

Mark 9:14-50

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Preacher: Rev. Jordan Senner

[0 : 00] So, thanks to whoever gave me 37 verses. I don't know if it's David or some curate somewhere. I used to be that curate doing these sorts of things.

Gospel of Mark seeks to answer four big questions, or you could say two pairs of questions. On the one hand, who is Jesus and what has he come to do? On the other hand, will I follow him and how will following him change my life?

And in this section of Mark, those questions are converging. They're causing conflict in their convergence. The temperature in the room is rising. Tension among the disciples is deepening.

Crowds around Jesus are widening and the shadow of the cross is lengthening. And Jesus is turning the world upside down right in front of everybody's eyes. Or a better way to put it is he is turning an upside down world right side up.

And his disciples are struggling to understand it. They don't get it. Jesus is talking about the cross. He's talking about the resurrection. But it's turning everything they know upside down.

[1 : 12] And so Jesus comes down from the mountain of glory to enter into their world that is fraught with tension. And to continue walking with them patiently and kindly.

And teaching them why his death and resurrection is so central to everything that is happening in the world. Notice here how right in the middle of the gospel we get this image of the incarnation.

It's marvelous. Jesus on the mountain transfigured in luminous divine glory. Jesus coming down the mountain into the tension and arguments of human misery.

Jesus speaking of his death and resurrection. And so you get the whole sweep of salvation history pictured here. From glory to humility to death. Back to life again in glory.

And right here in this passage the main focus is on the healing or the liberating and transforming power of Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus has come to liberate us from a power that we cannot control.

[2 : 13] And he has come to bring a transformation that we cannot bring. And so if you see here this little passage, the kind of nugget of it begins right in verse 31.

Jesus was teaching his disciples and the second time he predicts his passion, he says, So it's this prediction of the passion that stands as the kind of centerpiece, the center jewel in this passage.

And what comes before it and what comes after it are about the power and the pattern of the cross. What comes before it, I think, is intended to be an enacted parable of the power of what Jesus is going to accomplish through his cross.

And what comes after this is intended to give us a picture of a community. When a community lives under the liberating and healing power of Jesus' death and resurrection, what does it look like?

So in the middle, the prediction. Before the power. And after the pattern. In verses 14 through 19.

[3 : 33] The disciples face a menacing evil that is seeking to destroy humanity and over which humanity is absolutely powerless. We see this in verse 17 and 18.

Someone from the crowd answered Jesus, Teacher, I brought my son to you for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid.

So I asked your disciples to cast it out. And they were not able. So right at the beginning of the passage, we're told of a menacing evil that is seeking to destroy humanity and over which Jesus' disciples are powerless.

And as it goes on, it reemphasizes this fact that this is a menacing evil. You get in verse 24, immediately the father of the child. No, not verse 24.

Sorry, verse 22. He says, From childhood this has been happening to him. And it has often cast him into the fire and the water to destroy him. To destroy him.

[4 : 39] It's the same word that's used sometimes in the gospels of people seeking to destroy Jesus. Jesus. So, Jesus, we're told in this parable, in this enacted parable, that he has come to bring a power to set people free from an enslaving power that they cannot set themselves free from through his death and resurrection.

Now, why do I say this? Because notice how after telling this whole story, it does not end with just the spirit being cast out of him and he walked away. Notice in verse 26, the spirit is cast out of him and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said he is dead.

And then in verse 27, But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up and he rose. It's the same word that Jesus is going to use a few verses later to describe his resurrection.

So, right at the end of this passage, we get this image of death and resurrection. Meaning that the menacing power that humanity has no power to control is going to be released from humanity by this Savior through his death and resurrection.

And the way to experience this is through prayer, we're told. The primary act of faith is the means by which we are connected with Jesus.

[6 : 09] Do you notice how the disciples, in verse 28, when they enter the house privately with Jesus, they ask Jesus, why could we not cast it out? There's this sense with the disciples of helplessness in the face of this.

They wanted to do something, but they could not. And I think we too know this helplessness and the confusion that accompanies it, right? Lord, you called me into this marriage.

Why can't I heal it? Lord, you gave me this child. Why can't I help them? You equipped me for this job.

You called me to this ministry. Why can't I handle it? There's all sorts of ways in which I think Jesus wants us to see that the disciples are going to come up against situations and circumstances that they do not feel competent for.

They feel utterly inadequate for. And even more than that, they're going to come against an evil that is more powerful than they are and that they cannot control.

[7 : 15] And as the disciples are following Jesus on the way to the cross, Jesus wants them to know that he has the power over it.

Only he has the power over it. And the way in which the disciples experience this is through prayer. In Mark, prayer is seen as the primary act of faith.

There's lots of things that faith does. But prayer is in some sense the primary act of faith. And we see the prime example of this in the Garden of Gethsemane. Where Jesus, with a heart full of sorrow, falls to the ground and prays that if it were possible, God would spare him from the suffering that is to come.

And in language that reflects our passage here, Jesus says, Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me.

Yet not what I will, but your will be done. So we realize in this that prayer is not this mechanistic transaction, this name it and claim it thing.

[8 : 28] Prayer is a relational yielding to the power and abundance of God's grace at work in our lives. In prayer, Jesus himself acknowledges the possibility of God in the face of all human impossibility, but then he humbly yields his own will to God's holy will.

And so what Jesus is holding before us is the efficacy and the finality and the power of the cross over every form of human evil.

And he is seeking to impress this upon his disciples' hearts as they are journeying towards the cross with him. They're utterly confused. They're bewildered. They're arguing about it.

They don't know how to handle this situation. And Jesus says, no, this is, I want you to pay attention here. I want you to know the power and the efficacy and the finality of my victory over evil as I head to what looks like an absolute tragedy.

And then Jesus tells them about the cross in verses 30 through 32. And they don't get it. They're afraid, so they don't ask for clarity. But Jesus continues to teach them anyway because he's patient and kind.

[9 : 42] So he goes on in verses 33 to 50 to give us a glimpse of the pattern of life that results when people live under the transforming power of the cross.

Once again, he finds his disciples arguing, this time about their own greatness. Isn't that great? And the main question in verses 33 to 35, I think, is a corporate or a communal one.

And here's why. Because in verse 34, they're arguing with one another about who's the greatest. And then in verse 50, it ends with Jesus saying, have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.

So this section is actually bookended by two one another's. Meaning, I think, the main question of this passage is, how does the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ transform us from a community of arguing and bickering and politicking into a community of peace?

Another way of stating it, how does the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ make us a community of contrast in a world of posturing and positioning and power grabbing?

[10 : 54] How does this happen? Because that's a question I'm often asking myself. First thing Jesus gives us is that the death and resurrection of Jesus gives us new identities.

You see this right away in verses 33 through 37. The disciples are arguing about how great they are, and it's this desire to be great that is killing them. That is blinding them to what Jesus is doing in the world.

Distorting their humanity and eroding their community. And Jesus says what he needs to do is he needs to give them new identities so that the way they relate to each other totally shifts their attitudes and their postures.

And Jesus uses two identities here. The identity of a servant and the identity of a child. In verse 35, if anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.

Notice the twice of all. Jesus' disciples are not just called to be servant of those that are convenient to serve. Not just to be servants of those whom they choose to serve.

[12 : 02] They are to be servants of all. And so Jesus is giving us a new identity for the way we are to view ourselves in relation to others' servants. But then Jesus gives us another one.

He takes a child, puts him in the midst of the disciples, and taking the child into his arm. Verse 37, he says, Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.

Whoever receives me receives not me but him who sent me. And later on in verse 42, Jesus refers to his disciples as these little ones who believe in me.

So we are to view ourselves as servants and we're to view our brothers and sisters in Christ as children to be received and cherished and protected. And Jesus, this is a radical thing to do in the ancient world.

Because the disciples are arguing about their greatness. Who is the greatest? And you know who was the lowest rung on the social ladder in the ancient world? It was servants and children. So Jesus is saying, you are going high and I want you to think of yourself as the lowest.

[13 : 08] Because that's precisely what I have come to do. The Son of Man came not to serve, be served, but to serve and give his life away as a ransom for many. And there's this beautiful image of this in John chapter 13, which on Monday, Thursday, we'll probably look at, where Jesus washes his disciples' feet.

And after he finishes washing his feet, he puts his clothes back on. After taking the form of his servant, he sits at the table and he says, If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, then you also should wash one another's feet.

But notice what Jesus did there. He did not say, which would have been expected in the ancient Near East, I washed your feet, therefore you wash my feet back. I do this for you, therefore you do this for me.

No, Jesus says, I washed your feet, therefore you wash one another's feet. And I think Leslie Newbigin captured this so beautifully when he said, Our brother and sister in Christ is the appointed agent authorized to receive what we owe the Master.

We give to one another what we owe the Master. I came not to serve, I mean not to be served, but to serve and give my life away as a ransom for many.

[14 : 27] So the first thing Jesus is doing through his death and resurrection that is meant to transform us from a community of politic and power grabbing into a community of peace is he's giving us new identities. We're to see each other as children in Christ and we're to be servants in Christ and allow that to reframe our attitude and our posture towards one another.

And when that refaming takes place, then in verses 42 and following, Jesus tells us that we will do everything, we will cut off and tear out anything and everything in our life that causes us to sin or causes others to sin.

It's a call to personal holiness. But it's intimately connected to the life of the community. And so in verse 43, Jesus talks about your hand, cutting off your hand.

In other words, if something you do causes you to sin, get rid of it. In verse 45, he talks about feet, cutting off feet.

If somewhere you go causes you to sin, get rid of it. In verse 47, he talks about the eye. If someone you see causes you to sin, get rid of it.

[15 : 47] And Jesus' hyperbolic language makes this powerful point. It's that participating in the kingdom of God is worth any cost. Experiencing the eternal life that Jesus Christ is offering us is worth any sacrifice.

Jesus gives a couple parables about this in other gospels. He talks about the parable of a hidden treasure. Like a farmer discovers a hidden treasure chest in a field.

Buries it. Is so excited about it. Goes and sells everything he has so that he can come back and buy the field and get the treasure. You get the parable of a pearl. A merchant discovers a pearl of great worth.

Goes and sells all of his merchandise. All of his livelihood in order to go back and buy that singular pearl. There is this releasing. This saying no to.

This sacrificing that is motivated by a greater yes. A greater receiving. A greater entering into a more wonderful and holy and flourishing reality.

[16 : 47] So as we come to these words which are in many ways are very striking. Are very demanding. We actually see wonderful grace at work in them.

Jesus is offering people the kingdom of God. He's offering people eternal life. Rooted in new identities. Grounded in his death and resurrection.

A power that is liberating us from all of our sin and all the evil that binds us. Jesus redeeming work creates a community of disciples whose attitudes and actions echo the form of their redemption.

Jesus sacrificial and loving service. And this is a wonderful thing for Jesus to be teaching us as he goes towards his cross. It's as if.

When the disciples face the intensity of what Jesus is about to do. They face the intensity of evil that is resisting Jesus. Jesus ratchets down. He doubles down. On what discipleship is all about.

[18 : 00] Because he doesn't want us to get distracted. And he doesn't want us to be misled. And he doesn't want us to be caught off guard. He wants us to follow him eyes wide open.

Minds fully enlightened. Imaginations fully aflamed. Hearts fully warmed. Because Jesus is bringing his kingdom. Jesus is inviting us into his kingdom.

Jesus is empowering us to live in his kingdom. And Jesus is sending us as his witnesses in his kingdom. And all this is Jesus' gift to us. And all of this is our joy to receive.

Because he has made us his servants. And in him he has made us children of the living God. Brothers and sisters. I speak these things to you.

In the name of the Father. And of the Son. And of the Holy Spirit. Amen.