

Gospel of Mark: Disciples of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Verse 30, page 1013. They left that place and passed through Galilee.

Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise. But they did not understand what he meant, and were afraid to ask him about it. They came to Capernaum, where he was in the house. When he was in the house, he asked them, What are you arguing about on the road? But they kept quiet, because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the twelve and said, If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the servant of all. He took a little child and had him stand among them.

[1 : 04] Taking him in his arms, he said to them, Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me, but the one who sent me.

Teacher, said John, We saw a man driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.

Do not stop him, Jesus said. No one who does a miracle in my name can in the morning, in the next moment, say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.

I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward. And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.

[2 : 26] And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.

It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worms do not die and the fire is not quenched.

Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other.

Thanks very much, Maria.

Well, please keep your Bibles open at that section we've just read. We've just started a new series, which is looking at the second half of Mark's Gospel, which really is the last few months of his life while he was on earth and the journey that he takes with his disciples towards the cross.

[3 : 45] So we're going to be looking at that section that Maria just read. And before we do, we're going to pray. Hopefully you've got a piece of paper, maybe to take notes, or you can use the back of your news sheet there.

And if you have any questions or anything that you want to ask after, then please feel free to do that. So let's pray. Father, we thank you for this account about Jesus while he was here on earth, for the things that have been recorded.

And yet, even as we've just read them now, some of them sound quite strange to us. Some of it perhaps quite hard.

And so, Father, we need the help of your Holy Spirit to not only understand with our minds, but we need your Spirit so that it will change our hearts to show us what it is to be a disciple of Jesus.

So please help us right now. We come as disciples, people who want to learn from you. We want you to teach us through your word. So come, Spirit, teach us.

[5 : 20] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, before I start, has anybody got the flicker? I'll do it.

Thank you. Thank you very much. You're hired.

That's what every contestant longs to hear from Lord Sugar as they seek to become the winner of The Apprentice. What's on offer?

Well, a six-figured salary and the opportunity to partner with him in a multi-billion business. The way to win is simple.

You must be arrogant and stubborn with a ruthless desire to be successful. Stab your opponent in the back.

[6 : 20] Rather than serve people, you must use people. In Mark's gospel here, we are introduced to the apprentices of Jesus.

Verse 30. They left. That's Jesus and his disciples. They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were because he was teaching his disciples, known as the Twelve. They were to learn what it meant to be a disciple. That's what disciple means. They are a learner.

And Jesus is teaching them what it is to be a follower of Jesus. But in contrast to Lord Sugar, not sure who gave him that title, the one and only Lord Jesus Christ, offers his apprentices not success, but suffering.

Look at verse 31. He said to them, The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.

[7 : 43] They will kill him, and after three days he will rise. The Son of Man was a title for Jesus, a title of absolute power and supreme authority.

But this man of great power, the God-man, would be killed. You see, the death of Jesus is not just the means for becoming a disciple, but is also the model for living as a disciple.

That's why he's teaching about his death. It's not just the means for becoming a disciple, but his death is also the pattern, the shape of a disciple's life.

At this point in the account, Jesus is six months from his death, and the journey that is going to lead him to his death is a journey that we are called to live every single day.

It is nothing less than a life of humble service with a ruthless desire to remove any hint of self-centred living.

[9 : 03] Look at verse 32. But they didn't understand what he meant, and they were afraid to ask him about it. Who in their right mind wants to model their life on someone who's going to die a terrible death?

Do you? Surely there must be an easier way to go. No. This is a call to radical discipleship.

If we crave comfort and a nice, gentle lifestyle, if we long for popularity and acceptance, if we desire to be the ones who control our life, then please close your Bible right now.

Put it under your seat, close your eyes, and go to sleep. Because what follows is not for you if you want a gentle life.

After all, as we've just read in verse 31, Jesus doesn't want others to hear what it is that he teaches to his disciples. Because not everybody can handle it.

[10 : 27] So what does he teach? Well, first, being a disciple means serving the weak, not seeking to be great.

Verse 33, they came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, obviously, of one of the disciples, he asked them, what were you arguing about on the road?

But they kept quiet, red-faced, and embarrassed. Because on the way, they had argued about who was the greatest. So who do you think is the greatest in this church?

Go on. Who do you think? Well, we don't like to publicly talk about it, do we? That is embarrassing. But we can unconsciously practice it.

You see, we can be preoccupied with appearing great, that we simply forget to do great things.

Verse 35, sitting down, which in that culture, in that time, was actually a position of authority.

[11 : 43] So Jesus sits down, he's saying basically to his disciples, hang on a minute, you're talking about greatness? Well, listen to the one who knows what true greatness is all about.

He called the twelve and he said, if anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the servant of all. Did we get that quite right?

Did he say last? Did he say servant? How is that greatness? But yet, that's what Jesus came to do for us.

He was the one who was great, but became last, the lowest of the low. He was the one who became a servant, giving up of his rights and ultimately, giving of his life.

That's what greatness is. And Jesus now demonstrates to us what this will look like in practice. verse 36.

[12:55] He took a little child and had him stand among them. What's so great about that, you think? Well, children in that culture are not treated as they are in ours.

We have a special place for children in the Roman Greek culture. The father would decide if the child actually lived or died when it was born. If he thought they couldn't support the child for financial reasons, or if they thought the baby was going to be sick, they were left outside or abandoned. So children in this context were a good example of the lowest of all people and nobody. But look what Jesus does.

It's both shocking and surprising. He takes the little child, has them stand among them, but not only that, he takes him in his arms and he said to them, whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me.

Now this isn't about cute little kids. It's about all those regardless of age who are considered insignificant and less than everybody else.

[14:22] So through this very visual example, Jesus is saying to his disciples, look, if you want to not just appear great, but if you really want to do great things, then we need to begin to serve the weak and the insignificant, the nobodies within our community.

For us, it might mean inviting not the popular nice people to our home, but the outsider, the one that nobody really bothers with.

It might mean giving of our time. Not to those who are like us and might say thank you or give us something in return, but to those who are ostracized, those who struggle to fit in, those who can't give anything in return.

Isn't that what Jesus did for us? Jesus came into this world to serve weak, insignificant, nobodies like us.

He came to welcome sinful outsiders like us to welcome us in, to bring us in, to be part of his family. You see, a church family that does not welcome all people, regardless of their race or their particular social background or class or their religion, is a church of pseudo disciples, fake believers who want to appear great rather than do great things.

[16:11] So first, being a disciple means serving the weak and not seeking to be great. Second, he goes on, being a disciple means humility in ministry, not superiority in ministry.

Verse 38, Teacher, said John, well, we saw a man driving out demons in your name. But don't worry, we told him to stop because he wasn't one of us.

Literally, he wasn't following us. Now, how arrogant is that? John, it seems, is more concerned about his privileged position.

John wants status, not service. discipleship. But John is so far from true discipleship because the way of Jesus was marked by humility.

He didn't hold on to his position. He gave up his position for us. He humbled himself to the point of death on a cross so that we might become the privileged followers of Jesus.

[17:38] In fact, Jesus shows us the kind of humility that he looks for from his disciples. Verse 39, we can just picture it, John, do not stop him.

no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.

Can you not see it's not about superiority over people, but humility towards people. It's about being generous hearted to other believers, other disciples, even if they're not part of your little particular denominational group.

I think we can suffer with John's attitude, I know I can, wanting to hold on to my position, wanting to have status, thinking that the only possible way that God can work is through me, or that the only way God can work is through this church or through that particular denomination.

well, as disciples, we need to quickly understand that God's work is not confined to any one person or one church.

[19:00] If they are preaching Christ, or as it says in verse 40, whoever is for us, they can't be against us.

then we should be humble enough to accept them and welcome them. It seems that Jesus has a broader view of ministry than perhaps we do.

Jesus came in humility to minister to us. He didn't just dismiss us or ignore us, but he stretched out his arms on the cross to include us.

His ministry was broad enough to bring close to himself people like us who were against him. In humility he came.

Look at verse 41. Jesus says, I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

[20 : 12] Jesus is looking forward at this stage to a time when the disciples will actually be out on ministry themselves, no longer with Jesus. Jesus will have returned to heaven and they would be out on their own.

And he's saying, look, as you go about doing ministry, you're going to meet people and they're going to come to you and serve you, perhaps give you some water or some food. They're going to welcome you. And the people who do that, it's evidence that they too are disciples, that they too love Jesus.

So the question is, are we as generous and welcoming of God's people? People who perhaps come to this family of this church from other places, other Christians who've moved here?

Do we show that generosity of a welcome? Or do we kind of keep people at arm's length with a sense of superiority because, well, they don't really fit in and they don't do things our way, you know.

So being a disciple means humility in ministry, not superiority in ministry. Third, being a disciple means being ruthless with sin, not casual with sin.

[21 : 46] Verse 42, and if anyone causes one of these little ones, that is, any other disciple, a follower of Jesus, if anyone causes one of these disciples who believes in me to sin, it would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.

How serious he is, causing another disciple, another follower of Jesus to fall away from God or to turn away from God is serious.

Because what we say and how we live as a disciple really matters. Sin is not personal, it's not a private matter, it not only affects my life if I sin, but my sin affects the community of believers around me.

In fact, it is so serious that such a person will face the full weight of God's wrath. It will be like, as he says at the end of verse 42, being thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. Jesus took sin seriously. he came into the world to take our sin on himself. He faced the full weight of God's wrath around his neck for us.

[23 : 24] He died in our place on the cross. He took the blame for our sin so that we could live a different way, so that we could be ruthless with the sin that is in our lives.

let's read the verses of verse 43 to 48. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.

It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.

it is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.

It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell. If ever we were in doubt as to the seriousness of avoiding sin in our lives or not dealing with sin in our lives, this awakens us to the terrible and eternal consequences of being casual about sin.

[24 : 51] sin. I'm going to read that again. If ever we're in doubt as to the seriousness of avoiding or not dealing with sin in our lives, this must awaken us to the terrible and eternal consequences of just being casual.

sin. So as I read this, and maybe you're thinking, how come I still have my two hands and my two feet and my two eyes?

Have I never sinned? Well, you can be sure it's not because I never sin. I do. Too much.

Jesus' teaching about cutting and plucking is not to be taken literally. We're not to go and perform surgery on each other and cut each other's hands and feet and pull each other's eyes out.

But this means we are to take things seriously. He's using strong language deliberately to drive the point home. Whatever we do with our hands, wherever we happen to go with our feet, whatever we see with our eyes, if any part of our life causes us to sin, kill it, cut it out, deal with it before it kills you.

[26 : 28] Anything less is to ignore the reality of hell itself. God's love.

Johnny, you can't really mean this, can you? If Jesus didn't literally mean cut off your hands, then it's not too far to kind of go as far to say, well, he didn't literally mean hell.

Well, to underline that hell is real, Jesus quotes from Isaiah. Look at verse 48. The end of verse 47, he says, you'll be thrown into hell where?

And he quotes Isaiah where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. That quote is from the very last verse, you can look it up later if you wish, the very last verse in the book of Isaiah, which comes at the end of two long chapters of God's wonderful salvation, his promise of restoration and renewal and all that he's going to do, but at the very end it ends with this serious note of judgment.

The very last verse. Let me read it to you. Here's the full verse. They will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me.

[27 : 57] Their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched in other words, this is eternal suffering and they will be loathsome to all mankind.

It's a reality. And you know what? If it were not for the death of Jesus, we would all be facing hell.

Jesus came to be ruthless with sin because we could never do it. He came to be our sin. He took on all the wrong things that I've ever done and that you've ever done.

He endured the judgment that we deserve. He suffered the depths of hell for us so that we don't have to. He did it all for us so that we could actually live a different way so that we could fight the sin in our lives.

This is a sober reminder to all of us as disciples of Jesus. How we view sin and more importantly what we do with the sin that is still in our lives determines our eternal destiny.

[29 : 21] so being a disciple means being ruthless with sin and not casual with sin. I said it was hard and I think that's why Jesus took his disciples alone because it is difficult but yet there's joy in discipleship.

This is the radical nature of discipleship. This is what it means to follow Jesus and if we're in any doubt as to its difficulty look at verse 49 everyone will be salted with fire.

In other words he's saying the path of discipleship will mean a life of suffering. Serving the weak being humble towards others being ruthless with sin that's not a walk in the park that's really tough. but it's really good. It's really good. It's good for you. Look at verse 50 changing the metaphor Jesus says salt is good but if it loses its saltiness how can you make it salty again?

Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other. water. We don't use salt in the same way but again in the times that it was written salt will preserve and salt will purify food.

[31 : 02] So Jesus is saying the suffering and the path that we take as disciples it will preserve and purify you.

if there's no salt in the food it's going to rot and be mouldy and stink and go off. So without the salt of suffering we will never become the disciples and the people that God calls us to be.

so he says it's good. And thankfully Jesus took the ultimate suffering for us our sin death hell itself so that the path of suffering that we now walk as his disciples as we journey with him it will change us and transform us and make us to be more like Jesus.

in a contradiction to the world's standards suffering is good for us and we can be joyful in walking the path because one day suffering will end and suffering will have fulfilled its work within us because we will see Jesus and not only will we see Jesus but we will be like Jesus the ultimate and true disciple we will become like him in every way living with him for all eternity this is the joy in being a disciple is it hard absolutely is it worth it without a doubt are we hired are we an apprentice of the

Lord Jesus following him as his disciple let's pray father perhaps in some ways we're just like the disciples as they first heard those words of Jesus we find it hard to understand and we're even afraid to ask what all this means this is this is hard for us this is not easy for us so please would you give us a heart to accept your teaching and to follow in it trusting you that your way is perfect and good and the journey and the path that you call us to while it is hard it is good for us and it is your good way of changing us and transforming us to be more like Jesus so that as we go out into the world we reflect the beauty of

[34 : 23] Christ and we begin to serve others who are weak the nobodies and we begin to be humble in our ministry and we begin to see the sin that needs to be rooted out father be gentle with

us and continue your work in our lives as we seek to follow you and learn from you in Jesus name
we pray amen and we you you