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Reading: Mark 8.31-38 (NT page 1012)

Reader: Andrew Coutts

Background to the reading

It is clear from our reading that Jesus was fulfilling the words of the Old Testament with regard to the coming of the servant of God or the Messaiah in Isaiah 52 and 53. In this text it says that the coming servant will suffer and take the sins of many upon his shoulders. The title “Son of Man” is also a depiction of this. According to Daniel 7:13–14, in his vision he saw the son of man came with the clouds of heaven. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” Jesus is telling his disciples that everything is happening exactly as the prophets said.

We also know that people throughout Greco-Roman antiquity commonly believed that someone about to die could make predictions about the future, and many believed that holy men could forecast their own death.

Most Jewish people believed in the resurrection of all the righteous dead at the end of the age, and the inauguration of a kingdom under

God's appointed ruler afterward. Jesus' explanation of his mission in verse 31 did not make sense to Peter's expectations of the Messiah. It seems evident that the disciples in Mark could not bring the Old Testament prophecies and Jesus' practice and words together.

Then Jesus says to Peter that he is acting like Satan. Satan originally meant "adversary" but in early Christian and most early Jewish writings it refers specifically to the devil. Peter is just like Satan in preferring the worldly to the divine. Calling Peter by the name of the ultimate tempter and accuser underlines the seriousness of his failure as a disciple at this point.

The proper position of a disciple is "behind" his master, "following" him; "get behind me" may call Peter back to his rightful position of obeying. In Greek circles a person could be reproached for thinking in human rather than divine terms.

Jesus demands that his disciples take up their cross and follow him. This demand occurs five times in different contexts in the Gospels. The cross was an instrument of violent and painful execution. To "take the cross" was to carry the horizontal beam of the cross out to the site of execution, generally past a jeering mob. In rhetorically

strong terms, Jesus describes what all true disciples must be ready for: if they follow him, they must be ready to face literal scorn, shame and death, for they must follow to the cross. Because life is worth more than the world itself, giving one's life in this world to gain it in the world to come is wise.

In those days the condemned person carried the cross-beam to the place of execution, was fastened to it with ropes or nails, and was then hoisted on the stake, which was already erected. About the middle of the post a wooden block supported the suspended body. The height of the cross varied. A tablet hang around the victim which stated the cause of execution, and this was then affixed to the cross.

The kingdom for which the disciples are hoping would ultimately come; but it will be preceded by a period of great suffering and wickedness. Many others in Jesus' day believed that great suffering and sin would precede the kingdom; but it seems as if Peter and the others disciples did not understand Jesus' true mission and ultimately their mission to suffer too in their following of Jesus.

Amen

Sermon

The text verse for the sermon are: ³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

When I looked at the picture on the front of the order of service it struck a cord with me. I always thought to carry the cross means to carry the “whole cross” like on the picture. It was when I studied the background that I realized it was just the horizontal beam.

But does it make a difference in the impact of Jesus’ command?

No because although it is not the “whole cross” it still would be heavy to carry, not even to mention in sunny conditions, with steep hills. And to put it into context, in Jesus’ time it was pretty much something of a shame because it was usually criminals that were crucified.

So when Jesus is saying 5 times that anyone who wants to follow Him must first take up their cross, He is actually saying that following Him will not be easy. But in the greater scheme of things it will be nothing in comparison to the Glory that awaits everyone who carried their crosses till the end. Jesus was preparing his disciples to understand

the consequences of their actions in the world in spreading the Good news. And also to us – to you and me.

If there is one thing that really gets us all down then it is to suffer. It is even harder to watch the suffering of others. It leads us then to doubt and anger. Often we struggle to understand how such a merciful and loving God can allow us to suffer. But in the Bible, God is not hiding from the fact that His followers will suffer but that this suffering will come to an end that is really just the beginning to be with Him forever and ever.

But how will we be able to cope?

When I think of cross bearing, I always have this picture in my head of a African woman carrying a water bucket for miles, in the African sun. It always amazed me how these woman would never complain but sing all the way of carrying the heavy bucket of water. And how often not one woman but a group of woman would all walk together, carrying the water whilst singing their hearts out! And even when th

Maybe that is what we can do to help us to handle our suffering and struggles. Maybe we must allow others to share in our suffering. Maybe we must be honest in telling others how much we suffer and struggle. And maybe we must start singing too, even if it is with tears

in our eyes, even when no word comes out of our mouths. The thing is when we are alone, the problems and challenges often seem larger than life. It is when we talk to friends and close family that we get perspective and support and help even for the things that we thought would never be sorted. It is when we walk a difficult road together that the steep hills doesn't look so steep, and the potholes not so deep.

It is not something that will pass us. No it is part of the life of believers. It is an ongoing process that will only end in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus came not to make life easy but to challenge us to greatness!!!!

May we hold on to Him and never let go of His Hand, despite the pain and suffering!

Amen