

Is Your View of The Cross Worldly or Godly

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Bible Text: Mark 8:31-33

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Mark chapter eight. We will begin reading from the 31st verse up to chapter nine and verses one.

[Jesus] then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter.

"Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."¹

Last week, rather the week before, since last week it was, we had dear friends. We had Portuguese and [?] do the preaching and so on. There were a lot of things happening last week. But the week before we commenced a series of messages on the theme of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when I began I mentioned the fact that every religion and every great movement in history has had its symbol. We have had Communism with its sickle on the one hand and a hammer on the other. We have also had Islam with its

¹ Mark 8:31—9:1.

crescent or a moon that is just rising and so on and so forth. Hitler and his Nazi regime also had their swastika, a kind of cross that had every side broken in one direction and so on and so forth.

The strange thing about Christianity is not so much that it also has a symbol in the form of a cross, but it is the choice of this symbol because the cross stands for something extremely negative. It was the worst form of punishment that had ever been invented by human ingenuity and cruelty. The cross was a place you were hanged to dry, as it were, the way you put clothes on the line. But it was extremely painful because you were nailed to it and you were left bleeding to death in excruciating pain. You were mocked and laughed at. Life, as it was drained out of you in drops as the sun rose, reached its zenith in terms of the heat that it brings on your body right across to the end of the day. It is not a picture that you want to use as a symbol of a religion that boasts of being a religion of love.

And so the obvious question becomes: How can a religion of love take the picture of the worst form of cruelty and say, “This is our symbol for the whole of history”?

That is what we began to deal with. And in the last message we looked at the time when Jesus was on the cross and the people were saying, “Come down from the cross and we will believe in you.” And [?] humanly speaking that is the best thing that Jesus would have done because that is what super heroes are made of. Just when you think that they have been vanquished, everything turns around. They beat up the villains and everybody sings their praises from that point onwards.

Why didn't Jesus do that? This was a chance of a lifetime, so to speak.

But I trust that we answered that question properly, that the cross was not about human beings primarily. It was about God. It was about satisfying the wrath of God against humanity and if Jesus had not dealt with the wrath of God. If God's anger against sin had not been emptied, as it were, upon his own Son, then we, even though we turn from our sins and cry to him for mercy, would still be under his judgment, because God is a just God. His laws that have been broken, he must defend his law. Where there is the breaking of his laws there must be the penalty to be fixed.

Therefore, on the cross Jesus was taking our place. He was dying our death. He was suffering our hell in our place so that God could deal with us graciously.

And so as much as the people may have said to him, “Come down,” he did not come down. He remained there until he could say, “It is finished.”² And he died.

This morning I have taken us to yet another story. This is a little earlier than the cross. And in this passage we see the Lord Jesus Christ as he was getting closer to his arrest, speaking quite regularly about the suffering that he was to undergo. But we are told in

² John 19:30.

this verse, 31, that, “ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things.”³

And it was not the only time that he did so. Over and over again Jesus would speak that the time was drawing near and this is what he was going to suffer.

However, what I want us to notice from this passage is a contrast between our human view of the cross and God’s view. And I want us to really meditate upon this so that we can finally ask ourselves the question. What is my view? Because these two views are not the same. They are in totally different directions, extreme ends, so to speak. And yet if we are going to be true Christians, if we are going to be healthy Christians, truly godly Christians we must have the view of the cross that God himself has and not what is [?] in the world round about us.

What then do we see from this passage of Scripture? I think, first of all, we need to realize that the cross of Christ was not merely a miscarriage of justice. It wasn’t simply the fact that a few bad people took advantage of a porous judicial system in order to bring an innocent human being to an early grave. There is something of that. We cannot run away from it. But that is not the primary cause of the cross of Jesus Christ. Rather, the cross is the plan of God. God deliberately planned, long before Jesus came onto planet earth, that he was going to die that excruciating death that he died on the cross of Christ.

That is really what Jesus meant here when he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.”⁴ That must, must, must is not so much to do with the power of the Roman government in order to bring him to the cross while he is kicking and screaming. No. It has to do with what God himself had planned, that which was the will of God.

If you will turn with me, quickly to one or two passages you will notice how true this is. I want one passage from the Old Testament, another from the gospels and finally one from the book of Acts.

Isaiah chapter 53. In this chapter you have a graphic picture of the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, some of the things you read in this passage are hidden from view even by the gospel writers.

Look with me quickly at chapter 52 and verse 13 where this passage begins from.

The Bible says this:

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him— his

³ Mark 8:31.

⁴ Ibid.

appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness...⁵

In other words, what happened when Jesus was made to suffer and finally be put on the cross is that they actually in a very cruel way disfigured him through the beating that he underwent. They so disfigured him that you could not compare him to any other human being. That is how bad it was.

Well, we are told a few other things. For instance in chapter 53 verse three we are told that:

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”⁶

We are told in verse five that:

“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”⁷

Verse seven.

“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”⁸

We are told that:

“By oppression and judgment he was taken away... he was cut off from the land of the living.”⁹

And so on and so forth.

My interest is in verse 10. Verse 10 says:

“Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer.”¹⁰

It was not an accident that he went through all these difficulties. God deliberately willed it. God deliberately planned that Jesus was going to be crushed, that Jesus was going to suffer this way.

⁵ Isaiah 52:13-14.

⁶ Isaiah 53:3.

⁷ Isaiah 53:5.

⁸ Isaiah 53:7.

⁹ Isaiah 53:8.

¹⁰ Isaiah 53:10.

Look also at Luke 24, the very last chapter of Luke and just before the very end of that chapter, Luke 24 and verse 44.

If you are there, the Bible says:

“He,” referring to Jesus, “said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’”¹¹

In other words, in the entire Old Testament, everything that was prophesied about me needed to happen.

And what is that?

Verse 45.

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day."¹²

The Messiah would suffer. The anointed one would suffer. That is what is written in all the Scriptures, in the law of Moses, in the prophets and in the Psalms that Jesus the coming Messiah was to undergo extreme suffering pointing to the cross.

Finally, Acts and chapter four. This is a prayer of the early Church. Acts four and verse 24.

When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.’"

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.¹³

You had already decided that this is going to happen. So when they were planning, conspiring, flaunting, coming up with this devilish plan that it was simply fulfilling what you yourself had willed. It was not merely a miscarriage of justice. It was not merely the hatred of human beings. God himself had planned every detail of what took place as

¹¹ Luke 24:44.

¹² Luke 24:45-46.

¹³ Acts 4:24-28.

Jesus suffered, as he was rejected and as he was finally killed. All those details were in the plan of God. It was all written about the Lord Jesus Christ and consequently it had to be fulfilled.

That is what Jesus meant when he said in our text in Mark and chapter eight:

“That the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed.”¹⁴

Brethren, it wasn't easy for Jesus. There was a time when he paused and looked at his disciples and said, “My soul is in anguish even to the point of death. Shall I pray that God may rescue me from this hour?” And he said, “No, for this is why I came.”

Jesus was not going whistling to the cross. No, it was a dark shadow that was wavering over his soul. In fact, the Bible tells us that before his arrest he took three of his disciples, went on to a little place called Gethsemane and in that garden he fell down on a rock and pleaded with the Father, “If it is your will, let this cup pass away from me.”

The Bible tells us that he pleaded so much that his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground. The anguish that he was to undergo, the torment that he was to undergo, the agony that he was to undergo overwhelmed him. And Jesus said, “It must happen. It has to happen. It is good [?]. I have to go through it.”

In fact, the Bible tells us that when he was pleading in the garden God did not change his mind. Instead he sent an angel to come and strengthen him. It had to happen.

When you think about the cross, do you realize this? That it was God's plan. It was not an accident. It wasn't just a fruit of the malice and jealousy of human beings, but that God had determined that at the center of human history he was going to send his Son into the world to die.

But, see, the problem with the view that the cross was merely a miscarriage of justice is that it leaves you with a negative attitude towards the cross, a negative reaction towards it. And that was the problem with Peter in this part of the Scripture.

Let's get back to Mark eight and notice how Peter reacted when Jesus revealed to him that he was going to suffer.

The Bible tells us in verse 32:

“He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Mark 8:31.

¹⁵ Mark 8:32.

It is very clear that Peter was a very intense man. Peter responded according to his gut feeling over situations. He didn't sort of sit down and weigh the situation and imagine all kinds of things. No, no, no, no. Immediately he felt something. He spoke his mind.

And here upon Jesus written about his soon coming suffering, rejection and final death Peter said, "No way." And so he dragged the Lord Jesus Christ into a corner and I can well imagine with his finger in Jesus' face saying, "Stop talking about this, ok? Certain things will happen. I don't want to hear this kind of talk again."

Imagine a human being that is rebuking the Son of God.

But before we throw any stones at Peter, let's look at our own selves. How do we respond to situations that speak about a loss, a potential loss that is coming our way? How do we think about it? How do we think about the person who says to you, maybe when you are very sick and on your bed in the hospital and there may be other people just prayed for you and then they have gone. And then he says to you, "Have you thought about the possibility that maybe it is God's will that you die tonight?"

I am certain the immediate reaction is like, "Get [?] me. [?] in you body. Get [?] from here [?]."

You don't want to think about such possibilities. The potential loss of reputation, potential loss of money, potential loss of employment, potential loss of friendship, potential loss of a spouse, potential loss of life is the kind of thing you don't want a person to talk about. You don't to hear it, not even to think about it.

That is exactly the way it was with Peter here. For Peter this meant a loss, a very, very real loss.

And it is not just outside the Church. It is also within.

I was [?] that the people who discourage Christians from sacrificing are Christians, fellow Christians. [?] too seriously here. Come back [?] God really, really means. And they are willing to change the meaning of Scripture in order to just maintain our comfort zone. [?]

You said to a fellow Christian, "No."

And when I was praying this morning I heard as if God was saying I must go as a missionary to Baghdad or Afghanistan.

And you see how people's [?] you need to be careful. You need to be careful. I think we will pray about it, right?

And so it is all in religious garb which is saying, "What are you talking about? Are you out of your mind?"

But, of course, if you say as a missionary to Washington, ah, you know, I have been thinking the same, too.

You see, we shouldn't be quick to throw stones at Peter. It is a worldly mindset which we all have. Somehow the cross speaks about loss. Yes, Jesus [?], "I will die." He said, "I will suffer. I will be rejected and finally I will be killed."

Let's not be too quick to throw stones at Peter. If we were in Peter's shoes without the biblical understanding of the cross, without our eyes being opened by the Holy Spirit, we, too, would have stood there to rebuke the Lord Jesus Christ, because it is a worldly mind that fails to see that what we are dealing with here is the only way to rescue the human race, the only way was to pay the price for their sake.

So if yours is just a human view, you will never love the cross of Christ, never.

Instead, you would despise it. [?] saying, "Yeah, it doesn't make sense to me that our spiritual forefathers should have taken the cross and made it the chief emblem of the Christian faith. It doesn't make sense to me. It doesn't make sense to me that they should look at the day that Jesus was crucified that Friday and call it Good Friday. I mean, it must be a bad Friday, not a good one."

And, therefore, you end up glorying in a Christianity that is devoid of the cross. Jesus warned Peter many times against this and, indeed, his disciples and, indeed, the rest of his disciples and, indeed, the rest of the crowd.

Listen to verse 34 downwards.

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."¹⁶

That is the Christian faith.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.¹⁷

The point of the Lord just is pretty simple. True Christianity involves a willingness to suffer, a willingness to be rejected, a willingness to even die. And just as saying that is not just true about me who died for your sins, but it is the same about those of you who are to become my followers, too.

¹⁶ Mark 8:34.

¹⁷ Mark 8:35-38.

If you are going to take on yourself a religion that puts on silver slippers, just know it is taking you to hell. If your Christianity does not cost you, throw it away. It is a lie.

Jesus died in our place, yes, to save us from the wrath of God, but who says for us we are going to go into heaven on the praises of men? Brothers and sisters in Christ, in their hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands before us have sailed to heaven on bloody seas. They paid the dear price to get there. And when our attitude becomes one of no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, we shouldn't pay the price, no, no, no, no, no, no, we shouldn't suffer, no, no, no, why should we be suffering?

Therefore the big question mark on whether you are a true Christian at all, I repeat. If your Christianity does not cost you, throw it away.

Brethren, why is it that when we enter the court system fewer Christians go for evangelism [?]. I will tell you why. It is because [?].

Is that a price that the Christian should fail to pay, a Christian who claims to follow a Savior who wasn't only willing to go out in the cold season, but to die on the cross and then we say, no, no, no, no, no, no. It is cold now. And we keep our way from the livers of the gospel. Jesus is telling us here that it is those who are willing to pay the price for me and for the gospel who will truly [?].

I want to repeat. Let's beware of that Christianity that keeps us in our comfort zone. Throw it away. It won't get you to heaven. It is a lie. You have in your hands something that ultimately will destroy you.

This is an acid test for spirituality. And God feels so strongly about it that when Peter rebuked Jesus, Jesus rebuked him back.

Let us quickly read that together. Verse 33.

“ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ he said. ‘You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’”¹⁸

Imagine the situation. Jesus was with the disciples, telling them about what was going to happen and Peter [?] come here for a moment. They went into some corner and he began to rebuke him.

Peter, Jesus where he was turned and looked at where he left his disciples and he turned back and rebuked Peter.

What do you think happened when he turned and looked at his disciples and turned back and rebuked Peter?

¹⁸ Mark 8:33.

Well, in turning to look at the disciples, his mind was refreshed again that these are the ones I came to die for. I love them. I want them to be with me in glory. It is in obedience to the Father that I have come, that I might rescue these souls to be with me.

But what is [?] even to me is chief worldly politics of selfish preservation and, consequently, he turns and rebukes Peter. And, oh, what strong language he used. You would have thought he was going to say, “Get behind me, Peter.”

Nay. He said, “Get behind me, Satan.”

Jesus saw in all this worldly thinking, sinful thinking, devilish thinking. That is what he saw in all this. It was certainly the evil one who inspired such thoughts that our self preservation must be higher than obedience to God and the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

It is devilish thinking that inspires such affections towards ourselves that we are willing to so preserve ourselves at the expense of the salvation of souls, the glory of God.

Jesus was passionate about it. He said, “You mind the things of this [?], the things of men rather than the things of God.”

And that phrase, “you mind these things,” has to do with an attachment to something, a treasuring of something and he is saying the things you treasure, the things you are attached to are not the things of God, but the things of this world.

Brethren, the cross is at the very center of God’s plan.

All you need to do is to read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and you can’t miss it. When each writer begins the narrative is galloping. You go from Jesus’ birth. The next sentence or two you have already reached... he is 12 years old with his parents visiting the temple.

The next verse or two he is being baptized by John the Baptist. He is already 30 years old. In the first few chapters he has galloped through 30 years. But as we are getting close to the cross each writer slows down from galloping across decades or years. It slows down to months, slows down to days, slows down to hours, slows down to minutes.

The narrative with respect to the cross literally slows down to seconds. Why? It is because we have now arrived at the real story and that which really [?] us to God, the cross of Christ, the death of Christ, the suffering of Christ, the blood of Christ.

And when you get Christians who play fast and loose with the cross and they move on to everything else, that is [?] spiritual sickness. We are definitely being like those that God inspired to give us the gospels. The cross is at its center and anyone who is truly spiritually minded will not want to run away from the cross. He knows that the way to

that crowning glory is the way of the cross. It is through the cross that I get saved. It is by the cross that I lead my Christian life.

So what is your view of the cross? I want you to notice this. If you have got your hymn book, turn to the table of contents and you can easily see it. When you come to God's Son and you come to his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, his exhortation, his priesthood and even his Second Coming, where do you have most of the hymns? Come on. I know you don't normally give me audible answers from the pew, but there must be a quite a few accountants in here who can add and subtract figures. Come on. Where do you have the most hymns? Come on. I am beginning to hear.

I am talking about God this time. I am hearing the right answer here. Under God the Son. His birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, his priesthood, his Second Coming. Where do you have the most hymns?

Thank you very much. I am beginning to hear it. His death. That is biblical. It is not an accident. It is because God's children when they are spiritually healthy spend most of the time at the foot of the cross. [?] They don't despise it. They know that therein lies the centrality of salvation.

I wonder whether that is true of you as well. And perhaps we announce the fact that we are preaching a series of sermons on the cross of Christ. Does this news come to you with excitement? Or did it come to you with a note of flatness? The cross? Is that [?].

No. We want to hear an empowerment sermon about how we can get a lot of money.

I am asking. Beware of a crossless Christianity. It is the backdoor into hell. Throw it away. The cross of Christ is the way to the crown. May God truly rebuke you today if yours is a Christianity that plays hide and seek with the cross. May God enable you today to realize that if that has been your view, you are on the devil's side and you need to hear the rebuke, "Get behind me, Satan." Your desires are wrong. They are worldly. They are not God centered. And it may be that you are just a complete stranger to God's salvation.

And if I were you, I would spend the afternoon today at the foot of the cross gazing at the cross until its light shines brightly into your soul, until the cross of Christ. Becomes your all, the death of Christ, the blood of Christ, becomes your peace, the basis of your acceptance with God, the model, the organizing principle for all life decisions to the dying day. Refuse to rise to your feet until you can say, "Christ crucified, it is to you I come and it is with you I want to live the rest of my life."

And therefore whenever you share the gospel, it is not simply about a Jesus giving good life, but it is about Christ and him crucified, because the cross has begun to mean everything to you.

I ask, again. What is your view? You know it yourself. It is in your heart. It is in your attitude. Is it the worldly view or is it the godly view? Settle that matter quickly and may

you soon find that it is the godly view. But put it to the test in real reality in the way you are living, in the way you are thinking, in the things you love to sing about. Put it to real realistic tests. Don't pretend. [?] pretending God finally says to you, "In all your decisions it was clear, self love is what motivated you."

You would have done exactly the same thing that Peter did if you were in his shoes. To love your life is to lose it. Be warned. Amen.