

Mark 8: 31-34 and Matthew 16: 24; “Jesus’ Rebuke to Peter and to Us”, Sermon #
51 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered
by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 11th, 2009,
in the Morning Worship Service.

If we read the gospels carefully we find that the Apostle Peter was a man who believed in saying what he thought, immediately, in any given situation that he was in. You find him doing this over and over again in relation to the Lord Jesus. In the case that we are studying this morning, this was not a good thing, because it brought a very severe rebuke to him from the lips of His Lord. What started out as Peter's rebuking his Lord, ended up in our Lord's rebuking him. This way that Peter was looking at things; the way that he was viewing our Lord's purpose to come into the World to suffer and to die, so that men could be saved and be brought into His kingdom; this Peter did not understand. It was something that the Lord Jesus knew required immediate correction, or it might spread to all the other disciples. Peter's zeal in this case was for the wrong thing. He was zealous for, and he was setting his mind upon, the "things of man" our text says. Peter was zealous for his Lord's earthly welfare, rather than for His fulfilling the purpose of God. Peter was a man who had often shown himself to be righteously enthusiastic and zealous for the cause of the Lord Jesus, and he had often been right out in front; yes, even ahead of the other disciples if he could, in demonstrating his love for His Lord. And we can say that, because he was that way, we as Christ's disciples have been taught many things about how we should view the Christian life.

Peter's good statements and declarations as well as his presumptuous ones, are laid out for us to see in a number of places in the gospels. In the passage just before this one, it was Peter who had been the one to immediately and plainly state that Jesus was the Christ. And Jesus rewarded Peter's Confession by saying to him that He would build upon it. He would give to him and to the other Apostles the keys of the kingdom, and the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church. Oh, that there were more like Peter in this regard, in the church today; people who come out and confess Christ boldly. Oh that there were more like Peter who want everything that they can get in relation to Christ; and who will do everything that they can to promote His glory. And yet, we find, that even men who are zealous, thoughtful, and loving in a human way in relation to Christ may need to be rebuked if their perspective on how to live the Christian life becomes "the things of men", rather than the "things of God". For it is this very perspective that makes men spiritually weak as Christians; weak in their discernment, and weak in the practice of their Christian religion. It is this very perspective that finally led Peter to deny His Lord at the very time that He needed Peter to be strong; at the time when Jesus was going to the cross.

Peter could not be strong because he was man centered; he was self-centered; and he was tied in his thinking to this earthly life. Jesus knew that this was the outcome of Peter's not understanding his need of self-denial; his not understanding the mission that Jesus was on; to save him; that his Lord Jesus must suffer and give His life so that His heavenly and spiritual kingdom could be set up among men, and they then could be saved from their sins. Jesus knew that He, the Lord of Glory, would have to not only rebuke Peter, but that He would have to die for Peter. We need to see the context here. We need to remember that this rebuke was given to Peter right on the heels of his confession of Jesus to be the Christ. A Christian man who may be right at one critical moment may be wrong the next. Sometimes the things that a person thinks that they know about Christ and His kingdom and themselves in relation to it, are not at all correct. What is so impressive about our Lord's love of Peter is that even though He knew that He would have to rebuke Peter with strong words here; that He still patiently bore with Peter, and bought Peter "along with Him", so to speak; all the way to the cross. He continued to teach Peter by His words and His example, even though Peter had to learn the hard way; by his failure.

Even in his failure, Jesus had something to teach Peter because He was one of God's chosen ones. Jesus lived the righteous life of self denial and taught Peter what it meant to pick up His cross. He died for Peter even though Peter's sinfully weak perspective changed very little during the whole time of our Lord's earthly ministry. Let us remember this, because this is often the way that it is for us as Christians. We do not think that we need the Lord to rebuke us. Indeed, if He were standing before us now, without His grace working in our heart and mind, we might fall into this same sinful perspective as Peter had that day. Perhaps we are holding this perspective and trying to justify it. So what I want to do in preaching this sermon, is to have us think about this rebuke in relation to ourselves this morning, and receive it to ourselves as though we were Peter. For we may indeed be trying to justify trying to live our life without either Jesus or ourselves having to pick up a cross. I want us to look, first of all, at Jesus' teaching of His sufferings as the basis for rebuke. I want to look secondly at Jesus' rebuke to Peter, of His stating that Peter had fallen into Satan's hands. And then, thirdly, I want to look at Jesus' rebuke of Peter as teaching him the true meaning of discipleship.

1st - Let's look at Jesus' teaching of His sufferings as the basis for rebuke. (Verse 31 and 32a)

“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” “He spoke this word openly.” The basis for the rebuke to Jesus which would come from Peter's lips, and the basis of the rebuke to Peter which would come from Jesus' lips was this one statement that the Lord Jesus would have to suffer and die. It is a truth which human nature which is fallen, or which does not understand it, does not want to hear. But Jesus speaks it openly and plainly for all the disciples to hear. Peter whispered his rebuke to Jesus, taking him privately aside. Jesus will make no secret of His rebuke to Peter; He would speak it loudly. He would speak most plainly and definitely of the sufferings which were most certainly going to come to Him. He says that they “must be”. As Peter hears this statement of Jesus he thinks that he must protect the Lord Jesus from Himself. He must protect His dear Lord from doing something that He does not need to do; something which, if He would be careful about what He said to the religious rulers of Israel; He could avoid having to suffer in the way that He described. But Jesus says that He must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed. This teaching of the Lord Jesus is a rebuke to all fallen and unbelieving men who think that they do not need Christ to suffer for them. And it is a rebuke to those Christians who think that they do not need to practice self-denial or pick up their own cross.

The truth about why Jesus had to suffer and bleed and die on the cross is a rebuke and it is an unpalatable truth to sinful men in general. It is a rebuke because most people do not think of their sin as that bad a thing, that either they themselves must die and perish forever for it; or that Jesus, the Lord of glory must be made to die, so that they do not perish forever. God has created them, they think, so that they are free to seek their own pleasure. They can live as they please and they do not like being told that they are sinful if they make up their own mind about the meaning of life or the way that they live their life, or how they will spend their time and their resources. God, they think, may or He may not exist. And if He does exist, they think, why should He require of them anything which they would not agree to; let alone perfect obedience to the laws that are written down in the Bible. Why would God give men laws that they should live by, and then expect of them that they should learn them and live by them and walk in them? This is not freedom, they think; this is bondage; serving the God who Christians tell them has revealed Himself in the Bible and has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

But this statement of Jesus' is a rebuke to that kind of thinking. If sin is of no consequence, then why should people die at all? But it was because the first man and first woman sinned in the beginning, in the garden of Eden, that all people die physically and why they are dead

spiritually from the time that they are born. It was because Adam and Eve chose for themselves what they wanted to do and they did not submit to God's word to them; that is the reason that they fell from their original freedom and their original righteousness. God had told Adam and Eve that they might eat freely from all the trees in the garden except one. And that one was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the day that they would eat of it; they would die. And being a free moral agent, Eve was deceived by the false and subtle reasoning of the Serpent Satan, into thinking that she would be wise like God if she did what God had explicitly commanded her not to do; eating of the fruit of that tree. And when she ate, she gave some also to her husband, and they both died spiritually, immediately. Because of this sin of eating, they would have been separated from God eternally, and would have been punished in hell forever, had it not been for God's promise to them. God came looking for them in their lost estate. It was He who called to them and spoke to them in mercy and in judgment. Yes, they would have to die physically, but they would not die eternally if they believed in His promise. In Genesis 3: 15 He promised them that He would one day crush the head of the serpent; He would one day defeat the schemes of the Devil to destroy God's creature man, so that he would die and perish forever. God would crush the serpent's head by the seed of the woman. The seed of the woman was Jesus Christ who was born of the virgin Mary. The way that Satan's head would be crushed and all of their sins forgiven would be for Jesus to go to the cross and die. He must die or they could not be saved. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission (no forgiveness or cleansing of sin). But a sinless sacrifice offered to God would propitiate; would remove God's wrath and satisfy His offended justice, and allow Him to be not only forgiving, but to be gracious in every sense of that word, to those who had formerly been children of wrath. This is why you who are careless of spiritual things must become concerned for your own soul. These issues will not go away after I am done preaching to you. Christ must needs have died, or you cannot be saved. If you say that you do not need Him, you are very wrong and it will most definitely be proved to you in time. You cannot pay the sin-debt which you owe to God. There is only One who can. If you have come to see yourself as a sinner who cannot save yourself, you need to understand that it is your sins that took the Lord Jesus to the cross. And there He died for you. Believe in Him and God will forgive you and you will be set free from sin's bondage and sin's blindness, and you will be free indeed.

But this teaching of the Lord Jesus is also a rebuke to the self-righteous; those who think that by their own good works and their own ceremonial works, that they can please God and merit eternal life. I hope that you will remember that it was the elders and chief priests and the scribes who insisted that the Lord Jesus be put to death on the cross. And what was the most wonderful display of love that the World has ever seen; the Lord Jesus willingly picking up His cross and going to the cross and suffering and bleeding and dying upon it, for all the sins of all of God's Elect, of all God's dear people, must also be seen as the most heinous crime in all of human history. It is the crime of those who were self-righteous; it is a perfect picture of those who would justify themselves in the sight of God. They must kill Jesus as He came forth as a Savior and the Lord of all men. They did this because they were self-righteous and self-justifying. The leaders of Jewish people put to death their own Messiah, the One who had been promised to them in the Scriptures would be their prophet, priest, and king. When He came, they rejected Him and called for His death and delivered Him over to Pilate the Roman governor.

If you turn to Matthew 27: 15 you will see how they thought of the Lord Jesus. "Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner who they wished." "And at that time they had notorious prisoner called Barabbas." "Therefore, when they gathered together, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release to you?' "Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" "For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy." "While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him saying, 'Have nothing to do with that just

Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him.” (Interesting wording; is it not?) “I have suffered many things....” Christ says that He must go up to Jerusalem and “suffer many things” at the hands of the chief priests, etc.? Verse 20 – “But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.” “The governor answered and said to them, ‘Which of the two do you want me to release to you?’” “They said, ‘Barabbas!’” “Pilate said to them, ‘What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?’” “They all said to him, ‘Let Him be crucified!’” “Then the governor said, ‘Why, what evil has He done?’” “But they cried out all the more, saying, ‘Let Him be crucified!’” “When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just Person.” “You see to it.” “And all the people answered and said, ‘His blood be on us and on our children.’”

They received to themselves the guilt of this crime and would even pass it down to their own children. They are representative of all those self-righteous, self-justifying persons who think that they do not need the Lord Jesus to be saved. They are good enough because of their religious works and their high view of their own righteousness and their own supposed merits in the sight of God. How utterly sinful they were in what they did with the Lord Jesus. And yet it is what thousands upon thousands do in their hearts every day when they think that they are good enough, as they are, to merit eternal life. If they knew their own hearts well; they would see that they were full of sin. What can be more presumptuous than those people who believe that God shall accept their works, no matter how good they are, humanly speaking, without their being washed in the blood of Christ? “All of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags,” it says in Isaiah 64: 6 The self-righteous man would make himself out to be His own Judge, his own Maker, and his own Savior when God has appointed Christ to be the only Savior. See to it, my friends, that you renounce all your self-righteousness when you come to Christ. Believe in Him; because if you do, even though your sins are like Barabbas, you will go free, for Christ was seen as the sinner by God when He went to the cross and was punished in your place with the punishment that you deserve. Use Christ's blood in the right way and wash yourself from your sins, and do not bring down an imprecation of the wrath of God upon yourself. Receive the rebuke of Christ's teaching and be saved.

Now Secondly - I want us to look at Jesus' rebuke to Peter, of His stating that Peter had fallen into Satan's hands.

(Verse 32b and 33 of Mark 8, and verses 22 and 23 of Matthew 16)

Mark's gospel says, “Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.” “But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, ‘Get behind Me, Satan!’” “For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” Matthew's gospel gives us the very words of Peter's rebuke to Jesus. It says, “Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’” And it was then that Jesus told him to “get behind Him”, and addressed him as Satan. It would be good if we would ask ourselves how it could be possible that the Lord Jesus could turn to one of His most beloved of disciples and call him Satan instead of Peter. It was not as though Jesus did not love Peter; He did. It is not as though Peter was Satan. It was that Peter had taken the position which Satan would have approved of and promoted if he were standing right there before Jesus. If Satan were standing there he would have suggested that there was some other way to save sinners and to bring them into the Kingdom of heaven and God, than to suffer and die on the cross. He would say, “Spare yourself; there is another way.” The Devil is always promoting a different way of our accomplishing our personal goals than by doing it in the way that God would have us to do it. Satan would always have men believe the lie that there is an easier way obtain our highest goal of glorifying God, than self-denial and the cross. That way is to pay homage to his lying wisdom; his false reasoning.

You can see this if you will turn with me to Luke chapter 4, verse 5. Here we find the Devil himself trying to suggest this alternative to Jesus' going to the cross. "Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time." "And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish." "Therefore, if you will worship before me, all will be Yours." "And Jesus said to him, 'Get behind Me, Satan!" "For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve." You see that Satan's whole purpose with the Lord Jesus Christ in both of these instances was the same; to try to get the Lord Jesus to believe that there was an easier way than the cross. In Luke 4, during Christ's temptation in the wilderness, it was that Jesus should believe the lie that all the glory of all the kingdoms of this world was given to Satan and that he could bestow it upon whom he wished.

But what kind of glory could Satan give? A tinselly type of glory of the kingdoms of this world that were passing away? And besides, it is the prerogative of God alone to bestow true and lasting glory. The Lord Jesus knew that the kingdoms of this world and all their glory were passing away, but he who does the will of God abides forever. It was this doing God's will in every particular that Jesus was most zealous to do. And he would not be deterred from this by either the Devil or any man. "Get behind Me Satan" is the Lord Jesus' saying to him, "I do not want to consider anything that you have said to me as being either true or profitable." "I have set my mind and my heart on doing the will of God and learning obedience through my sufferings for the sake of righteousness." "This is the only way that salvation for fallen men can be purchased; when God is glorified, and His will is done, in every particular." "No compromise!" Get behind Me, for I will worship God only!

Let us remember brethren that Satan does not really have the authority to give you anything but what is false and a lie! All the glory of all the kingdoms of this World belongs to Jesus Christ because He purchased men from every tribe, tongue, people and language, with His precious blood! The blood of the Son of God is worth more than all the kingdoms of this world, and Jesus would not spare Himself in the withholding of it for a fallen angel's power or false promises. All that glitters is not gold. And not all that promises peace will bring lasting peace. So when Peter began to rebuke our Lord saying, "Far be it from You Lord; this shall not happen to You!", he was actually keeping Jesus from fulfilling the very purpose that He had come into the world for; the salvation of God's Elect people; the eternal salvation of untold millions and billions of people! That is why He said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!" "You are an offense to Me...." He was saying, "I must suffer Peter, and if I do not suffer, you and every other Elect person who has ever lived, can never be saved." "All will be lost forever; all will be punished forever for their sins; all will perish eternally in hell; all will never have God, nor any of the blessings of salvation and eternal life; if you are able to convince that I should not suffer." "But Peter, you will not convince Me; you are an offense to Me in this regard; acting and taking the part that Satan would take were he standing before Me." "Get behind Me Peter" and understand the way of the cross is the way to the crown. The way of the cross is the way to glory!

We need to receive the rebuke which Jesus gave to Peter today. How many times have we been deceived by Satan into thinking that obedience to the commandments of the Lord can be compromised so that we will never suffer for righteousness sake? How many times have we been deceived into thinking that it is possible to strive to have our portion of the glory of the kingdoms of this world by believing that Satan and sin can give us something that God won't? Oh do not be deceived, my beloved brethren! "Every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning!" (James 1: 16 and 17) Tell Satan by the power of the victorious Christ to "get behind you". You are going to do things God's way, in accordance with His word, and in terms of right words and right actions and good deeds, and not fall for the line that there is some better way or end than God Himself and Christ Himself!

My beloved brethren, if we believe the truth of Hebrews chapter 5 and verse 8, where it says, "though Jesus was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered, and having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him;" then how can we not see that in the process of our being made like Him that we also will have a cross to pick up; a cross to bear? And believe it or not, there will be joy in picking it up for the one who believes. How can this be, you say? It is because Jesus not only said that He was going to suffer and be rejected. He not only said that He would be crucified; but He also said that He would rise from the dead! Who or what then can separate us from this kind of love and this kind of power which is found in Jesus Christ and His grace? No one! And so receive the rebuke and tell Satan to leave; you will be doing the will of God.

Now 3rdly and finally - I want us to look at Jesus' rebuke of Peter as teaching him the true meaning of discipleship. (Verses 23 and 24 of Matthew 16, and Verses 33 and 34 of Mark 8)

The beginning of true discipleship and the meaning of true discipleship is found in this statement of the Lord Jesus on being "mindful of the things of God". Peter was not acting the part of a true disciple of the Lord Jesus, even though he was a true disciple. And so the Lord Jesus had to rebuke him. He had to turn to him and tell him that he was an offense to him because he was "not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men". Our Lord puts these things in opposition to each other for a reason. To mind the things of men is to pay attention to, and to live by the false reasoning of people around you that do not know God. They believe that they know a better way to live than suffering for the sake of righteousness and truth, and they will try to persuade you as a Christian disciple that there is an easier way. There is another way to glorify God some weak Christians might say, than self-denial and bearing a cross. But don't you believe it. Peter shows us here today that it is entirely possible that a true Christian and true disciple may also fall into this mindset if they are not careful.

If you are not mindful of the things of God; if you are mindful only of the things of men; their false philosophies and strategies, and their selfish and sinful way of doing things; then you cannot be making progress in being a disciple of Jesus Christ. You have the right way in Jesus Christ and in His blessed word. It may not seem to be the better way because there is suffering involved in it. But Jesus says this is the only way which will please God. Will you take it? This is why Jesus called all the disciples to Him over this issue. In verse 34 of Mark 8, it says, "When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, 'Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'" To be mindful of the things of God and to become a disciple of Christ means that you are agreeing to deny yourself and to take up your cross and come after Him.

Will you not remember that Jesus is the pattern for all that you will do in your obedience as a Christian? Jesus is the Way, the truth, and the Life. And Jesus is raised from the dead. He has all power and authority in heaven and earth. And you as a disciple of His are being asked to deny yourself and pick up your cross. He is laying the whole matter before you. He is not forcing you to be his disciple. He is asking you today, through this time of preaching. Will you come after Me? "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Do you now desire to follow Jesus? Oh then receive the rebuke that Jesus gave to Peter if you are not denying yourself. Believe that Jesus is true and right when he says that this way of self-denial is the right way, and be willing then by faith in Him, to suffer for it. The next time that I preach to you from this passage we will look at some of the lessons of denying oneself and picking up the cross.

