

Title: The Message of Christ

Text: Mark 8:31-33

Date: April 9, 2023

Verse 31

Mark 8:31 says, “Then he began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and rise after three days.” In the preceding verses, Peter had made a grand pronouncement concerning Jesus’ Messianic nature. Though the Twelve rightly understood that Jesus was the Messiah, they needed to understand what type of Messiah Jesus would be. Like many first-century Jews, they only envisioned the Anointed One as a political liberator. They were blind to realities concerning the need for Him to suffer on behalf of sin.

The word “necessary” in Mark 8:31 is a translation of a little Greek word that could also be translated “must.” In the context of our passage, the term revealed the “divine necessity” behind Jesus’ death.¹ It linked Jesus’ crucifixion to prophecies given in passages like Psalm 22, Isaiah 53; Psalm 69; and Daniel 9. In order to fulfill the Lord’s Covenant of Redemption (Revelation 13:8), it was necessary for the Messiah to be cut off for sins. Jesus’ death was necessary because it was God’s ordained means of salvation (Genesis 3:15). It was His plan of paying for the sins of His people. Since the beginning of time, the Lord has revealed that sin necessitates the shedding of innocent blood. Scripture says, “According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22).

Jesus’ pronouncement in our text constituted the first of three such pronouncements in Mark’s gospel. See Mark 9:30-32 and Mark 10:32-34 for the other two instances. In our current passage, Jesus was strategic in announcing His death and resurrection immediately after Peter’s profession concerning His Messianic nature. Now that it was out in the open that He was indeed the Messiah, Jesus wanted to clarify exactly what type of Messiah He would be. While first-century Jews typically anticipated a ruler who would vanquish the Romans, Jesus announced that He would suffer, die, and be raised.

In announcing His death and resurrection, Jesus referred to Himself as “the Son of Man.” Interestingly, Jesus didn’t refer to Himself by the typical Messianic title of Christós. Peter used that title in His famous profession (Mark 8:29), but Jesus employed a different one. The ministry of the Messiah was highlighted through primary passages in Daniel’s prophecy (Daniel 7:9-14; 9:20-27). In the first passage, Daniel called the Messiah “Son of Man” (Daniel 7:13). In the second, he called the Messiah “The Anointed One” (Daniel 9:26). In the second, he also made mention of the way the Messiah would be “cut off” (Daniel 9:26).

Daniel’s use of the title “Son of Man” reveals the rationale of Jesus’ use of it in our current passage. The title indeed had Messianic connotations, but it also pointed to the way Messiah would suffer and die. In our verse, Jesus said that He would “suffer many things.” The words “many things” likely referred to the beatings, flogging, and mocking He would later endure in Mark’s gospel (Mark 15:6-20, 29-32).

¹ Brooks, 136.

In speaking of His suffering, Jesus mentioned three groups who would consort to His rejection — “the elders, chief priests, and scribes.” Combined together, the three parties respectively represented the religious, political, and theological leaders of Jesus’ day. The “elders” were members of the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:53-65). They were regarded as the leaders of the Jewish nation.² The “chief priests” included the High Priest and members of the priestly family (Mark 15:3). The “scribes” were teachers of the law (Mark 14:53).³ They performed what was regarded as an important function in Jewish life and society. Together, the three parties mentioned above all consented to Jesus’ death.

Jesus’ reference to His death undoubtedly seemed strange to the Twelve. They expected Messiah to be a conquering King. Defeat and death were not in their conceptions of what the Anointed One would be. Unbeknownst to them, the fact that Jesus would be “cut off” (Daniel 9:26) was central to Christian salvation. Isaiah had prophesied that Messiah would suffer (Isaiah 52:14; 53:1-12), but many first-century Jews were blind to such realities. Unbeknownst to most everyone at His appearing, Our Lord’s death was the primary reason He came to Earth. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus said, “...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

Jesus’ death is the crux of Christian salvation. He died as a sacrifice for the sins of God’s people. Though He was perfectly righteous, He was offered up for unjust people. His death is the means of redemption. Peter said, “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). J.C. Ryle has remarked on the purpose of Christ’s suffering by saying, “Let us lean all our weight on this mighty fact — that though we have sinned Christ hath died for sinners — and that though we deserve nothing, Christ hath suffered on the cross for us, and by that suffering purchased heaven for all that believe in him.”⁴ Until one understands these realities, one does not truly understand Christian salvation.

Jesus told His disciples that He would suffer, but He also told them that he would “rise after three days.” His words obviously formed a reference to the resurrection, a pivotal event and doctrine in Christianity. In speaking of the event, our Lord said it would take place “three days” after He was killed. First-century Jewish thought counted days a bit differently than we do. One should not think Jesus meant to speak of three, full twenty-four hour days.

In Jesus’ day, if even a small part of an event occurred on a given day, that day was counted in the overall duration of an event. We still reckon things similarly in our culture. When one goes on vacation, one may count the final day of the vacation as a part of the vacation, even though only a small part of that day was attribute to vacationing. Jesus counted similarly in our text. In saying “after three days,” He counted a part of Friday, and a part of Sunday, along with the entirety of Saturday.

² Brooks, 136.

³ Schnabel, 199.

⁴ Ryle, 132.

Some make a big deal about the timing of the crucifixion and the resurrection. While such conversations are certainly worthwhile in some contexts, they are not important to our current study of Mark 8:31. It is best to simply take Jesus' words at face value. He simply meant to say that He would remain dead for a time frame that would span the course of three days. What's most important for our study is the fact that Jesus promised He would "...raise after three days!"

Along with the cross, the empty tomb is a centerpiece of Christian belief and practice. Paul declared such to be true when writing to the Corinthians. He told them, "...if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain, and so is your faith" (1 Corinthians 15:14). Though most everyone in Jesus' day was ignorant of the need for Messiah to suffer, die, and be raised, truth concerning such things had been declared since the Garden of Eden. When Adam rebelled against God's Law (Genesis 2:16-17), the Lord meted out consequences for the entire created realm. In doing so, He told the Serpent, "I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

Theologians use a latin term to describe the content of Genesis 3:15. They call the verse "the Protevangelium." The term means "first gospel." It depicts the Lord's pronouncement to Satan as being the first mention of the gospel in Scripture. Within Genesis 3:15, the Lord made promises that the consequences of sin would be reversed. Though Satan duped man into violating God's Law, and though death was the natural result of that violation (Genesis 2:16-17), God would send one through woman who would reverse the consequences of sin. Where Adam and Eve had experienced death, God would give life! Adam believe in God's gospel promise. That's why he named his wife "Eve," a name that meant "mother of all the living" (Genesis 3:20)!

This was the purpose of Jesus coming to Earth — to live, die, and be raised for the sins of mankind. When He preached and taught, He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live" (John 11:25). Jesus' disciples were slow to understand these things. It is imperative for professing believers of all generations to not miss the weightiness of the resurrection. One has said, "...the death of Christ for us was the defeat of the devil; but it is not the end of the story, for it was followed by his resurrection...If Good Friday had not been followed by Easter, that is, if Christ were still dead and buried, then he would be no savior...."⁵

Verse 32

Hearing Jesus' pronouncement concerning the cross, Peter gave strong opposition. Mark 8:32 said, "He spoke openly about this. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him." The original language of the text depicted Jesus speaking freely. It was used to speak of one using boldness or frankness in speech. One has said the terminology of Mark 8:32 meant that Jesus "spoke plainly" about His pending

⁵ Peterson, Robert A. *Salvation Accomplished By The Son: The Work of Christ*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 451.

crucifixion and resurrection.⁶ Considering the theological significance of the two events, it is no wonder that Jesus used such direct speech.

With his well-known brashness, Peter matched the Lord's bold words. He took Jesus "aside and began to rebuke him." The insufferable disciple provided a good picture of our fallen condition apart from Christ. One minute he made a grand profession of faith in the Lord. Immediately afterwards he resisted the Lord's mission. Peter stands as a reminder that we all stumble in so many ways (James 3:2). We are prone to error and indwelling sin and we need sustaining grace to battle indwelling sin (James 4:6).

Peter's rebuke of Jesus was rooted in his preconceived notions of what Messiah should have been. From events later recorded in Mark 14:47, we know that Peter held to the popular opinion that Messiah would function solely as a political conqueror.⁷ Documents found in the Qumran community reveal that there were a number of first-century views regarding what Messiah would be like. Some anticipated a priestly ruler. Others looked for a king. A mighty prophet was another widely circulated conception. The view of Messiah being a Suffering Servant was not popular.⁸ Peter's perspective was rooted in human tradition. He was so blind to Jesus' real mission that he rebuked the Lord for speaking about the crucifixion and resurrection.

Verse 33

Mark 8:33 describes Jesus' response to Peter's rebuke, saying, "But turning around and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are not thinking about God's concerns but human concerns.'" The original language of the text portrayed Jesus turning around sharply and facing His disciples in a confrontational manner.⁹ In saying "Get behind me," Jesus used strong language. Some think the Greek of the first-century world was equivalent to our "get out of my sight" or "get out of my face." Jesus' use the strong reproach to show the severe folly of Peter's rebuke. The disciple's words were a distraction from Jesus' mission.

To further emphasize the severity of Peter's error, Jesus called Peter "Satan!" Why would Jesus use such a title of his foremost disciples? Were his words simply the result of an angry outburst? Was there any real meaning behind the association of Peter's rebuke with the Devil?

Recall Jesus' temptation in the wilderness in Mark 1:12-13. In that episode, Satan tempted Jesus to back down from His Messianic mission (Matthew 4:1-11). Since the beginning of time, Satan has attempted to prevent the work of the Promised One. He is more aware of the Protevangelium than any other created being. Knowing that his downfall would come through the seed of the woman, he has labored throughout history to prevent the work of the Promised One.

⁶ Robertson, 85.

⁷ Schnabel, 200.

⁸ Schnabel, 196.

⁹ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 85.

Even before the incarnation, Satan tried to stamp out woman's seed through instigating the murder of Able (Genesis 4:1-16). During the days of the kings, he provoked the Israelites to sacrifice their sons as burnt offerings through the worship of false gods (Jeremiah 19:5). At the incarnation, he tried to eradicate the Messiah through instigating Herod to murder innocent babies (Matthew 2:16-18). All of these things were efforts to prevent the promise of the Protevangelium.

Considering these facts, it is easy to see why Jesus called Peter "Satan." It has always been Satan's aim to keep Jesus from the cross. Because Jesus was fully man, there was a human struggle with facing the cross (Matthew 26:36-39). Peter's rebuke constituted a Satanically inspired temptation. Because Jesus was fully God, Jesus faithfully embrace the cross on behalf of humanity's sin. Regardless, Peter's values were in alignment with Satan's, so Peter received the rebuke he deserved.

Our Lord's own rebuke points to His vehement commitment to fulfill the Lord's will for His life. He faithfully embraced the cross, sin, and death on our behalf. After dying, He was raised to give us justification and life. The events of Matthew 8:31-33 underscore the heavenly importance of all of these things. Let us never lose sight of the primacy of the cross and the resurrection. One has rightly said, "Our sense of worth as persons is to be found in Christ and nowhere else."¹⁰

¹⁰ Letham, Robert. *The Bible Speaks Today: Message of the Person of Christ*. (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2013), 220.