

Lenten study 1 – Mark 8:31-38, ‘Bearing the cross’

³¹ 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. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But 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.’

³⁴ 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. ³⁵For 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. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those 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.’

Opening discussion

What jumps out at you in this text? What initial comments or questions comes to mind?

Discuss the image of the cross. What did it mean to first-century people? What does it mean to people today? What do you think the expression ‘take up your cross’ means?

The text

Bible scholars usually point out that Mark’s Gospel is divided into two main sections with our passage being the pivot point between the two. Think of the events in the first half of Mark and the second, how might we categorize the two main sections?

This is the first of Jesus’ three “passion predictions” (8:31; 9:31; 10:33). What is significant about Jesus making these predictions?

Who are the ‘them’ in verse 31?

What sorts of people is Jesus going to be rejected by?

What do you make of the prediction that Jesus will be ‘rejected’?

Why do you think Peter felt so strongly about Jesus’ prediction of his suffering and death?

Read Mark 8:27-30 which immediately precedes this passage. How do those verses help us understand what is happening in our passage?

Read Matthew 4:10. What is the connection between that verse and verse 33 in our passage? What do you make of that connection?

What does it mean that Peter is setting his mind on 'human-things' rather than 'God-things'?

What is the connection between verses 31-33 where Jesus predicts his own suffering and death, and verses 34-38 where Jesus calls his disciples to a life of self-denial and bearing the cross?

How do you interpret the apparent paradox of verse 35? (Hint: think of how the word 'life' be used in different ways)

This Gospel was first written for second or third generation Christians in AD 100s. How would verse 38 strike them more forcefully than us? How might it similarly strike Christians in Sudan or China very sharply?

Further application for us

Are you ever tempted to be 'ashamed' of Jesus? In what groups is this more of a temptation?

In what ways have you experienced suffering for being a Christian?

What does it mean for us to 'deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus'? (note these are not separate things)

Some have suggested Colossians 3:1-17 is a further reflection and application of our passage. How do these words from St Paul help us understand our passage?

Below is part of Luther's explanation of Baptism in his Small Catechism. How does this relate to our following Jesus by taking up our cross?

What does such baptizing with water signify?

It signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise; who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Where is this written?

St. Paul says [Romans, chapter 6](#): We are buried with Christ by Baptism into death, that, like as He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

If someone asks, 'what did you learn today at Bible study?' How would you respond?