

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Mark 8:31-38

Verses 31- 33

He began to teach them that it would be necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribal experts, be killed and after three days to rise. He was speaking frankly about these matters. Peter, having taken him aside, began to rebuke him. But when he turned and saw his disciples he began to rebuke Peter saying, “Get behind me Satan because you do not have in your mind the things of God but the concerns of men.”

This was the first of four prophecies about his death and resurrection (9:31; 10:32-34; 14:27,28). However, Jesus mentioned his death on many other occasions (9:9,12; 14:7,18,21,32-42). Nothing will be said about the title Son of Man since this has been covered elsewhere, but once again it was clearly seen by Jesus to be a messianic title for Peter had just finished declaring that he was the Christ (29).

Jesus described his **suffering of many things**. The first of his sufferings, and this suffering led to others, was the **rejection** by the religious authorities. **Rejection** αποδοκιμασθηναι was not a personal rejection, though that certainly occurred, but the official condemnation carried out by the Sanhedrin (**the elders**), the **chief priests** such as Caiaphas and Annas who used **the legal experts** against him. Literally, it translates: examined and distanced, or separated after examination. The result of the trial would be his scourging, mocking, and crucifixion, though Jesus mentions only his death αποκτανθηναι, not the manner of his execution. Jesus was not speaking obliquely or in passing but this episode was a moment when he took the time to explain **plainly** what was ahead of him.

Peter's motive was a reasonable one and no doubt proceeded from a genuine concern for Jesus. However, the action of taking him aside and then **rebuking him** επιτιμᾶν revealed Peter's desire to actually stop Jesus from doing what he had been sent to carry out. Jesus noticed the rest of the disciples and the reaction on their faces confirmed for him that Peter was their spokesman and therefore, the rebuke that followed was meant not only for Peter but for all.

Jesus did not consider Peter possessed but saw in Peter the same temptation he faced in the wilderness (1:13), the temptation to avoid the cross and to win the world through political means or by providing for the people food and the answers to their physical needs. Hence he mentioned that Peter and the disciples were speaking and acting out of the desires of the flesh, the desire for comfort, security, power, and prestige. They did not want to see him killed because they did not comprehend the mission of Christ, to deliver people from damnation. Indeed, **the concerns of men** dominating their lives were the very things our Lord came to save them from. Jesus made a clear distinction between himself and the disciples, for only in him were **the things of God** focused on and acted on in a perfect way. If one is to follow Christ, then he has a pathway to offer, one that leads to life with God in fullness and glory but it is the way of the cross and resurrection. In an ethical context, Paul instructed Christian minds in the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5-9).

Finally, Jesus did also say that **after three days he would rise** αναστηναι. Here would be proof amongst the many other proofs that he was the Son of God. In their shock, the disciples had not heard this (16:7).

Verses 34-38

He then called the crowd along with his disciples and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come along with me let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake and gospel, he will save it. What does it benefit a person if he gains the whole world but forfeits his life? For what can a person give in exchange for his life? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this evil and sinful

generation the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

The message about the cost of following is for all who would consider such a call. It is a call to life but with it comes loss, suffering and even death. On the other hand, the first stage of the call is the embracing of the gift of salvation and the rejection of false securities and idols.

When Jesus called people it could mean literally **walking behind him** οπίσω μου ελθεῖν. While his call certainly applied to **the crowd and his disciples** it applies spiritually to all people today. **Let him deny** ἀπαρνησάσθω **himself** was the first call. Did our Lord first of all mean repentance, a rejection of false supports? Christ was calling followers to receive him, to embrace his life as their own life. It therefore meant a turning away from the self-constructed life with all its desires and vanities. Next it would mean the acceptance of a new set of attitudes and desires coming from Christ and directed to him and his kingdom. After all, the goal is to be behind Jesus, with him in front and he being the goal of one's existence. A person cannot experience the redemption of the cross, cannot receive the benefits of the Lord's sufferings, nor enter the resurrection to a new existence unless he denies himself, that is, let's go of the life he is presently clinging to. This denial that begins in accepting Christ by faith, continues on a daily basis in submission to him.

Christ called each person to **take up his cross** σταυρόν. Followers do not copy Jesus because Christ gives a cross suited to each believer. To embrace the life and destiny of Jesus (suffering, cross and resurrection) is followed by a willingness to take up one's own cross. This will mean suffering on two fronts: a fighting against temptation, suppressing desires, and giving oneself to others in the name of Christ and then accepting persecution and perhaps death because of one's witness to the Lord.

The third call of Christ was **follow me** ακολουθεῖτω μοι. This is no redundancy because Jesus began by referring to those wishing to be with him (**come in behind me**). **Following** thus refers to adopting the ways of Jesus, engaging in his mission and carrying out his will in one's own life.

Jesus spoke law and gospel. First the law: if a person attempted **to save his life he would lose it**. In a literal sense, this phrase probably meant escaping martyrdom through denial of Christ. As mentioned above, Jesus called disciples to deny themselves, to accept that their old lives were over and Christ would give them a new way to live and the promise of life with him. Applying this in a wider way would entail the preservation of existing comforts, employment and lifestyle. Whatever a person considers constitutes his life and wants to hang on to is what he believes will save him.

The gospel is the promise of a restored life now and in eternity for those who have lost their lives as martyrs for Christ and his gospel. They **will save their lives**. The reward of the gospel is already given to every believer through faith but we can forfeit it through cowardice or lack of commitment. However, this word Jesus particularly addressed to those who would suffer much for him.

Present and future are at work here. **What does it benefit a person if he gains the whole world but forfeits his life?** **Life** ψυχή has been translated as soul by some. This is misleading. Certainly, life here refers to the inner life, the life of the mind and one's conception of one's self. But life is the opposite of death too. It is the death of oneself. To gain the whole world while alive may seem preferable to many. However, Christ had in mind a future judgement where a person can be destroyed in eternity. So, it is not a premature death that Jesus was thinking of. Rather, he was aware, as some were in the Old Testament, that there is a life that comes from God, a spiritual existence on this earth. Even fewer in the OT considered a resurrection but Christ certainly did. Life, is the present life restored by the resurrection and lived in fellowship with God in eternity. The calculation many make when considering their advantages will lead to disappointment because a few years with ephemeral goods and pleasures cannot match the glory of God and a new existence with him.

Jesus was reflecting the psalmists who spoke of there being nothing that anyone can do to ransom a life. No money can buy it (Ps 49:7,8). The meaning here is clear. Should a person be in mortal danger, from enemies, accident or death, the huge amount of property that person owned would be valueless: **For what can a person give in exchange for his life?** What would a person have to bargain with God with the purpose of redeeming his life from everlasting damnation?

Jesus considered that his words, warnings and promises, were the critical component of life. Outside of these words, nothing of enduring value existed. It was by him that a person rose or fell and a person's response to him determined the eternal future. An attempt to save one's life by denial of Christ or simply exchanging his truth for the deceptions of pleasure and material goods is in effect to be **ashamed of Christ**. The disciple is to know of the value of Christ. He is the Saviour from destruction and the glorious Son of the Father with the greatest heavenly power, the power of **the holy, angelic** army of God. Once again, **the Son of Man** title is equivalent to the unique relationship Jesus enjoyed with **his Father**.

The present and future are contrasted here. Some have said, such as Feuerbach, that heaven is simply a projection of the disappointment of those who have missed out on earth. Nothing could be further from the truth for Christ was talking about the giving up of family, wealth, status and even life itself for him and his gospel, **his words**. It is precisely because of the sinfulness of human beings, **the evil and sinful generation** Christ spoke of, that the offer of a new life is granted to those who embrace Christ. They have rejected what the world offers and the inadequacy of what they can achieve on earth. The alternative is for those who reject Christ to construct their utopias on earth, which have been murderous, death to the unborn, euthanasia, gay marriage, exploitation of the earth's resources, pollution, the death of species, wars, crime and marriage breakdown.