

June 5, 2011

The Christ Must Suffer

Mark 8:27-38

INTRODUCTION

In the film *Forrest Gump* there was that scene, after the war was over, where Lieutenant Dan cynically asked Private Gump, “Have you found Jesus?” and Forrest replied, “I didn’t know He was lost!” Lieutenant Dan laughed, and so does the whole world. The modern church that has tried so hard to apologize for God and reduce our separation from God to a mere seeking, as if getting the question “Who’s Jesus?” were the sum total of salvation. We have the right Jesus. Mormons have the wrong Jesus. That’s what we tell ourselves. We got the trivia question right! But as I’ve said a hundred times, at least, Jesus isn’t Waldo. He’s not lost and He hasn’t asked you to find him. The world knows at a gut level that this doesn’t add up.

- THE GREAT CONFESSION
- THE GREAT CORRECTION

The Big Idea is that our gospel cannot separate the person of Christ from the offensive work of Christ.

DOCTRINE

I. THE GREAT CONFESSION

A) The Insufficiency of the Culture’s View of Jesus {27-28}

1. *And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” (27b).* Everyone here knows roughly where people in their families are spiritually, so there is no better ice breaker “on the way,” or around the barbeque grill this summer than ‘Who is Jesus and why does it matter?’ Jesus was such a different conversationalist than we are! He cut right to the chase. Jesus would never simply allow certain individuals to be hyper-sensitive toward controversial subjects. He would ruin your Hallmark Christmas every time!

2. *And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets" (28).* This response is very complimentary, considering some of the opposition Jesus was getting. This is positive press! But what is flattering is also false more often than not: "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you" [Lk. 6:26].

B) The Insufficiency of the Church's View of Jesus {29-30}

1. *And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" (29a).* This has been called the "ultimate question." And that is absolutely true in one sense. If Jesus is who the Bible claims that He is, then everything else in the Christian message becomes authoritative. On the other hand it can be misleading to call this the ultimate question. For instance, suppose we answer the question correctly, but then proceed to disbelieve in virtually everything else in the biblical worldview. What exactly is so 'saving' about answering a question right about Jesus? In the modern form of religion we speak of "accepting Jesus" as if Jesus were auditioning for a job, as if we were approving of Him! That is what comes from reducing this question to a mere question. But the whole notion of "accepting Jesus," as A. W. Tozer pointed out, is nowhere found in Scripture, and for good reason:

It shows Christ applying to us rather than us to Him. It makes Him stand hat-in-hand awaiting our verdict on Him, instead of our kneeling with troubled hearts awaiting His verdict on us. It may even permit us to accept Christ by an impulse of mind or emotions, painlessly, at no loss to our egos and no inconvenience to our usual way of life.¹

Let's look at Peter's response to begin to see it.

2. *Peter answered him, "You are the Christ" (29b).* Peter is acting here as a representative of the disciples as a whole. This is sometimes called the "Great Confession," and it is on the parallel text in Matthew's Gospel that Roman Catholics build their doctrine of apostolic succession. There are a number of reasons why it won't work. For starters, everything that Jesus ascribes to Peter in Matthew 16 is ascribed to the rest of the disciples in Matthew 18. And when Jesus says, "on this rock I will build my church" [16:18], the "rock" referred to is Christ who is referred to as the chief cornerstone by Peter himself [cf. 1 Pet. 2:6]. But I mention all that in passing. Mark does not focus on the greatness of the confession at all. Often Evangelicals spend a lot of time trying to refute Catholic doctrine on this point by saying, "Look down here: a minute later Jesus is rebuking Satan himself through Peter!" That is true, but Mark wants us to focus on the *nature* of what the devil was saying through Peter.

¹ A. W. Tozer, *That Incredible Christian* (Christian Publications Inc., Harrisburg, PA 1964); p. 18

In other words, we spend so much time pointing to Peter being rebuked that we don't ever stop to ask *why* he is being rebuked.

3. Let us look at the confession itself to get a first glance at its insufficiency. He calls Jesus **the Christ**, which, if we remember, means “anointed one” or “chosen one,” namely, for the throne of the Kingdom of God over all things. All true and all important! In Matthew's account Peter adds the words, “the Son of the living God” [16:16], which does not necessarily imply an understanding that the Christ is in fact God. In other words, what Peter has confessed here is that Jesus is the promised Messiah and that this Messiah is related to God the Father as a Son, the heir to the throne of all thrones. Do not misunderstand. This is an all-explaining truth *if* you let it start explaining all! If you leave it as an answer to a trivia game, it winds up explaining nothing at all.

4. Here is the ‘Messianic Secret’ again: *And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him (30)*. What do all of the commands of Jesus to be silent and wait have in common? It isn't just wrongheaded enthusiasm: the demons were not excited about the arrival of Jesus! It wasn't even wrong information: the demons got some things right. The most accurate understanding of who Jesus is prior to this confession of Peter was out of the mouths of those demons. The Apostle James gives us the principle: “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” [2:19]. So the insufficiency of Peter's confession was not in any amount of inaccurate information; it is that it is nothing but accurate information about something that is not good news in and of itself. If you are in a sixth story window in a burning building and I yell up to you “Fire Department!” and you say, “Yep—fire department,” looking down and waiting for a punch-line that never comes—i.e. “I'll be right up with a ladder!”—my announcement is going to be pretty anticlimactic, and hot.

II. THE GREAT CORRECTION

A) The Plain Necessity of the Work of Christ {31-32a}

1. *And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things (31a)*. Must! This suffering many things is described as a necessity. This is what Christians through the ages have meant by the “passion of Christ,” from the Latin word for **suffer** (*passio*). But why would suffering ever be necessary for a King who has all power and glory in himself? Nothing in God ‘must’ experience this.

2. It was also necessary that the Christ *be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed (31b)*. It is one thing to come to harm; it is another to have failed in your life completely. We need to understand that, as far as Peter could tell at this point in his “Christian walk,” what Jesus is describing is nothing less than an end to all their hopes. Rejected by the spiritual leaders of God’s people? That means that you can’t be their Messiah or ours? Killed! How can that be of a messenger of God? Of course Muslims say the same thing. The Islamic religion teaches that Jesus was the second to last great prophet and that no prophet could come to the shameful end of execution. Both Jews and Muslims believe in the inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures. Well they both might want to take a little perusal through those Scriptures to see how all of God’s messengers were treated! But if He was to be the Lamb of God on behalf of sinners, then He must be killed in this way, for “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” [Heb. 9:22].

3. And then it was also necessary that Jesus *after three days rise again (31c)*. Why is Jesus rising from the grave necessary to salvation? The Apostle Paul gives us two big reasons. First, the resurrection vindicated the justifying work of Christ that was accomplished by the cross; and second, the resurrection of Christ includes the resurrection of all those who have been united in him. As his rising was bodily and glorious, so our rising will be bodily and glorious. To the first reason, Paul says about Jesus, that He “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for (because of) our justification” [Rom. 4:25]. To the second reason, Paul says, “we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” [Rom. 6:5]. So, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” [1 Cor. 12:17]. So it is necessary that after three days the Christ would rise again.

4. Now notice what has been taught here by Jesus: the suffering, the death and the resurrection of Christ are all necessary to the gospel, to his mission. These belong to that category of truths that we call **essential doctrines** of the Christian faith. An essential doctrine (or essential truth) is one that if it were not true, the whole biblical worldview and whole gospel hope would collapse. An essential doctrine is a necessary condition for something to exist. It is a “must.” An essential doctrine is not a trivia contest that if you personally answer right, you’re in, and if you don’t, you’re out, or that if you understand better or deeper than someone else, you’re “more in” than someone who doesn’t. These necessary things are important to believe, but there is nothing trivial about them. They are not things that make much of you and me. But they are things that if the leaders of the

church, like Peter, start to stumble over and remove, what is left no longer resembles the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Mark adds, almost parenthetically, *And he said this plainly (32a)*. The essential doctrines are plain things. The necessary “musts” of the faith are as plain as a potato, but their edges are jagged as a crown of thorns and as uncomfortable to behold as blood, at least to a carnal mind. And even though Jesus had just rejoiced with Peter and said, “Blessed are you Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” [Mat. 16:17]—in spite of that work of God on Peter’s mind, his weak mind, like ours, could not comprehend why someone so glorious should become so infamous and say that He “must suffer.”

B) The Devilish Offense at the Work of Christ {32b-33}

1. *And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him (32b)*. I do not think that this is Peter simply expressing misguided sympathy. The connotation of Mark’s words is that Peter was irritated and manifesting what we would today call “buyer’s remorse.” You don’t think that these men thought about how much they sacrificed and how they would appear as failures before men! Later on in this Gospel we will see Peter “say to him, ‘See, we have left everything and followed you” [10:28].

2. *But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! (33a)*. Jesus is shown as doing this for the sake of the disciples. A strong response was needed to Peter’s strong delusion. Matthew has Jesus calling Peter a “hindrance” [16:23] at this point. The Jews wanted an earthly power to counteract Roman power, so really the devil’s own temptation to Jesus was the extreme version of the same thing: “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me” [Mat. 4:8-9]. So this was not hyperbole; Peter’s words represented the devil’s program of distraction.

3. *For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (33b)*. There is that big little word “For” again. Jesus is rooting this hindering doctrine of demons in siding with the things of men over the things of God. It is a battle of worldviews and Peter was clearly not transformed to a basically Christian worldview yet. To be the Christ was not to be anointed for an earthly political revolution (although the truth of this King would bring about those too); to be the Christ was to be anointed for a very specific, scandalous work.

APPLICATION

To the Gospel We Preach – When we share the good news of Jesus with sinners, we are after cultivating a faith that was better than the demons' confession! And that will mean tying the person of Christ to the work of Christ. Answering a question right is not the righteousness that God requires. Trivia and Gospel are not the same things. The demons answered right and Peter answered right. For Peter it was the beginning of eternal life; for the demons it was their sentence to eternal doom. Are we telling people that the Christ must have suffered and died for you, or else!

To the Gospel We Believe – Now what does it mean that Jesus really did suffer and die for sinners and on the third day rise? It means that for those who will trust Him for it, the death we earned by sinning was placed on Him instead and the life He lives by rising from the grave has awakened us to live at peace and in inconceivable joy with God forever.