

The King's Cross

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[0 : 00] Well, it's great to welcome you to St. John's and one or two new people, including Baby Larson. Great to have you in church, Baby Larson. Congratulations, Mum and Dad.

Well, now I wonder if you would open your Bible to Mark chapter 8, please, page 844. As you're doing that, I just mentioned last year at this time we had an Ebenezer service.

It was our first, and Ebenezer is an Old Testament word that means, until now the Lord has helped us. And each of us wrote down on a piece of paper something specific we were thankful to God for, something we were praying for for the year to come, and something that we wished to do for God. And I'll get you all to stand up now and say, what happened? No, I'm not going to do that. One of the great privileges of being a minister is you get to hear stories of what God's doing.

We thought this year we're going to have another Ebenezer Sunday in two weeks' time on the 27th, and we'll do some things we did before. Between now and then, there will be some young people from the youth group.

[1 : 14] You might have seen them at coffee milling around with video cameras. They are not spies. They want to ask you questions like, is there something you're thankful to God for?

Do you see God doing something in your life? And if you would like to, feel free for the encouragement of others to share a story or two. If you don't feel brave, if you feel shy, take someone with you.

And the limit is one hour. One hour interviews. So make use of that if you'd like. Well, now, today we come to the second half of Mark's Gospel.

This is a watershed, a great continental divide in the Gospel. And you remember we finished the first half on a very high note as Peter, leading the disciples, confesses Jesus to be the Christ. First person to do so. And we all breathe a big sigh of relief. And because it's taken eight chapters for Peter and the disciples to get there, we feel like we should throw a party. We should just stop and celebrate, balloons, give him a cigar, all that kind of thing.

[2 : 21] It doesn't happen, doesn't it? You just look down. You see in verse 29, Peter confesses him. Verse 31, instantly, as soon as they confess him, Jesus changes direction, changes what he's doing, and he begins to speak explicitly about two things which he binds together.

The first is his own suffering and death, and the second is what it means to be a disciple, a Christian, a follower. By the way, I don't know if you think of yourself as a disciple. That's a more common word in the Bible to describe someone who's a Christian.

And those two things are bound together in Jesus' mind. Can't have Jesus without disciples. Can't have disciples without Jesus. And what he says is very searching, and it creates a massive conflict between Jesus and the disciples.

And they try and talk some common sense into Jesus, all this talk about dying, something that we've been trying to do ever since. And despite the fact that he's talking about death and life and suffering, I hope you noticed in the passage that there's nothing gloomy or fatalistic or tragic about it.

The tone of it is just the opposite. It's quite hopeful, positive, purposeful. So I want to look with you, if you have your Bibles open, just to two paragraphs under two headings.

[3 : 46] And the first heading is, The Shocking Shape of Jesus' Life, and that's verses 31 to 33. And I just want you to notice that this comes first before he talks about what it is to be a disciple.

Jesus wants us to be in no doubt whatsoever about what his purpose, mission, goal is for his life. Verse 31. And he began to teach them.

First time the word teach is used for Jesus with his disciples. That the Son of Man, the Old Testament heavenly figure, must suffer many things and be rejected, that's an ultimate word, by the

elders and chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. Very interesting. It's not be raised. It's active. Rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and rebuked him.

And I think at a human level, you can understand Peter's reaction. It doesn't make any sense, does it? They've just built up to this picture that Jesus is this great Messiah, the King of Israel, talking about dying and being rejected.

[5 : 09] That's no way to start a religion. If you want to help the needy, it's no way to attract followers. It's negative thinking, Jesus. I don't know what's in Peter's mind, but he may be thinking, look, the local Pharisees, they're a rum lot, but those guys up at Jerusalem, the scribes and the elders and the chief priests, they're the best we've got.

And if they're planning something nasty, you don't have to go to Jerusalem, Jesus. We can avoid this. This is a mistake. For Jesus, it's no mistake, is it?

You notice the word must? The Son of Man must suffer. That's a deep word of purpose. He's talking about why he's come. And it must happen, not because his enemies are smarter than he is, but because this is the will of God revealed in the Old Testament scriptures.

This is the must of God. And I think there's a bit of a sense of relief on Jesus' part here. You see at the beginning of verse 32, he said these things plainly.

Well, until now, it's all been in parables, hasn't it? But now, he is openly, boldly, proclaiming his mission. He's not the slightest bit embarrassed.

[6 : 27] He's not the slightest bit ashamed of the fact that he is going to be rejected, suffer, die, and rise again. because the rejection tells us on the one hand that he will die under God's judgment, but the fact that he will rise tells us that he also dies under the blessing of God and that this is the way of God and the will of God because through this death will come resurrection and life, not just for him, but for all of us.

This is the first of three very clear predictions in Mark's gospel in these three chapters in this midsection and everyone finishes with resurrection because as Jesus looks at his death, it's not just suffering as a ransom for many, it's the way to glory not just for himself but for us as well.

Now, if you've been around Christian things for a while, you'll be familiar with this, but I want you to feel how upside down this is from the way we usually put things together.

It's very, it's not the way humans usually think, is it? I mean, it's so radical because what Jesus has come to do is so remarkable.

We could never invent this. I mean, he hasn't come to just tweak a religious system. He hasn't come as a reformer giving us some better rules or telling us to try harder or try different.

[7 : 56] He's come to bring something that is new, the kingdom of God, new creation, fresh start, a new life through death, forgiveness of sins, liberty from Satan, and it's only his death and his resurrection have the power to do these things, you see.

But Peter is absolutely scandalised and he takes Jesus aside physically, it means he grabs him, pulls him aside and the word for rebuke is the word you use to cast out demons.

So he grabs Jesus by the lapels, gets in his face and he says, stop it, stop it, he says. This is absolute madness. You've got things completely the wrong way around.

It's a great picture, isn't it? Oh, I think it is. Verse 33, Jesus, well, look at this, Jesus turning and seeing his disciples, he wants to say this so all of them will hear it.

He rebuked Peter and said, get behind me, Satan, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man.

[9 : 07] That is the fiercest rebuke from Jesus and I imagine because Mark writes this from Peter, I imagine as Peter recounted this, his cheeks were burning.

I've never called someone Satan. I've been mighty tempted from time to time. Jesus does because he sees Satan at work, Satan's hand in what Peter is saying because Satan will do anything to deviate Jesus and disciples from the cross.

Do you remember in chapter 1 after the baptism when God the Father mentioned that Jesus would suffer? What's the next thing that happens? Satan attacks him with temptation and now he spells out the cross clearly.

Satan speaks through Peter. You know, in one sense, it's all right to Satan that Peter confesses Jesus to be the Christ. I mean, he doesn't like it but it's a whole other thing to see the cross as the centre and heart of what Jesus is doing and the heart of his mission and the heart of our lives and I

think Satan's terrified.

because he knows exactly what Jesus has come to do and he knows that through the power of Jesus' death and resurrection his power will be broken, he will be bound, his house will be plundered of its victims and worse still, his victims will begin to preach the cross so that others will be freed.

[10 : 44] I just point out there is always a temptation for us as Christians to move the cross of Jesus out of the centre of things. There are all sorts of Christianities on offer.

You can have an incarnation-centred Christianity where you focus on the baby. You can have a creation-centred Christianity where the focus is to save the planet. You can have a power-centred Christianity where the focus is on miracles and deliverance and great things.

You can have a teaching-centred Christianity where Jesus is to make us nicer people with new rules. But I just want you to see here for Jesus himself, the centre and heart of why he came is to suffer and to die and to rise because the way of God is not the normal human way.

The Christian gospel turns human wisdom on its head. It's always the way. Grace of God, the holiness of God. It's just, it's contrary to the way we think about life and Christ's teaching when you first come into it it's always disorienting and then reorienting.

This is the way God said it in the Old Testament. He's just explaining how he will forgive people and then he says, for my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are my ways your ways.

[12 : 09] For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. And God's way and God's thoughts come embodied in this person of Jesus Christ.

We didn't ask him to come and die for us and suffer for us but out of love and grace he gives his life away for us. A life that's full of such power and beauty it just violates what seems to be common sense.

And I think for us this morning that's why Peter is such a brilliant example. He's wonderful. And I think you've got to be fair to Peter. I don't think any of us would have done half as well as Peter. He's bold. He's putting his money where his mouth is. He leads the disciples to see who Jesus is. But here's the thing. Even though he's a disciple and trying to follow Jesus his thinking is still human thinking.

It's still antagonistic to God's plan. His eyes are open but he only half sees. He's an immature and worldly believer.

[13 : 21] He likes Jesus wants to follow Jesus listening to Jesus but he resists Jesus' mission because his mind is set on human things.

And I just point out it is possible to confess the name of Jesus Christ but to still have your mind set according to the world to this world. To be sure that what you think is the only sensible way and to find very quickly your opposing God.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth in that very pluralistic and pagan city. And in Corinth the city values were being heavily reflected in the church.

read the book and he says to them I have to write to you Corinthians as toddlers. I need to feed you milk not solid food you're not ready for it.

And the way it was showing was they were playing politics in the church. Power games factions jealousy and he says you are behaving in a human way.

[14 : 26] So despite their massive giftedness and their social standing and their wealth the Corinthians in Paul's mind were spiritual babies. They'd never learned to feed themselves.

They were stuck on the bottle. In the end our mindset is either conformed to our culture or to God's way of thinking. and that means we need to deliberately choose not to be conformist in our thinking but to be transformed by having our minds renewed by the word of God.

That's why Jesus says to Peter get behind me. He wants Peter to go back to being a disciple not Jesus' teacher. He wants him to know his way is different. He wants him to know that being a disciple is different.

That ought to be the mark of who we are as a community of disciples. We ought to be a community of contrast here in Vancouver. We ought to do things differently counter-culturally and here it is Jesus must suffer many things.

He must be rejected. He must be killed and three days later rise and that's the shocking shape of his life. Secondly he moves instantly to the shocking shape of the disciples' life and this is just

verses 34 to the end of the chapter.

[15 : 45] And in verse 34 there's a little break a little shift in audience and Jesus calls the crowd with the disciples to himself and as we go through these verses I just want to I want us to be clear Jesus is not speaking to some elite group this is not for special monks or clergy or hyper-Christians or this is for every disciple he uses the words anyone whoever so what is the shape of the disciples' life verse 34 here it is calling the crowd to him with his disciples he said to them if anyone would come after me let him let her deny himself take up his cross and follow me we've got to be careful not to domesticate these words Jesus is calling us to join him on the way to execution to follow him on the road through death to life and that is clean contrary to our upper middle class aspirations for life isn't it let me just explain these little phrases denying self is not denying things to myself like comfort or chocolate or sin although it may involve that over Christmas

I had way too much Toblerone I was completely unaware they come in very big bars and so we had a lot of kids in our house so I hid one and worked away at it carefully and it was marvellous but I'm now in a season of no Toblerone I'm denying Toblerone to myself although when I dropped my son off at the airport the other night there was someone standing there waiting for a flight who had a Toblerone that was about five and a half feet long and I wavered in my commitment however you'll be know we're at Toblerone free house right now that is not what Jesus is talking about we don't deny things we deny ourselves we deny ourselves to ourselves it's surrendering my self control my right for self determination it's not just saying no to unhelpful desires it's saying no to my own self rule it's taking myself off the seat out of being number one in priority or out of the centre it's replacing myself with

Christ mustn't domesticate it the same with taking up the cross taking up the cross is not those little inconveniences we all have to put up with you know I got a difficult sister-in-law that's the cross I bear that's not what Jesus is talking about this is voluntarily taking hold of the instrument of execution and loading it up on your shoulder putting it on your shoulder it's choosing to say I am with Jesus I'm walking I'm proud to identify with him nothing theoretical about it means it's a complete relinquishment of all of myself and all of my resources to him it means living today and tomorrow as if I am a condemned criminal I'm following Jesus now what does that look like you say well if you notice the next verses they all begin with that little word for

Jesus spells out the divine logic this is what it means and I'll just I'll look at two of them with you but I want you to notice as we go through it Jesus is not begging us to think about it I wish you'd think about this he's not trying to oversell being a disciple he just he's just saying it the way it is laying the truth out there and these words are very deep and I beg you to consider them because they're tremendous because they don't just speak negatively they speak about being saved they speak about life and they speak about freedom not just in the world to come but in this life now and let me just take two what does it look like to deny ourselves take up our cross and follow him firstly it means a different use of our lives a different use of our lives verse 35 for whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his or her life for my sake and the gospels will save it Jesus is saying that the only way for us to save our lives is by losing them for him and for his gospel true life is the only thing you cannot preserve by trying to protect it only by forsaking it to him he's not saying we all ought to give our lives away cheaply or easily he's not even saying that we should give it away to some other big cause that's not the way to save our lives but he says life now only comes as we lose our lives over to him and to his gospel he's talking about being public disciples it's not about private piety it's not about acts of kindness done anonymously even though that's what Christians should do it's talking about public testimony to Jesus giving your life away to him and to his gospel it's engaging in mission because in Jesus mind we cannot give our lives to Jesus without giving our lives to the gospel as well and when you give your life to Christ and you go public it gets rough and the great temptation is to protect ourselves and coddle ourselves but salvation means following

[22 : 18] Christ means a freedom to lose our lives in this look at verse 38 it says the same kind of thing he says whoever is ashamed of me and my words a lot of people say I'm proud of Jesus but not his words in this adulterous and sinful generation of him will the son of man be also ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with his holy angels I don't think he's talking about the second coming I think he's talking about the resurrection so after the resurrection Jesus is proud of us when we're proud of him adulterous generation simply means it's not that they were sexually very deviant it's spiritual adultery in the Roman culture of the day it was pluralistic many gods on

offer and we live in a pluralist culture every religion is equally valid every truth is equally valid and the one thing you must not do is to evangelize or try to convert people to your religion I feel this pressure we are molded by it

Jesus is saying if we take up our cross and follow him it opens a kind of freedom to us not only to serve others but to go public with our faith that is to engage in the culture in which we live without compromise with humility because we've already taken up the cross and we're following Christ through death those who are willing to give themselves for the cause of Christ and promoting his gospel and remember this is not clergy this is not an elite this is all disciples will preserve and save their lives now and forever that's the first thing it means a different use of our lives secondly it means a different set of values this is obvious doesn't it a different set of values verse 36 for what does a prophet a woman or a man to gain the whole world and forfeit their soul what can a man or a woman give in return for their soul very simple math isn't it you set up a set of scales on the one side you put everything the world can give the highest ambitions wealth success honor rewards whatever and on the other side you put yourself your essential self

Jesus is saying you self you are much more precious you weigh much more than all the world can give in other words if we live for this world only and we invest our lives just in this world without Christ it shows we don't understand the true value of who we are and don't get me wrong the Bible is not anti material the Bible is very positive about our our creation this world is made by God our bodies are from God and we receive and enjoy and use every gift from God with thankfulness as his gift just if you follow Christ you're not preoccupied by getting your hands on more it's not a preoccupation for you doing the last deal following Jesus it just gives us a different compass so we bring

Jesus Christ and we bring his gospel to bear on how we live how we work for example during the week it all depends on what you do what that looks like but it means not sealing off Jesus and the gospel to a little private Sunday afternoon Sunday morning Sunday afternoon affair but it means we engage in work Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday for most of you we engage in work on the basis of the gospel of grace it just means means all the difference it's going to change our motives it means if you've taken up your cross you see you enter into work you're no longer serving the idols of the marketplace you're not going to find your identity in making money and success you have a freedom there it shapes how we work you if you if you're living for Christ and his gospel you have a different view of what it is to be human a different view of what is good and beautiful and you're free to work for the advantage of other people even if it's to your own disadvantage because our lives belong to him well it's very searching isn't it very challenging just grunt I think it is and I want to do two things just say two things as I finish the first is this that although James is

James was right when he told the kids that it's all about what God's doing and it is this passage sets a very clear choice before us and so I would not be faithful to the passage if I didn't say to every single one of us this morning you must choose Jesus is calling for a decision here you must choose whether to set your mind on the things of God or the things just human things the things of this world you must choose whether you will come after Jesus whether you're willing to deny yourself whether you're willing to take up the cross and follow him the word follow is ongoing every day every day every day take up your cross and follow him now this is your choice to decide whether you're willing to live your life for Jesus Christ and his gospel or will you try and save your life now whether you'll be ashamed of him and his words and forfeit your very self it's your choice I also want to say a second thing I think this is impossible by ourselves yes the shape of our lives is like Jesus but it's only shaped as Jesus life because he has gone through death and risen again and he rejoins us what I mean by this you've been reading in the newspaper the stories from [28 : 35] Australia with the bushfires I'm sure there are a number of ways to try and escape a bushfire one of them is don't live in Australia lots of people head to the water although that can be very dangerous one of the most certain ways to escape bushfire is if you have enough warning is to burn completely burn a large patch of ground if it's burned and there's nothing left to burn when the fire comes you can go and you can stand in that place and the fire is not going to touch you that's the Christian life we go and stand in the place because Jesus has been burned as we stand in him nothing can touch us and that's what it means to take up our take up our cross and follow him apart from his death and resurrection there's just no reason to do it frankly apart from his death and resurrection it's just cruelty what he's saying I think it leads to despair there's no reason and there's

no power to do it apart from him but because he has done this because he has gone through this we are able to do it he bore our sins he died our death he ransomed our lives and what happens is this when we take up our cross when we deny ourselves when we begin to follow him on the road he joins us on the road and he then stands beside us and he helps shoulder the cross and it becomes lighter and we know that this life when we start to take up our cross even though it's light it's hard and if you're anything like me you throw it off every now and again it's just too hard but the strength and the grace to go forward when we slip and when we fall and when we throw it off where does it come from it comes from his cross again because he reaches out with his hand as we're lying there beside the road with his forgiveness forgiveness is only attached to his cross and his resurrection because the road to life is through death through his death which is ours i was listening to the messiah courting of the messiah in the car the other day which someone gave me for christmas and as you work through the second half of the messiah it's amazing how the music paints the picture of what's going on we speak about they sing about with his stripes we are healed and you can hear the whip with his stripes we are healed with the with the suffering of jesus christ we are healed and then all we like sheep have gone astray you can hear the sheep jump bouncing around and it all slows down at the end it says the lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all and that's the center of the christian life and that's the power to live the christian life if anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me amen okay you you you you you you you