

02.07.10 / Mark 8:31-38

Passage Insight

This is a passage of distinctions. From the outset, we see that Jesus makes a clear distinction between a mind that is set on the things of God versus one set on the things of Man. Then, later on in the passage, He distinguishes between those who will follow Him and those who will follow something else. In these distinctions we see a picture of our God as one who is altogether preeminent, altogether perfect, and altogether worth living and dying for.

In His statement that Peter has the things of Man on his mind rather than the things of God, Jesus is implying that He Himself (Jesus) has the vision and insight necessary to make such a call. He accuses Peter of doing Satan's work in that moment, drawing a strong line between what Peter is doing and what Jesus Himself is doing. In other words, He is claiming authority here, authority that draws lines in the sand, lines which He will go on to explain in the following verses as He makes astonishing claims that His judgment of us upon His return will be the final call. An immediately practical implication for us is this: if we would seek to devote our minds to the things of God, there is ONE WAY to do this, and that is to give our full devotion to Jesus, who knows the Father and is one with Him.

In this moment, Peter would have Jesus avoid the cross, and it is plainly stated that this is the work of Satan. What was the reason behind Jesus' counter-rebuke of Peter? To answer this, we must understand what would have happened (or not happened) if Jesus had accepted Peter's rebuke and acted accordingly. As we consider the implications of this, we'll begin to see why this was Satan at work attempting to divert Jesus from the cross. The story of God is:

- one of pursuit (God's pursuit of us, His creation)
- one of grace (unmerited favor despite our consistent evil rebellion that keeps us out of God's presence for the long-term)
- one of redemption (paying the penalty that needs to be paid in order to cleanse us)
- one of restoration (forever returning us and the rest of creation to the state/condition/purpose for which we were originally designed, one that glorifies God continually).

So, as we look at this, what are the implications if Jesus were to avoid the cross? Here is a non-exhaustive list:

- Death would not have been conquered for humanity. The penalty of our sin would not have been paid, and we would be left in isolation, unable to be restored to relationship with the Father.
- We as followers would not be cleansed from our sin, and because God won't allow evil to remain in His presence, He would not send His Spirit to live inside of us.
- We would not be transformed into God's likeness.
- We would not have an advocate before the Father who speaks on our behalf.
- God's plan of redemption at the cross was in place at the beginning of time, as God knew of our rebellion and had a plan to deal with it. For Jesus to avoid the cross would be for Jesus to go against God. Since He is God, He would divided against Himself and no different from us in our constant contradiction.

In short, had He heeded Peter's rebuke, Jesus would have been a rebel just like us! Fortunately for us, He is the epitome of perfect Godly obedience, and in Him we have a trustworthy advocate who has created and purchased the entirety of our being. Peter and the other disciples were following Satan's philosophy (seeking glory without suffering) instead of God's philosophy (suffering actually being transformed into glory). The philosophy you choose will determine whom you serve and how you live.

Jesus says that anyone who would come after Him would deny himself, take up his cross and follow Him. This idea of bearing a cross would have made a lot of sense in Roman-occupied Palestine. What it brought to mind was a condemned man who was forced to demonstrate his submission to Rome by carrying part of his cross through the city

to his place of execution. To “take up one’s cross” meant to demonstrate publicly one’s submission/obedience to the authority against which he had previously rebelled. In the context of following Jesus, this means submission to the authority of God. Where the image of Roman cross-bearing was disgusting and ugly, the image of cross-bearing for a Christian is beautiful and hopeful. First of all, it is a reminder that there is NOTHING we can do to pay the penalty for our sins, that Jesus did that completely by His work on the cross. Carrying our cross should in no way be an attempt to make restitution for our sins. Only Jesus has the power to do this. By taking up our crosses, we have an opportunity to demonstrate whom we follow. When we bear the weight and burdens of this world, we demonstrate before others the love of our God who bears OUR burdens and does this work through us, and God uses this to graciously purify us, refine us, and make us more like Himself.

The “For Statements” in verses 35-38 are essentially saying this: “Because X is true, we can conclude that we should deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus.” In other words, the following truths should drive us to the cross, and to carrying our own:

- a. We cannot save our own life, and in fact, to try to save it is to lose it, but to willingly recognize that Jesus and His good news are worth everything . . . that is to truly gain life. Therefore:
 - i. we should deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus.
- b. There is no value in gaining something temporarily if in doing so we will lose EVERYTHING eternally. Therefore:
 - i. we should deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus.
- c. Mankind possesses nothing, and because of this, we have no ransom that we can pay for our souls. Someone else must pay this ransom on our behalf. Therefore:
 - i. we should deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus.
- d. To be ashamed of Jesus is to invite His shame, but to love Jesus is to be loved by Jesus. We love Jesus by believing and following Him. Therefore:
 - i. we should deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus.

There is tremendous cost in following Jesus. In fact, it costs us everything to be His disciple, even our very lives. There is also tremendous cost in NOT following Jesus. This too costs us everything. So why is it better to follow Him? Because, in following Him, while we may give up everything, we GAIN everything in return: hope, transformation, all of God’s resources, the presence of God Himself inside of us, a family of believers, and eternal life. Praise Him for it.

Application Questions (feel free to use the ones that best meet the needs of your group)

Mind on the things of God vs. the things of Man

- 1) What motivates humans as we make decisions?
- 2) What motivates God as He makes decisions?
- 3) What characteristics distinguish the mind of God from the mind of man?
- 4) God created man’s mind, in His own image, no less, so why is there a difference in what mankind wants and what God wants?
- 5) Where in your life do you see evidence of this difference?
- 6) What specifically in your life is leading you to make decisions that dishonor God (by doing things differently from Him)?
- 7) What needs to happen in your life to set your mind on God’s interests?

Jesus at the Cross

- 1) If you have been saved by Jesus, the penalty for your sin was paid at the cross, and you have been completely cleansed spiritually. Where do you struggle to believe this?
- 2) Once cleansed, God's Spirit comes to quite literally live inside of us. Where do you see evidence of this in your own life?
- 3) Where do you see evidence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those in your Community Group family?
- 4) When we follow Jesus, God works to transform us into His likeness. Where do you reject this transformation?
- 5) Without Jesus, we are a people of contradiction. Where do you contradict yourself?
- 6) Sin comes from a failure to believe the claims of Jesus and to then follow Him. What are you failing to believe about Jesus?

Taking Up Our Cross

- 1) What does it mean for you to take up your cross?
- 2) Where are you willing to suffer and carry burdens so that others may see God's hand at work?
- 3) Where are you unwilling to bear a burden that you know you should carry?
- 4) What are you failing to believe about Jesus when you reject this cross?
- 5) What help do you need from your Community Group in order to believe this about Jesus once again (or possibly for the first time)?

Cost of Following Jesus

- 1) If you are a follower, where is Jesus showing you that losing your life for the sake of Him and the gospel actually saves your life?
- 2) How are you seeking to save your own life?
- 3) What will it cost you personally to follow Jesus?
- 4) What would have to happen for you to be willing to lose your life for the sake of Jesus and the gospel?
- 5) How can your Community Group tangibly help you with this?

Sources

- Bible Exposition Commentary
 - The Bible Knowledge Commentary
-