

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Mark 8:31-38 (NT page 1012)

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 didnae 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 textverses for the sermon are: verse 34 & 35,Ó 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. Ò For whoever wants to save his lifeÒaÒ will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it

Have you ever bought anything without a section of some very small print either at the end of the contract or in a long winded separtae document

called “terms and conditions”. I wonder how many of us would admit truthfully of reading it all?

Well, I am most certainly guilty. It is really offputting and in a language that is above my head. And it feels usually like jargon anyway – so why read it! But a lot of people have sometimes bother just because they do not read the small print!

The definition of “Small print” or “fine print” is according to Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary: “the detailed wording of a contract, lease, or the like, often in type smaller than the main body of the document and including restrictions or qualifications that could be considered disadvantageous. Also called small print.”

Why do companies do it?

I guess to mislead people in buying or committing to something where they do not fully understand all the technical and minute details of the contract which can be used against them later. I mean some of these advertisements are so misleading like a store who offers a £ 10 discount card. But on reading the small print or the terms and conditions it clearly says you need to spend at least £ 50 and it is not valid on 9 occasions which is excluded with the deal.

JESUS's words of invitation has no small print hidden anywhere. He says “Come to me **but** know exactly what to expect. No hidden meaning or cover up at all. Jesus invites and spells out exactly what is going to happen

next. Come and follow me but be prepare to suffer, to even die for it. His terms and conditions are for everyone to see.

Faith in Jesus Christ is simple. It is a choice of a life of suffering and sacrifice. But it is a life that has hope beyond expectaion. A life that will end in the Kingdom of God. A life that is made possible by the calling, guidance of His Holy Sprit.

But if there is one thing that really gets us all down then it is to suffer or to sacrifice. 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. In our world sacrifice has become a “swearword” which everyone wants to avoid. It is not part of our selfish world views. No the emphasis of our world is to get everything with the least possible commitment.

And it may work very well in the outside world but it does not work if you want to be a follower of Jesus. To be a follower of jesus will mean to committ yourself one hundred percent. It will mean a different lifestyle with different values. It will mean a life where you sacrifice your time and money for the sake of helping others.

But we must remember it is only Jesus who can say: Come and follow me,,,and take up your cross! It is a personal calling. You and I cannot decide calling on people to follow Jesus. It is His moment, It is His decision to call. We can ask and wait on the Lord. We need to have patience. God only needs one second of our time to change our lives forever.

By bearing our crosses – we can be powerful witnesses of God’s grace and mercy especially when we do it with gratefulness of what the Lord had done for us. We can bear our crosses by staying on our knees and asking God for help. We can encourage others through our example of bearing our crosses with a smile. But this smile must not be faked. It must come from a commitment of following Jesus despite all the odds. But at the end of the day we cannot bear the crosses for others.

If God called us to bear our crosses, everyone should listen and carry their own. And when thinking about the idea: How can it be possible for anyone carrying their own crosses and helping someone else at the same time?

In His church, it is not about you and I bragging about how many crosses we carried during the week. It is not about you and me playing heros or care givers over other people. In his church, it is about His calling and His loving care for His people. He will look after His own vulnerable sheep and if He needs you and me, He will call us. We must stop worrying about His flock. He will in his own time and place take care of His people. We cannot bear the crosses of others. We can certainly help them – by urging them

onwards, throughs words of encouragement. But we must remember above all – we are not God, we cannot heal or cure people that is suffering from the onslaughts that life brings. God can and will do it himself in His own time and place.

I recently read about a 49 year old named Marc Bounds in America who literally took up the challenge of Jesus' s words to take up his cross.

He said: "I'll go wherever God takes me with whatever God provides,". He started his journey cross country a year ago and has already travelled more than 1,300 miles on foot. His 150-pound cross on wheels holds his belongings – toiletries, a few changes of clothes, a cellphone, tire-repair tools, a sleeping bag, a tent, a supply of Bibles and some food. He quit his job as a landscaper and left his St. Louis home with \$250 in cash and not much else when he decided to embark.

It has an amazing impact on all the people who pass him by. Some stop and talk, other honk their horns.

A women said she passed him twice on Highway 29 and said she was overcome with emotion when spotting him.

"He is touching so many people during this walk," she said. "At first, I wanted to ask him if he would like some help, but then, I remembered. ... That was his cross and he had the courage to pick it up and bear it across America."

But what I found his answer to a wee girl remarkable. She asked him how he would manage to carry the cross around the entire country. His response was simple, he said. "The same way I'll cross this intersection: One step at a time."

I guess it is true for all of us. We can only bear our crosses one step at a time because God commanded us to do it!

Amen