

STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, March 1, 2009

Radical Renovation (*Week 1 of 7*)

Discipleship: The Design of a Cross-Shaped Life

Mark 8:27-38

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "but who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

The Word from the Bible, Revised Standard Version

Discipleship

When God begins a work of interior renovation in our small, narrow, self-addicted lives, God has a big idea. God's renovation plan is to rebuild our little lives into a place where God can take up residence and be at home. We may think that the repair work is minor and then discover that God had a major renovation in mind. Are you ready for a cross-shaped, Christ-center life experience?

Peter's Confession (Mark 8:27-30)

The first half of Mark's gospel, he establishes the identity and the authority of Jesus. Jesus is the Christ with authority over nature, illness and death. In spite of the evidence, the disciples seem to miss the true identity of Jesus. Jesus confronts his disciples in a "*who do they say that I am*" encounter.

In one sense it is a record of their insight, even though it is belated. Peter, a spokesman for the others, affirms his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. In another sense, however, it is an indictment of the limited view of the twelve, for it reveals a political, worldly, messianic view. Their understanding clearly falls short of the Mark's Son of God affirmation.

The title "*Christ*" is the Greek translation of the Hebrew "*Messiah*." Both words mean "*anointed one*." The concept of the Messiah among Jewish believers implied not a divine being, but an appointed human. As the demons that recognized Jesus' divinity have always been silenced, so now the twelve are forbidden to reveal this misunderstanding.

First Prediction of the Passion (Mark 8:31-33)

This is the first of three predictions of suffering and death which Jesus makes to his disciples. Jesus tries in vain to prepare his disciples for what is to come, but the disciples consistently fail to understand.

The point of the threefold attack on the understanding of the twelve is to establish the defectiveness of the disciple's grasp of the identity and significance of Jesus. Mark reports that Jesus said this to the disciples clearly or plainly. The disciples are blinded by their human limitations.

This first prediction interprets the coming resurrection as the victory of Jesus over death in the phrase **"rise again."** Jesus is not passive in this action of resurrection. Jesus fully participates in God's victory over death as he himself will rise. The final demonic enemy – death – will be defeated once and for all.

The reaction of Peter illustrates his lack of understanding and makes it necessary to view his confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah as less than a full understanding. Jesus, in turn, gives Peter his most serious personal rebuke, calling him Satan and accusing him of being not on the side of God. The phrase get behind me is a Jewish way of saying "be gone" or "get away from me".

Standards of Discipleship (Mark 8:34-38)

This paragraph is a collection of several short sayings of Jesus, arranged here by Mark to offer the standards for true discipleship. Three of them exist also in Matthew and Luke. They are appropriate here because of Peter's failure to grasp the significance of Jesus' coming crucifixion. Mark wants us to know that following Jesus does not come without change and sacrifice. But for the one willing to pay the price, the reward is heavenly.

The multitude should be understood as including the reader of the gospel. It is generally believed that the phrase **"Take up his cross"** used by Jesus to describe the cost of following Christ is probably a post-crucifixion phrase used among the early Christians. In a cryptic way it expresses the Christian life as the way of the cross, probably as understood in Gentile Christian preaching. Matthew 16:24 repeats the saying exactly, and Luke 9:23 is almost exact, reading **"take up his cross daily."**

The phrase and the gospel are omitted in Matthew and Luke, probably because their sources focused more dramatically on the Christian way of the cross. It has overtones of death and persecution in it, on both the historical and the symbolic levels.

Verse 38 reflects the situation Christians faced under official Roman persecution. To deny Christ was to be saved from persecution and possible death in this world but to be lost in the life after death. To accept Christ was to face possible persecution and death in this world but to be saved in life after death.

Discussion Questions –

(use these questions in your study groups, families or ponder them on your own)

1. When you look at your own experience, have you ever felt like a homeowner who invited God in to do some minor repair work and then discovered God had a major renovation in mind? How did you respond? What difference did it make?
2. Read Mark 8:27-33 again and reflect on the feelings of Peter. How do you think Peter felt when he "rebuked" Jesus? How did Peter feel when Jesus "rebuked" him?
3. What does it mean for you to "set your mind" on something? How would you describe the difference between setting your mind on human things and setting your mind on divine things?
4. In our culture, what evidence can you find of self-centered, self-addicted lives? How have you experienced this in your life?

5. Read Mark 8:35 again, reflecting on your own life. What does it mean for you to live into the truth of scripture? What action can you take to move in that direction?

Notes

Daily Readings

Please note: We begin the year by focusing our attention on the gospel of Mark. We are now more than halfway through Mark. The rest of Mark's gospel focuses on the final weeks of Jesus life before the crucifixion. This is week nine of our reading from Mark.

Monday, March 2 – Read Mark 12:13-27. In chapter 12 of Mark, the gospel writer deals with a variety of subjects. Here he quotes Jesus on the issue of paying taxes, *“render unto Caesar that which is Caesar and unto God what is Gods.”* The second is an exchange between Jesus and the Sadducees concerning the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees were so tied to the ways of the past they could not understand Jesus' gift of eternal life. Have you rendered unto God that which is God's in every area of your life? Are you blinded by the ways and understandings of the past?

Tuesday, March 3 – Read Mark 12:28-44. Mark continues by citing the Great Commandment, to love God and love neighbor. Jesus then addresses his followers by pointing out the sacrificial gift of a poor widow. This section closes with Jesus' warnings concerning the scribes. In what ways this week will your life reflect love of God and love of neighbor in sacrificial giving?

Wednesday, March 4 – Read Mark 13:1-23. In chapter 13, Mark includes quotes from Jesus concerning the last days. For our reading this week, the chapter is divided into two parts. Today's reading includes the time of tribulation. Jesus wants his present and future followers to know that the difficulties of today will not stop the glory of God's future. Have you dedicated your future to God? Are you willing to submit to God's will even in the tough times?

Thursday, March 5 – Read Mark 13:24-37. Jesus speaks of the last days before the coming of God's Kingdom. If Jesus were to come today, would you be ready? Do you bear the fruits of God's Kingdom?

Friday, March 6 – Read Mark 14:1-9. Quickly, Mark turns to the plot to kill Jesus. He then couples it with the anointing of Jesus in Bethany. The tension between the adoration and hatred toward Jesus is obvious. On which side would you stand? If you were a follower of Jesus, what would you have done to stop the plot to kill Jesus?