

"WHAT MESSIAH REALLY MEANS."
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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden
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Text for the Sermon: Mark 8:31-9:1

Introduction.

Last week we heard Peter's wonderful confession about Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And then we heard Jesus' reply, "He strictly charged them to tell no one about him." Why in the world would Jesus tell someone who had just confessed who He truly was, to tell no one else?

Remember the blind man. Jesus said this because their eye sight had only been restored part way. They saw the Messiah but only like the man who saw men like trees walking. The disciples only thought they truly saw Jesus and knew who He was, but it immediately becomes clear they didn't have a clue.

One minute Peter was giving a marvelous confession of who Christ was and the next minute Christ was rebuking Peter and calling him Satan.

What's going on here? Our text tells us. Jesus was about to open their eyes the rest of the way and they were totally unprepared for what they saw. They probably wish they had stayed blind.

Mark 8:31-33, The Messiah must Suffer.

Jesus began to teach them the Son of Man must suffer many things, many horrible things and then the Son of Man must die. No Jew could ever imagine hearing those words. No Jew even in his wildest nightmare could dream up such a scandalous notion.

It's impossible for the Son of God to die. Impossible. When you are God, by definition, you are eternal, you are immortal, you can't die. It's categorically impossible.

And then if it was possible to make matters worse, Jesus wouldn't be killed by evil, wicked, godless men. He wouldn't be lynched by some angry mob, but He would be killed by the most respected religious leaders of the day, arrested with official warrants and tried before the respected Jewish and Roman courts of Law, the implication being Jesus was wrong.

Today this would read, the senior pastors and seminary professors and denominational leaders and church elders all conspired to kill Jesus.

Try to imagine if as a student at Lynden Christian you were called to the principal's office and when you walk in sitting there was the chairman of the board, the school superintendent, the principal and vice principal, the school chaplain, two teachers and your parents. What would be going through your mind? You would immediately be thinking you were in really deep weeds, that you had done something very wrong.

When all the powers and authorities of the Jewish faith are lined up against Jesus they had to wonder if Jesus was wrong.

What Jesus said fit none of their categories. They had no brain cells for this kind of information. This was an offense to their ears. What was the point of following a leader who talked about the kingdom of God but then said everyone would reject Him and then kill Him? Why would you sign up to follow someone like that?

Sure they had read Isaiah 53 about the suffering servant but in the Jewish mind that was interpreted to be about the nation of Israel. Yes, they had suffered but they believed when the Messiah came He would bring about the consolation of Israel, He would redeem them and restore them and establish Israel as a great nation and vindicate them.

Messiah meant glory, victory, power and a throne, not suffering and sacrifice and death. They were looking for a royal Messiah, not a suffering Messiah.

A cross meant humiliation, shame, dishonor, disgrace. No wonder Peter couldn't remain silent.

Mark 8:32, Peter rebukes Jesus.

Peter once again speaks up and says what's on everyone's mind. He is just being a good Jew. Peter rebukes Jesus and again Matthew gives us a little fuller account.

Matthew 16:22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

In Peter's mind nothing good could ever come from a cross. As one commentator put it, Peter and Jesus were at "cross" purposes with each other. For Peter the cross is unthinkable, for Jesus it's inevitable (see James Edwards, *Mark*, p. 255).

We hear this and we all know how wrong Peter was to do this. We all have the advantage of lots of hindsight.

How many of us have wanted to take God aside and say what's going on in my life is crazy, why in the world are you doing this, what are you thinking? How many of us have in the moment wanted to rebuke God especially when suffering is involved? How often does the clay want to argue with the potter?

It's a very hard thing to submit ourselves to God's plans when His ways make absolutely no sense to us at all. How do you submit to craziness?

We see in Peter a combination of pride and ignorance, a pretty common and deadly combination. He thought he knew better what was best for Jesus. He tried to educate Jesus and show Him the error of His thinking. His motives were good, he meant well, but he was in great error. Our good motives can lead us into terrible mistakes. Let us humble ourselves lest our pride put us on Satan's side.

Mark 8:33, Jesus rebukes Peter.

Jesus' rebuke of Peter is one of the strongest rebukes we read in Scripture. Again quoting Matthew to get the full punch, Jesus immediately says:

Matthew 16:23 “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

A Christ without a cross is Satanic. Peter was unwittingly playing the part of Satan. He had become the devil's advocate. To try to keep Jesus from going to the cross was demonic. That's how central the crucifixion is to Christianity.

Think about it, Peter unknowingly was trying to deprive himself and all humanity of eternal salvation. Aren't we glad God didn't answer his prayer? How glad will we be in heaven when we find out why God didn't answer some of our prayers?

We must learn not to trust our own sense of things, or just follow our human instincts. We must learn to test things by God's Word and set our minds more on the things of God so that we can more quickly discern the ways of God. None of us wants to shut the way of salvation that God has for us.

Jesus will not allow Himself, let alone them, to entertain the thought even for a moment of not going to the cross. Jesus will not let us entertain false notions of Him and what He came to do.

I have shared how I became a Christian 40 years ago this past June at Young Life's Malibu Club in Canada. The week after I became a Christian I was a new person with a new outlook on life. The world was perfect, I was perfect, all was well. I was given a job on the work crew and got to work in the ice cream shop. After a few days a conflict arose between me and one of the other workers. It totally confused me, we were both Christians, this shouldn't be happening.

God smashed my little utopian dream world of what Christianity was all about. God smashed my small ideas of what life as a Christ-follower was like.

This is why all utopian dreams fail. This is why most communes eventually fall apart. We have these dreams and ideals of what Christian community should be like. We have expectations of how church should be and how everyone should act. We have our visions of our own little perfect worlds here on earth.

The problem is we are sinners and when we sin against each other it creates a crisis of faith, a crisis of community and relationship, a test of forgiveness and love. As Christians we must learn how to bear the burden of a brother, bear the burden of being in relationship with someone different, someone who doesn't always measure up to our expectations.

Jesus is about reality and that means He repeated bursts our bubbles and gives us a heavy dose of *disillusionment*. The disillusionment of our own sinful hearts and the sinful hearts of those around us, the disillusionment of being humbled by our own sin and our own weaknesses and our own pettiness and our own misconceptions. To grow and mature we have to embrace the disillusionment and work through it.

The tendency is to withdraw, to get bitter, to isolate and go it alone. Some wander from church to church looking for that perfect community where there is no suffering or conflict or difficulty. Reality is struggling with God and each other through the suffering and difficulties. That's what makes us human and what shapes our character and makes us mature and fit for heaven, prepared for the only perfect community.

Mark 8:34-38, The Followers of the Messiah must Suffer.

First, Jesus tells the disciples what it would cost to be the Messiah. Then He tells the disciples what it will cost to follow the Messiah. Jesus says that if anyone wants to be His disciple, to be a follower of Jesus then they will have to do what He does and that is take up the cross.

What is this cross?

To us it's a piece of jewelry or a religious symbol in our churches. But remember Mark is writing to Christians in Rome around the time Nero was crucifying and burning Christians. The cross was a symbol of radical commitment, of total allegiance, of laying down everything for the sake of Jesus.

The cross represents a radical truth the world denies and rejects.

The cross represents a radical faith the world ridicules, mock, and despises.

The cross symbolizes crucifying our flesh and our fleshly desires, dying to sin and denying ourselves sinful pleasures.

The cross signifies fighting daily with the devil, resisting him.

The cross means giving up our own rights for the sake of others.

At home the cross means denying ourselves selfishness or laziness; getting our way or having our expectations met. At work it means not begrudging another's success. Among friends it means holding our tongue when we want to complain or be critical. At church it means not having a critical spirit. On Facebook it means posting only what honors Christ and builds up others. In life's hardships it means seeking to be Christ-like, humbling ourselves under the burden and seeking God's purpose for it.

The kingdom of heaven is not gained without a cross, without affliction and trials and testings.

What has your Christianity cost you? "A religion that costs nothing is worth nothing" (J.C. Ryle, *Mark*, p. 170). How many of us can say that we are radically and completely devoted to Christ at any cost? Here is a test to find out.

Mark 8:35-38, The Four Fors.

Mark records four "for" statements that explain the purpose for the cross and the reason why we must take it up to follow Jesus.

35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

37 For what can a man give in return for his soul?

38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Anyone who counts Jesus as better than life, is guaranteed life. Anyone who counts his own life more important than Jesus will lose both Jesus and his life.

The world is not as it seems. Appearances are deceiving. If you gain all the goodies in this life, you may lose them in the life to come. Do you want to invest in the short term or the long term?

In the immortal words of Jim Elliott, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”

We have all been given an immortal soul and it’s going to spend eternity somewhere. What we do here and how we live here will determine where. You and I and every human being on this planet have a soul for which one day we will give an account to the God. How is it that we ignore and neglect such a valuable and priceless possession?

It’s staggering when we consider how much this world blinds our eyes to see what our true future holds. One soul is worth more than all the world, all the world’s money, all the world’s goods and possessions, all the world’s assets, all the world’s pleasures, all the world’s benefits and blessings.

We should constantly pray that God would open our eyes to the worth and value and pricelessness of our eternal souls and that we would consider our souls in the light of every earthly choice or worldly temptation. Oh that we would give more earnest and serious thought to our souls.

How can we lose our souls? By murdering it with unrepented sin, by starving it through ignorance and neglect, by deceiving it with lies and false religion, by hardening it with a critical spirit and bitterness and hatred and anger.

There is not a single person in hell who thinks they made the good trade, the best the world had to offer for an eternity in hell.

Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of stew. The person who trades his soul for the riches of the world, has done no better.

When temptation looks bright and beautiful and fun and pleasurable and satisfying, remember your soul. Repeat to yourself, “What does it profit a man to gain the world and lose his soul?”

Your soul can only be saved by a cross, to deny the cross is to lose your life and your soul.

It takes courage to stand for Christ, to confess Christ in the world. Pray for that courage. Never be ashamed of Him who bore the shame of our sin on a cross, who endured the spitting and cursing and mocking. Far better to be despised by men than to have Christ disavow us before the Father.

What’s the opposite of being ashamed of someone? Being proud of them, admiring them, wanting to be around them and associated with them. Not being embarrassed by them.

You know, not like the teenager who is embarrassed to be seen with his parents.

We all sin in small ways in this, we have a crisis of nerve and chicken out when we could have said something. Jesus is talking about something deeper here, about a person who doesn’t love and cherish Jesus, about a person who loves his idols and sin more than Jesus. To reject Jesus is to lose your life and your soul.

Application and conclusion.

If you only confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, but don't see the implications of His messiahship for your discipleship, then you don't yet see clearly.

To confess Christ is more than intellectual assent to truth. To truly know Christ is to follow Him, and to follow Him is to follow Him to the cross, to suffer and die to sin.

If you treasure and value Jesus above everything else in your life, above everything, if you admire Him and love Him and worship Him and esteem Him better than life itself then He will acknowledge you before His Father in the presence of the holy angels, and He will give His life as a ransom for yours and you will save your life now and forever.

If you treasure Him more than your comfort or your success or your own pleasure or even your own safety, you will have life.

Philippians 3:8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ