

# The Cross-Centered Gospel

In Mark 8:28, Peter, after many struggles to understand, has just summarized what the first half of Mark's gospel was all about: Jesus is the Christ. But now, Jesus has much more to teach His disciples, and, once again, they are slow to learn. Let's read our text:

## Mark 2:23-3:6

<sup>31</sup> 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 three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> 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."

<sup>34</sup> And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> For what can a man give in return for his soul? <sup>38</sup> 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."

<sup>1</sup> 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."

### I. We must believe the cross of Christ (8:31-33)

This is one of three instances of Jesus' teaching His disciples about the Messiah's sufferings. (cf. also 9:30-37; 10:32-45)

Peter cannot conceive of a crucified Messiah, so he unwittingly opposes God's purposes. Peter took Jesus aside, probably in his arms, because he wanted to protect Him; and then he rebuked Jesus.

Jesus sees that the disciples overhear this conversation so He gives a remarkable response that, no doubt, shocked Peter and all of the disciples. He says that Peter's words are Satanic. Jesus had to resist not only the threats of the Pharisees and Herodians, but also the temptations of His own disciples. The reason for His strong response was that Peter was unwittingly undoing the very heart of the gospel itself. If Jesus doesn't die for us, we have absolutely no hope of eternal salvation. We must trust in the cross of Christ alone for our salvation.

*Read also Romans 3:19-26*

### II. We must bear our own cross (8:34)

The cross we must bear is universal (If anyone...), active (would come after me), intentional (let him deny himself), and costly (take up his cross).

In his commentary on Mark, David Garland says that discipleship is not part-time volunteer work that one does as an extracurricular activity. One cannot follow Christ the same way we watch our favorite TV program. Our tendency is to morph Christianity into a commodity we can use and enjoy. He says that God is not calling us to make modest adjustments to our lives. He is calling for a total overhaul. He does not entice us with spiritualized schemes of self-fulfillment or deep, rhapsodic spiritual experiences. He gives us a cross.

What is this cross? Is it ailments or grievances or difficulties or irregular people? No, but rather

the intentional suffering we undergo as a result of our taking on the life and ministry of Jesus. Look at how the Apostle Paul teaches these things to the saints in Corinth in I Corinthians. 4:8-13.

### III. We must boast in the cross (8:35-9:1)

#### A. Because we will save our lives (8:35-38)

The "divine irony" is given us in v. 35: by dying we actually live. Jesus then shows us the problems with alternative lifestyles:

1. They are foolishness (v.36).
2. They are futility (v.37).
3. They are failure (v.38).

One's stance toward Jesus determines the final verdict of God. If we win the favor of the world, we lose the favor of God and vice versa.

#### B. Because we will see the Kingdom (9:1)

Throughout Mark's gospel he emphasizes the necessity of "seeing." (Cf. 15:32,36,39; 16:6,7.) Here Jesus tells His disciples that they will one day see something truly spectacular—the Kingdom in power. What a great promise! Just as these disciples saw His transfiguration, His resurrected majesty, and His glorious ascension, we shall, with them, behold the consummated glory of Christ upon His return.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why do human beings often seek to distort the message of the cross?
2. Why is the cross crucial to the gospel?
3. What does it mean for us to "take up our cross?"
4. What are the biggest challenges for us to do so?
5. What are the benefits we enjoy in this life from taking up the cross of Jesus? What are the benefits in the next life?

### Going Deeper

How have you failed at times to take up the cross in your life?

How can you more faithfully deny yourself for Jesus' sake?