

## Mark 8:31 – 9:8

We are back to the Mark series this week, and will once again be following the sermon series. Please try to resist the temptation to 'review' the sermon. Instead, try to look into the word of God together as a way of encouraging and equipping your group to read the Bible for themselves.

In this study, we look closely at what it means to live as a follower of Jesus. Try to be as personal and practical as possible, and avoid discussing things in the abstract or about people 'out there.'

### **The passage in context:**

We looked at Mark 8:1-30 in the first half of the series. As a reminder, throughout the gospel of Mark we see a few themes developing: Jesus' **identity**, and his **mission**.

Jesus has been doing amazing things in his ministry, but his disciples have not really 'gotten it' yet; they don't really know who they are following, and they don't completely understand Jesus' mission.

Jesus says a few times of them 'do you not yet understand?' (see Mark 8:17, 8:21, 7:18).

Mark 8:27 – 9:8 is the high point of the book of Mark, the climax. One of Jesus' disciples (Pete) finally recognises and proclaims Jesus for who he is: the Messiah, the Christ (8:29).

But as we see, they are still unsure about what that will mean. They may have a sense of his identity, but they have no idea what that will mean for his mission (8:31 and then 8:32) or for his followers (8:34 – 9:1).

This is the point at which Jesus starts to describe what he is going to do, or more accurately, what is going to happen to him. He is going to suffer, be rejected, be killed and resurrected.

This is a shock to his followers (8:32). You can imagine why – they have been following the most powerful and striking person they have ever met. Though he has encountered some opposition, he is also incredibly popular. Thousands are lining up to hear from him and be healed by him. You can kind of see why it would be unimaginable to them that he would somehow be hated and killed.

From this point on, Jesus talks about his death and resurrection regularly, trying to make sure they really get it.

### Read the passage aloud

- Don't pause at the end of Ch 8 – keep going straight through into Ch 9. The chapter separations in Mark are somewhat artificial, and the book is designed to be read as a whole. As will hopefully become apparent during the study, the first part of Ch 9 is closely related to what has happened in Mark 8.

### v31: Why “must” Jesus suffer many things, be rejected, die and rise again?

- Couldn't be the Jesus and bring the Kingdom of God without suffering, rejection and death – departure from the Jewish ideas about what their Messiah would look like
- Suggests his death is voluntary – Jesus isn't just predicting that will happen, he is telling Peter what will and must happen
- Shows how seriously God takes our sin. The cross is not merely a representation of God's love – it is a legal payment for sin, and we can't be saved otherwise
- Illustration of how we are saved by grace. If we were good enough to save ourselves by living perfect lives then it wouldn't be necessary for Jesus to suffer and die. As Tim Keller says in 'The Gospel of Mark: Leaders' Guide', Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2005, “Why else would Jesus have suffered? Why else would the Father have sent him to do it? If we won't accept the force of the word 'must', we misunderstand the gospel”
- **NB:** This may be confronting for people who haven't yet grappled properly with Jesus' death. However, it is a perfect opportunity to thank Jesus for his sacrifice. It can also be extremely freeing – if we beat ourselves up about our sin over and over again, we are rendering Christ's crucifixion redundant. Instead, we need to accept his grace – what a blessing!

### v33: It seems pretty harsh for Jesus to call Peter, Satan. What is going on here?

- Read Matthew 4:9 and Luke 4:5-7
  - o Satan offers Jesus the world kingdom without any pain or suffering (cf: Jesus' humility and obedience). Peter is inadvertently echoing the words of Satan! Peter still hasn't 'got' that Jesus wasn't going to fulfil the Jewish ideas of a Messiah and thinks that Jesus is teaching things that are inconceivable and wrong. Suffering and rejection doesn't fit in with his idea of who the Messiah should be.
- How can we fall into the trap of being like Peter?
  - o We often laugh at the disciples for how often they miss the point. However, they are provided as an example for *us*. We need to think carefully about how we can fall into the same traps they did
  - o Here, there are at least 3 ways we can be like Peter:
    - Setting an agenda for God and getting annoyed/upset/disappointed/angry when God doesn't fulfil it
    - Not expecting suffering and self-denial

- Feeling like Jesus didn't really have to die for us. As Tim Keller says, "the doctrine of the necessity of Jesus' death is very insulting. It means that you are so sinful, nothing but the death of the Son of God could save you. We want to believe that our goodness and good record will be enough, and so implicitly or explicitly, we deny the necessity of his death."

**v34 – 38:**

These verses contain ideas that people may have heard a lot and thus skim over. However, the verses are extremely significant for how we live our lives as followers of Christ. One suggestion for teasing out and reflecting on the meaning is to use the 'paraphrase technique' suggested by Karen and Rod Morris in their book *Leading Better Bible Studies* (Aquila Press, 2008). They say:

The paraphrase technique is particularly useful for those passages which are very familiar but not always understood. We often find that people know the jargon of a passage but do not really understand the meaning of it. The aim of paraphrasing is for the group to translate the passage out of 'Bible English' into 'normal everyday English.'

We generally ask individuals to paraphrase a single phrase from each verse. After an individual's initial attempt at paraphrasing, we enlist the help of the rest of the group to fine-tune the first attempt. Doing this for every person takes the pressure off someone who is uncertain. Another way to relieve the tension is to have people work in pairs.

Newer Christians can feel intimidated because of their lack of Bible knowledge. Emphasis that the group is focusing on the passage at hand, not on all the extraneous information they can drag in.

The leader must work hard to ensure the theological content of a passage is maintained. For instance, while 'eldest child' may capture some of what it means to be the 'firstborn', it does not capture the sense of inheritance implicit in the biblical use of the word. The firstborn is one who will inherit everything from the father, and may be better paraphrased as the 'heir'. It is crucial that the leader has worked on the passage in advance so nothing theologically significant is lost in the translation

- Work through this section of the passage using the paraphrase technique
  - o Go carefully through the different uses of 'save his life' and 'lose his life'
    - The first time, 'save his life' is referring to trying to save ourselves by being 'good' or trying to be happy in a self-interested way. But Jesus says that this will result in you losing your life. Tim Keller says that "this seems to mean that the very thing you hope to achieve or attain will escape you. You will not be happy if you live to be happy. You will not be accepted by God if you live to earn your favour with God. You will not know who you are if you simply live to please yourself and 'find out who I am'."

- Conversely, the second time ‘lose his life’ is used it is referring to giving yourself up to Christ. This is really the way that we ‘save our lives’. Note that we don’t actually save it; Jesus does that for us. We are losing worldly wisdom and losing the right to do whatever we like. But we are saved by grace.
- How can we be caught out by this stuff in our own lives? Try not to discuss this in the abstract. Keep it as focused and personal as possible.
  - Are we trying to ‘gain the whole world’ (v36)?
    - Are we chasing after success, achievement, recognition? In doing so are we trying to gain self-worth apart from God?
  - Are we ‘exchanging the soul’ (v37)?
    - Are we neglecting knowing God and being close to Him, and living in a self-centred way?
  - Are we striving to ‘deny ourselves and take up our cross (v34)?
    - Are we living under self-determination or are we letting God have control of our lives? How? In all areas, or only in some? Are we actually willing to suffer for Christ’s sake? How?

**v38: What does it mean that some people who are standing there will see the kingdom of God come with power?**

- We get part of the answer to this question in the very next section – the transfiguration. The transfiguration is a representation and glimpse of some of the glory that Jesus deserves and that he will come with. This does two things: it gives us a sense of who he is, and a sense of what it means to follow him. That is, we suffer, but later we enter into that glory too. The disciples are confused about the suffering part and thought that the glory part was it. Tim Keller says, “the death and suffering of the cross is the meaning of ‘the kingdom coming.’ What a paradox! The glory of the kingdom is the death of the king! His power is service; he dies to liberate.”
- Another view is that this verse is referring to Pentecost
  - Read Acts 1:6-7
- But Tim Keller thinks that we need to be modest in our interpretation because this verse has been the subject of debate and confusion. He points out that if we step back, we can see that Jesus is comforting them. According to Tim Keller, “Jesus says, ‘don’t worry – whatever you lose will be more than made up for! You will see great things! I will be with you!’ So though we are not sure about Jesus’ specific meaning, his general meaning is clear – and it is wonderful!”