

## **Mark 8:31-38 – Jesus predicts his death**

Welcome. Today, in our reading Jesus tells his disciples that he must suffer (many things), be rejected (by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law) and that he must be put to death. The only silver lining to this very dark cloud, is that after three days Jesus will rise from the dead.

To add to the suffering, rejection and death that Jesus has predicted will happen to him, Peter makes it worse by choosing to rebuke Jesus. Peter must have thought ‘What is Jesus talking about? Who can Kill, Jesus this man of great power? In Peter’s mind Jesus should not have these doubts.’

### **Jesus Rebukes Peter**

But Jesus looks at the disciples before giving Peter a severe reprimand. Now it is Peter’s turn to be chastised. And what a dressing down Peter gets from Jesus ‘Get behind me Satan!’ He is told ‘You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’

Jesus used a very similar phrase when he was being tempted by the devil in the Wilderness. Jesus tells the devil in the book of Matthew ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ Why does Jesus use such a phrase on his beloved disciple? What has Peter done to deserve such a rebuke?

### **Q – Why has Peter been rebuke so severely?**

To understand why Peter has been rebuked by Jesus, we have to go back just a few verses to Mark chapter 8 verses 27 – 30. In these verses Jesus asks his disciples ‘Who do the people say I am?’ They respond that some say Elijah, others John the Baptist, some call him one of the prophets. But it is Peter that calls him the Messiah. This is a significant and pivotal point in the gospel of Mark because Jesus is acknowledged for the first time as the promised Messiah.

### **The Miracles of Jesus**

It should come as no surprise that Peter has called Jesus the Messiah. Ever since Jesus first called his disciples, they have personally witnessed Jesus, drive out impure spirits, heal people with fever, sickness, disease and demon possession. Jesus has also healed a man with leprosy and this all happens before the end of the first chapter!

Peter and the other disciples have witnessed Jesus, preach parables of great wisdom to the crowds that gathered to hear his teaching; Calmed the storm when the disciples were afraid of drowning; Restored a demon possessed man; Raised a dead girl to life and healed a sick woman. Jesus has fed many thousands, walked on water and given sight to a blind man. After such great demonstration of Christ’s power, we can see why Peter has chosen to call him the Messiah.

### **Peter’s understanding of Messiah**

But Peter has misunderstood what it means to be Messiah, God’s anointed one. Peter’s own assumptions and thoughts have limited Jesus to his flawed definition of what Jesus could do for him and for all Jewish people. Has Peter imagined Jesus as Commander of the armies, defeating the Romans who sat as an occupying force in their lands? Peter, like many can only picture Christ in great triumph and victory. The Messiah Peter wanted could never be killed.

Peter’s understanding of what it meant to be the Messiah would reduce Jesus to just another ruler of men and deny him his status as the Son of Man. The Son of Man is a position with great authority given from God. But Peter’s version of the Messiah took authority from man and not from God. This is why Jesus rebuked Peter so severely.

## **Supernatural Powers**

Yes, Jesus has supernatural powers that the disciples had witnessed many times over, but Jesus would not use his powers for self-promotion or to fulfil Peter's expectations.

Jesus had not come to win the approval of men. He had not come to entertain the crowds or lead armies into battle. Jesus had supernatural powers which he would use only to serve his Father's will and for no other purpose. Remember in the book of Matthew when Jesus rebuked the devil he said 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'. Jesus was not prepared to serve Peter's will over his Father's will.

## **To deny self and follow Christ**

Christ instructs those who desire to become his disciples. 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me'. Denying self means to live a life where we do not place ourselves at the centre. Taking up one's cross implies a willingness to suffer for Christ's sake. Those who follow Jesus reject a life of comfort and self-indulgence. Only those who deny themselves and follow Jesus will be granted an eternal life.

## **Greatest Commandment Mark 12**

If any of us lack understanding as to how we can deny self and follow Jesus then we should listen to the response that Jesus gave to the teacher who asked him 'Of all the commandments which is the most important?' In Mark 12 Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these. If we live by these commandments, we will learn to deny self.

## **To deny one self**

The 'Way of the Cross' also called 'the theology of the cross' meaning 'to deny oneself' does not mean that we should live a life of forced humility. We are not asked to follow Jesus by daily degrading ourselves. To 'Deny oneself' means that we are called to use our talents and gifts to the best of our ability in service of God and neighbour. But Christ does not seek to limit our lives as we deny self. In fact, the very opposite is promised. Those who follow Christ are promised a life overflowing with blessings. In John 10.10 Jesus declares that He has come so that we may have life and have it to the full.

To those outside the church, a life of self-denial is a life lost. But Christ reminds us what becomes of those who reject him for the comforts of this world. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? A life saved may well be a life full of many pleasures, riches and rewards, but however abundant these rewards are, every one of them will be lost when their life is ended.

But for a life lived in denial of self, rejecting selfish ambition, for a life lived in loving service to God and neighbour, for all who choose this life, for them awaits the promise of an eternal reward, a promise that will never end. An eternal reward is the promise to live with God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit in his perfect Kingdom for all eternity. To receive this blessing, we are instructed to lose our life, deny self, Love God and to love our neighbour as ourself.

## **Choice**

But God does not force us to deny self: We are offered a choice. Those who lose their life for Christ and the Gospel will save it. They will be rewarded with eternal life. But those who seek to save their life, to deny Christ, will in turn be denied eternal life.

**Denying Self – not a once in a lifetime act.**

Before we finish, I want to remind you that denying self is not a once in a life time act. To deny one's self is an act that must be repeated again and again and again. Those who seek to be disciples of Christ must be prepared to question their own actions and to hold themselves always accountable to Christ.

We must seek to learn to Worship the Lord our God, and serve him only. Those who deny self and persevere to the end without giving up will be eternally rewarded.

Let us seek to Love God with everything that we have to offer.

Amen.