

Meet Jesus: As he demands not your money but your life

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Date: 11 July 2007

Preacher: Alex Bedford

[0 : 00] So we're continuing our series from Mark's Gospel and we're in a very exciting section of Mark's Gospel. It's exactly the middle of Mark's Gospel, chapter 8, Mark chapter 8 and it's page 844 in the Bibles.

Mark chapter 8 and reading from verse 31. So Peter's just identified Jesus as the Christ, hasn't he? The long expected Messiah from the Old Testament. And Jesus strictly warned Peter not to tell anybody about him.

And verse 31. And Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again.

And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples he rebuked Peter and said, Get behind me, Satan, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man.

[1 : 10] And he called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

But whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life?

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father and with the holy angels.

And he said to them, Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.

Chapter 9, verse 1. We'll look at chapter 9, verse 1 next week actually. Our first point is the shocking mission of Jesus from verses 31 to 33.

[2 : 16] And so we ended last week, didn't we, with silence. Silence. And it was just really after Peter had identified Jesus as the Christ.

But Jesus warned him to keep that news to himself, didn't he? And so it was a very intriguing end of the first half of Mark's Gospel.

It ends with silence. Chapter 1, verse 1. And you might remember Mark lays out his stool, doesn't he? Chapter 1, verse 1. He says the beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It's all about Jesus Christ, says Mark. And then chapter 8, verse 9. Peter, he finally identifies Jesus, doesn't he, as the Christ.

They're going to Caesarea Philippi, aren't they? Walking along the road. And Jesus asks quite an easy question really. It's like one of these Gallup poles on the high street.

[3 : 26] Who do people say I am? And the disciples say to him, well, some say John the Baptist, still others Elijah, and others one of the prophets. And then Jesus sort of zooms in, doesn't he, on his disciples.

He looks them in the eye. He said, but what about you? Who do you say I am? And Peter blurts out the answer. Bullseye. You are the Christ. And then Jesus strictly warned them not to tell anybody about him.

So why the secrecy? Well, friends, it's because we all come to the Bible with our own framework, do you see? And we try to make it fit our lifestyles, our hopes, our dreams.

And Peter, he has a plan for Jesus. Peter, you know, he's got his own understanding of the Christ from the Old Testament. And he wants to combine, think about this, he wants to combine the person of Jesus with his expectations from the Old Testament.

Do you see? He wants to sort of merge them together. Peter, it's like he's got a mannequin in a shop window and he wants to dress it in a certain way. So Jesus said, no, don't do that, Peter.

[4 : 45] In the Old Testament, there's two streams of prophecy about somebody looming up in the distant horizon. And it was available for everybody to read in the first century.

The Old Testament closed about 400 BC. So it was in common currency in the first century. You know, this isn't religion.

It's outside intelligence breaking into the physical world that we know. So two strands of prophecy. Let's think about that. Two strands of prophecy from the Old Testament.

The first is the well-known Messiah figure. You know, the Christ in Greek. He's going to be a victorious king. And then the second, well, the second is a character who suffers.

A character who suffers. He seems to be sort of incompatible with Peter's idea of the Christ. You know, he seems quite the opposite to the plans that Peter has for Jesus.

[5 : 54] But listen, Jesus knows that they both identify him. He's the incarnation of both of these strands of prophecy, do you see?

But Peter, well, Peter just wants a king. He just wants that victorious king. He wants somebody who'll come and they'll wipe the smile off the face of those Roman soldiers strutting the streets of Jerusalem.

That's who Peter wants. It's sort of smash and grab from the Old Testament. But let's have a look ourselves, friends. We've got the same documents in front of us as they had in the first century. Let's have a look ourselves. We'll go back to Isaiah. If you'd like to open it up. If you open the Bible exactly in the middle, you'll be somewhere near Isaiah.

You might need to turn right a few pages. And we'll have a look. We'll have a look at Isaiah chapter 9, first of all. And this is the Messiah that Peter's anticipating.

[6 : 56] A victorious king. Let's have a look. Isaiah chapter 9, verses 6 and 7. It's page 573. It's a well-known little passage.

Verse 6. For to us a child is born. To us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase, verse 7, of his government and of peace there will be no end. You see, it's an eternal kingdom. On the throne of David. It's a Davidic kingdom and over his kingdom.

To establish it and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and how long for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

No wonder Peter's excited. Well, wouldn't you be if you'd got the inkling that Jesus is the incarnation of this prophetic hope?

[8 : 01] It's like Peter can suddenly identify with his childhood hero. You know, his right-hand man from Sunday school. An eternal Davidic kingdom of peace.

The zeal of the Lord will accomplish it. Peter's thinking, well, let's have some of that zeal. Bring your kingdom in, Jesus. Your kingdom come. And Jesus must have almost had to sellotape his mouth closed.

Recoup from quiet. Do you see? Have you ever had a secret to keep yourselves? Perhaps a secret involving good news. It's difficult, isn't it?

And actually, we sometimes don't want truth to get in the way. This is Peter. Tunnel vision. All he can see is Jesus sat on that throne. Let's move forward now to Isaiah chapter 53.

We'll see the other strand of prophecy about the coming Messiah. You'll know it well. Isaiah chapter 53, verse 2. For he grew up.

[9 : 07] He grew up before him like a young plant. And like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him. No beauty that we should desire him.

You know, no wonder it took Peter eight chapters to identify Jesus. Verse 3. This is a suffering Messiah, isn't it?

Have a look there at verse 3. It's where Peter's turning a blind eye. He was despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised. And we esteemed him not. And this, friends, is a juncture before us where?

In Mark's Gospel. Do you see? This is where we are in Mark's Gospel. We're with Peter. And we're seeing these prophetic strands zooming in, converging in on Jesus.

[10:06] Jesus knows that they're fulfilling themselves in him. It's like a bank of prophetic spotlights shining at Jesus, beaming down towards him from the Old Testament.

But Peter's mouth is sellotape closed. Why? Well, he knows Jesus' identity. You are the Christ. But he doesn't yet know, think about it, his role.

So Peter knows Jesus' identity. But he doesn't yet understand his role. And so we begin the second half of Mark's Gospel at this point.

And you'll notice that if you turn back to Mark's Gospel, verse 31. Mark chapter 8, verse 31. And this is the beginning of the second half of Mark's Gospel.

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed. And after that, three days to rise again.

[11:10] And did you notice what Jesus is doing there in verse 31? He's identifying himself, isn't he? With that suffering servant figure from Isaiah chapter 53.

Did you notice that? He must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed. And then he ends with good news, isn't it?

Resurrection. And after three days, rise again. Did you see also that Jesus began to teach, verse 31? We say to Mark, how can Jesus begin to teach there?

He's been teaching for eight chapters now. How is this a beginning? You see, but this teaching is not now about who he is. Think about it, but why he came.

It's the second half of Mark's Gospel. And it's that second strand of teaching. It's actually about how that Davidic kingdom will be inaugurated.

[12:13] Do you see? Isaiah knew, didn't he? But Peter doesn't yet know. Tis mystery all. The immortal dies. Who can explore his strange design?

Paul Barnett says this. Listen to this. At every level, Jesus' teaching must have taken the disciples entirely by surprise. They expected a triumphalist, messianic kingdom.

But Jesus taught that the kingdom of God would be characterized by suffering. His and theirs. According to them, triumph would be political and to that extent, time-bound.

According to him, the triumph would be heavenly, unlimited, everlasting, above and beyond anything they imagined. Friends, let's just grapple with a scale of things here.

Just think what happened back in the early chapters of Genesis, from chapters 1 to 3. In chapter 2, verse 17, the Creator said, if you choose to reject my way, there'll be consequences.

[13:26] And those consequences are death. And then the root of death enters the scene, doesn't it? Genesis chapter 3. Satan enters the garden.

Did God really say? Do you see? And Adam listened. He listened to the power of death and he rejected his creator, the giver of life.

And friends, we inherit that pattern and think about it, the consequences as well. Do you see? Think of humanity. I don't know if this is a very good illustration.

They're all imperfect, aren't they? But think of humanity as a gene pool. Think about that. It was a gene pool of life, but it became contaminated, contaminated with death.

And this is the gene pool, friends, that we find ourselves in on planet Earth. We can't escape it by ourselves, but verse 31, do you remember the end of verse 31, there's good news.

[14:30] It's an invasion from the outside. The realm of life has invaded. The creator has visited, do you see? Look there again.

Let's look at verse 31 again. And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer. Do you see what he's doing? He's taking upon himself death, suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and then rise again, do you see?

And after three days, rise again. It's life out of death, isn't it? That's what's happening with Jesus. That's why he's visited planet Earth. So at Adam's end, what happened?

Death entered humanity, didn't it? And you and me, friends, are born into it. But then, 2,000 years ago, 2,000 years ago, someone plunged in to our realm from the outside, and life entered the pool of dying humanity.

And verse 31, the last two words, there's resurrection on the cards, isn't there? New life, it's an escape, there's a way out. Good news, says Mark.

[15:40] I hope it sounds like good news. Genesis chapter 1, verse 1. But Satan, well, Satan doesn't want all of that death from Genesis chapter 3 reversing, does he?

In my life and yours, he wants us to remain in that realm. And Eve approached Adam. Think about it, Eve approached Adam. But here, Peter approaches Jesus.

It's like Genesis chapter 3. All over again, a cosmic confrontation with eternal consequences. It's like two kingdoms engaging.

Do you remember the end of verse 31? It was resurrection. It was life out of death. And now, verse 32, it's like death is moving in again, stalking its prey. You definitely need, friends, to look at the text at this point.

Verses 32 and 33. And he said this plainly. Look at Peter here. Look what he does. It's like a football manager taking somebody to the touchline to rebuke them.

[16:42] And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he, that is Jesus, that is life if you think about it, rebuke Peter.

And said, get behind me, Satan. He's identified him, hasn't he? Who's speaking through Peter. It's the realm of death. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, life, but on the things of man, death.

You know, if only Adam had done that. Back in Genesis chapter 3. Get behind me, Satan. If only Adam had done that. So here it is, friends.

It's the incarnation, isn't it? Life entered our world of dying humanity. Where, oh death, is your victory? Where, oh death, is your sting?

And the question is, you know, do you have a relationship with Jesus? Have you asked God to deal with your sin through Jesus Christ and give you the eternal life that he came to offer?

[17:49] Our second point is the radical life of Christianity. And that's from verses 33 to 38. It's the next section here.

And it's about following the pattern of Jesus, the pattern of death and life. So it's about following that pattern. Now, I wonder what's the most important thing in your own life.

Think about what is the most important thing in your life. You know, your ultimate value, the thing that sorts everything else. There must be something there at the top. You know, the centre of your life.

For many people, it can be a career. There can be good things. A family. There can be all sorts of things like that. It could be beauty.

It could be the house. It could be charitable activity. It could be all of these things. But think about this. Whatever is the most important thing for you, it ends up controlling you.

[18:51] It ends up controlling you. You know, if it's, for example, your work, it will determine what sort of qualifications you need. It will probably determine where you live.

And whatever it is, the thing that we have as the most important thing in our lives, we end up slaves to it. And we feel guilty if we're not attaining what we're striving for. We feel angry if somebody threatens it, whatever that is.

And our lives can be characterised by stress and anxiety. You know, and think about this. In the end, whatever it is, if it's not Jesus, we lose it, don't we?

We do lose it in the end. Think about somebody getting close to death, lying in a hospital bed with the drips going in. You know, whatever it was, the most important thing in our life, if it wasn't Jesus, they're about to lose it.

Even good things like family relationships. If it was the work and the career, they lost that long ago. If it was the house, well, painting that fence, it doesn't seem all that important now, does it?

[19:59] Or that new garage. So in the end, it all falls apart, doesn't it? If our most important thing is something or someone other than Jesus. Now think about this, friends.

Put Jesus in place. Put him as the substitute, as the most important thing in your life. And suddenly everything else takes order. We still have many of these good things, like family and houses and cars, but they take their proper order.

And so life is suddenly more stable. Are you with me? Because the most important thing, listen, can never be taken away. Do you understand? So we don't have as much anxiety.

The most important thing, death even, won't be able to take Jesus from us. So life is properly stable. We become proper humans when we have Jesus as our most important thing, our most important person.

And that's what's going on in this passage here as we close. If you just want to look there from verse 34. And he called to him the crowd with his disciples. And he said to them, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

[21 : 11] For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. And then he just exaggerates everything out of all proportion. Verse 36.

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Verse 37. There's no bargaining on judgment day. For what can a man give in return for his life?

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the son of man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels.

So if we're to follow Jesus, he wants our whole lives, doesn't he? Not a little compartment, not a little time slot, not a little 10% tithe.

He wants everything. He wants our whole lives laid before him for his purposes. Do you see? Sounds costly, doesn't it? But it was infinitely more costly for him, friends.

[22 : 14] And if it still sounds too costly, it's because we're thinking of this world. We're thinking like Peter. We've still got our anchor down in this world.

And so the question is, friends, from this passage, what or who do we live for? Will it be the intoxicating things of this world?

Or will it be death to the things of this world and life eternal in Jesus Christ? C.S. Lewis said, Die before you die.

There's no chance afterwards. Just listen to this hymn. All I once held dear built my life upon. All this world reveres and wars to own. All I once thought gain I have counted loss. Spent and worthless now compared to this. Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater thing.

[23 : 14] And friends, it's the overlap of ages, isn't it? And Jesus is asking us to make up our minds about the things of eternity, about what it is to be human.

What or who are we living for? Shall we pray? Amen. Take my life and let it be.

All you purpose, Lord, for me. Consecrate my fleeting days. Let them flow in ceaseless praise. And Father, that is our prayer.

We pray that you'd help us to consecrate our lives for you and for your purposes. and we pray that we would feel the liberation and the assurance of eternal life that is ours in your Son, Jesus Christ. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now, this day, and forevermore. Amen.