

Set Your Mind on Divine Things March 03, 2024

Mark 8:31-33

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. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 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" (NRSV).

Jesus teaches the very important lesson about how he has to give himself as a sacrifice for sin. It is he, the Messiah, the Son of God that has to do this. He gives a stinging rebuke to Peter for being under the influence of Satan. However, without the grace that comes to us from the sacrificial death of Jesus we are all under the influence Satan. Most people agree with the statement "God works in mysterious ways." Well, I personally disagree with the term. God's ways just seem mysterious to us because we see God from the realm of human understanding. As such, we tend to believe that God should operate on our terms. Therefore, when God's plans don't align with our own plans, we tend to think that God works in mysterious ways.

Imagine you are one of the disciples. A lot has happened since you were recruited as a disciple. You have witnessed great crowds flocking to Jesus. You have seen many miracles, heard magnificent teaching, and witnessed the masterful way he handles the many challenges to his mission. You were with him every step of the way as he dodged his opposition with a preaching tour outside of Galilee. You are amazed at his compassion for a crowd that had nothing to eat. You know of his wisdom from the times when the Pharisees try to trap him and he beats them every time. And when he asks "Who do people say that I am?" a colleague answers "You are the Messiah."

Now that the disciples know his Messianic identity, Jesus can now teach them what he has to do because he is the Son of God. This is the first of three passion predictions. It is a repeated lesson due to its strong significance. Each lesson is followed by the relevance of discipleship because he needs the disciples to carry out his legacy. Only he can go to the cross of Calvary for the sake of humanity due to his identity. Jesus knows the fate of the prophets. He knew that he would face a similar fate and he accepted that fate. Jesus foresees his suffering and resurrection. He realizes the dangers that lie ahead. It is a hard lesson that deals with one of the mysterious ways of God. The divine rule is that sacrifice and suffering is not reserved for humans alone, it is a shared experience. This is great love like a mother that has a baby that is suffering and she prays to God to let her take on the suffering instead. The Lord's role is one of love that is so great that it is willing to take on our suffering. It is because of God's love for us that he has suffer, be rejected, killed, and rise again.

Peter can't handle the concept of the Messiah suffering and tries to correct Jesus. Peter's problem is one of attitude. He is thinking Jesus is better than this human problem. The suffering is willed by God. It is God's way. Suffering is to be a shared experience and sacrificial death is necessary for salvation. Peter misunderstands and attempts to turn Jesus away from the will of God. "Get behind me, Satan!" Seems like a harsh rebuke from Jesus. I am sure Peter's feelings are hurt but the problem is the ongoing struggle of humanity. Human beings question God's ways. The closest followers of Jesus haven't

gotten it yet. They do not understand what Jesus is all about. They just now are beginning to realize who he is. So, Peter denies the will of God and the chosen way of God. Jesus knows what the disciples are thinking. He knows the common beliefs of the people are also in the disciples. The people expect the Messiah to be the long awaited king of glory ushering in the eternal Kingdom of God. The Son of God claims victory through love and peace and the role of suffering servant. There is no alternative. There is no plan B. Jesus has to do this. Jesus speaks openly and clearly. There is no parable or hidden message. He is who he is. He has to suffer, die, and rise. The disciples are on a learning curve and it will take some time for Peter to get it.

Jesus uses strong language. This is serious. The devil desires for your mind to be fixated on other things. Jesus is not condemning Peter. We are all guilty of setting our minds on our own stuff rather than the things of God. We have to trust ourselves to the Lord's wisdom and commit ourselves to trust, believe, and obey. Peter is shocked by the news that great suffering must come to the person he just recently identified as the Messiah. Due to overwhelming emotions the part about the resurrection probably didn't register at this time. Peter does not fully understand the most important thing about Jesus. It is because he is the Son of God and because it is God's plan of redemption that he must suffer and die. No one can fully understand the roll of the life and death of Jesus until after he faces the cross.

Jesus teaches the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matthew 7:1). Even though it is God's truth and God's standard, the majority of humanity does not follow the will of God. We must open our eyes and ask the Lord to open our hearts. We must embrace Lord's truth, will, and way. The beauty of God's love is that it is so pure and sincere that the Lord is willing to take on the role of a suffering servant for all of us. Jesus is a man of sorrows; bloodied and bettered he carried the cross. He carried the cross. Not his cross but the cross. He carried your cross and my cross. While the crowd jeered he carried the cross. He was crucified on top of a hill with only a few of his closest loved ones present. We experience the death and resurrection of Jesus when he comes into our lives and transforms us.