



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Intent on the Things of God

Mark 8.27 - 9.1

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Traveling Away from Success

The author of "One Solitary Life," a reading often heard at Christmas time, notes that "for three years He [Jesus] was an itinerant preacher."¹ Travel from place to place typified his ministry.

Just think about what we read in Mark 1-5. He is walking alongside the Sea of Galilee when he calls his first disciples (1.16). His first extended teaching occurs after "they went into Capernaum" (1.21). They leave for a preaching tour of Galilee (1.35-45) and then return to Capernaum (2.1). In 3.7, they are again by the seaside. In 4.35-41, they are crossing the sea in a boat. In 5.1, they reach the country of the Gerasenes (from which he sends a disciple to the Decapolis, which he will visit later; 5.18-20; 7.31), and then go back across the sea in a boat (5.21). On and on they went. Jesus was a teacher who was literarily on the move.

I wonder if his disciples always understood the purpose for his different trips. Several years ago, a colleague and friend gave me a "Far Side" (Gary Larson) coffee mug. It pictures a herd of buffalo, bunched together, and moving forward. One buffalo looks to the one next to him and says, "As if we all knew where we're going." My friend and I knew that those leading us had an idea where we were headed, but sometimes, like that buffalo, we wondered just where that was.

Would the disciples have had such thoughts as they traveled to Caesarea Philippi? The area was 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. It had been a prominent site for worshiping Baal (Josh 13.5; Judg 3.3), then the Greek god Pan, and finally became a place of homage to Caesar. It's not hard to imagine them wondering why they were leaving the successful ministry around the Sea of Galilee to go there.

Then, while they were there, Jesus began to tell them that he would be handed over, suffer, and be killed by their religious leaders. And Peter immediately responded: that could not be! Yes, they had confessed him as Christ, but did they wonder if Jesus really knew what he was doing?

More importantly, as we read his words today, do we also wonder? He spells out what is most important for following him and the way we should follow. Let's review what he said.

To Follow Is to Be Informed by Different Values (8.31-34)

8.31-34 go to the heart of our actions as disciples and the underlying attitude that guides us when we live best. In fact, it is from the definition of a key word in these verses that the title for

this sermon comes. When Jesus responded to Peter's "rebuke" (ἐπιτιμάω, *epitimaō*, v. 32) with his own "rebuke" (same word, v. 33), he told Peter it was because "you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's" (v. 33). "Setting your mind" (φρονέω, *phroneō*) means to think or hold an opinion. It also means "to set one's mind on, *be intent on*, espouse someone's cause" (emphasis mine).²

Peter's intentions were good, but what informed them was wrong. Two things were at work. First, like most of his countrymen, he did not understand the idea of being "Christ" the same way Jesus did. Jesus declared that being "Christ" meant that the rulers of the Jews—the groups named in v. 31 were the ones who made up the Jewish Council³—were going to abuse, reject, and execute him. "[I]n ancient Judaism there was *no* concept that the Messiah would suffer the sort of horrible fate that Jesus describes in 8:31" (Hurtado, 136; emphasis mine). In the view of Peter and the rest of the twelve, the formal rejection by the Council "would have meant . . . that Jesus' mission was a failure" (Hurtado, 137).

Second, unlike now when other layers of meaning have been attached to his words about taking up one's cross (v. 34), the twelve

could have understood them only as a warning that discipleship might mean execution, for in their time the cross was a well-known instrument of Roman execution used on runaway slaves, rebels, and other criminals of lower classes. To be more precise, in Mark's time the cross was not just an indication of possible death for disciples, it was a warning of execution by the state authorities (Hurtado, 138).

Jesus lived with a different view of what matters and constitutes success. He called his followers to live with the same view. It is a view that gives life an eternal perspective, that calls us to keep in mind a picture much bigger than our circumstances. It goes against the grain of culture. It looks past what appears to be total failure, especially as the world typically measures things, to conquest and glory (as in the last phrase in v. 31). It realizes that, when we keep following Jesus faithfully, setbacks are detours, not defeats.

Faithful Following Leads to Unparalleled Glory (8.35-9.1)

8.35-9.1 remind us that Jesus rewards faithful following. In effect, they apply the principle of the last phrase in v. 31 to the life journey of a disciple. Notice two things.

First, it is worth it to live in a way that is counter-cultural (8.35-37; 9.1). This is the life that imitates Jesus who surrendered temporary glory and adulation for the sake of obedience to God and advancing the aims of the gospel. His victory and exaltation lead the way and show the authenticity of this way of life (see Phil. 2.5-11; 3.20-21; 1 Cor. 15.20-34, 50-58). Jesus' transfiguration (9.2-13), which follows and some students think explains 9.1 (see Hurtado, 139-140), foreshadows his greater, enduring glory.

Second, the glory to be received is "a glory won by obedience to the will of God" (Hurtado, 139) (v. 38). Again, Jesus demonstrates this, as indicated by the word "must" (δεῖ, *dei*) in v. 31. As his prayer in Gethsemane shows, Jesus knew that the way of the suffering Christ was the way that conformed to God's will (Mark 14.35-36). He did not ask to avoid it, but for strength to do it. When we follow him, we are committing to his way, regardless of the difficulty it entails.

It All Matters Because of Jesus (8.27-30)

When we review 8.31-9.1, we can understand why some will not sign on for such a different way of life. We also understand why some who do sign on seek to find ways to lessen its expectations. What we should not forget is that Jesus started talking plainly (v. 32) about the expectations of following him only *after* the disciples had reached a level of faith that led them to conclude that he was, in some sense at least, “the Christ” (v. 29).

Notice that, as we see in Mark 6.14-15, other possibilities for his identity were considered (8.27-28). Many knew Jesus was different, a powerful prophet. Many modern people are convinced of the same thing. And a person can live a pretty good, productive, even service-oriented life with that kind of belief.

But that will not suffice, nor does it give what we need to sustain the life to which Jesus calls us in vv. 31-38. If he is in fact the Christ as *he* defined it, then it makes sense to sign on to his way with all the expectations—and blessings—he announced. We know he prevailed, and therefore his promise to sustain us will be honored. There are some audiences I would need to try to convince of that. You just need a reminder.

To Have Life, We Must Die

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote *The Cost of Discipleship* in his cell in a Nazi prison. The book is in part a rebuke. But it is more a rebuke of Germany’s Lutheran Church than of the Nazis. The church had been co-opted by the state and stood for nothing distinctive. Bonhoeffer charged them with a longstanding practice of “cheap grace.” The remedy in his eyes was “costly” grace, the only way to find true freedom from both license and legalism. At the heart of “costly” grace, Bonhoeffer said, is the way of cross.

The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. . . . *When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die* (emphasis mine).⁴

Currently, we do not face the prospect of the cross as a cruel instrument of execution. But what Bonhoeffer said remains true. Jesus’ call is a call to die. But in that dying it is also his call to save our lives and gain something worth more than the whole world (Mark 8.35-37). Are you living with and for Jesus? Have you died with him?

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Notes

¹ “One Solitary Life,” adapted from a sermon by Dr. James Allan Francis in “The Real Jesus and Other Sermons,” © 1926 by the Judson Press of Philadelphia (pp. 123-124 titled “Arise Sir Knight!”). https://www.anointedlinks.com/one_solitary_life.html. Accessed July 2, 2018.

² F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), BibleWorks. v.10 [p. 212].

³ Larry Hurtado, *Mark*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 1989), 141.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1959; first paperback reprint edition, 1963), 99.