

Mark 8:27-30 (PM)

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[0 : 00] When I first, this is my wife over here, when I first started talking to my wife, then just a friend, this is before we were dating, and I was trying to work out how she was feeling about, you know, the whole friendship, what was going on.

So one day we were chatting on the phone, it was a long distance relationship, and we were talking, and I said, Amy, you know, I went to this party on the weekend, just gone, and whilst I was there, I thought to myself, if I had started just talking to some random girl there, and was, you know, getting kind of chatty with her, I have to be honest, it would make me feel like I was cheating on you.

What do you think that means? In terms of our relationship. Which, I know, is very smooth, wasn't it? That was a very smooth move on my part, I thought.

So that is, that's what you call a DTR, that's a define the relationship conversation. And do you call that, do you have those over here? Define the relationship? Yeah, define the relationship conversation, that can be a bit awkward.

In this little section of Mark, we have this extreme version of a define the relationship sort of conversation. So Jesus and the crowds and the disciples, they've been together for a little while. And Peter has just declared that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the one who's sent by God to rescue us.

[1 : 33] And now Jesus is going to define what that actually means. You're the Christ. So what now? What does that mean for Jesus? What does that mean for the disciples?

What does that mean for them as a community? And it does. It gets awkward pretty quick. Let's get into it. Verse 31. Jesus says, let me tell you what it's like being the Christ.

You've just said I'm the Christ. Well, let me tell you what that's going to look like. Verse 31. And began to teach him that the Son of Man must suffer many things. And be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed.

And after three days rise again. So he says, I'll suffer many things. I'll be rejected by the religious elite. I'm going to be killed and I'm going to rise again. Now there's a word in there that's really interesting that we skip over.

The word must. Isn't that? Why is that? The Son of Man must suffer many things. So it's not that Christ is going to suffer because he's outmaneuvered by the religious types.

[2 : 41] No, Christ will suffer because it's the will of God. Because it's happening under God's sovereignty predicted in the Old Testament. We're going to come back to that.

But why the must? Now when Peter said to Jesus, you are the Christ, we don't know what he had in mind. We don't know what he thought that might look like. Being the Christ.

But it's probably not what Jesus said it was going to look like. The Messiah stereotypes of the day were all about, you know, the Messiah was going to be some huge, some great military leader or some like super hardcore uber moralist or that kind of thing.

So Jesus' description of what it meant to be the Christ would have sounded ludicrous to Peter. Which is why in verse 32 he says, it says that Peter physically grabbed Jesus and took him aside and got in his face and he told him to cut it out.

He's like, stop this crazy talk, Jesus. You're kind of, you're ruining everything. It says that Peter rebuked Jesus. You know, this story of Jesus in the Bible was originally written in Greek and the Greek word for rebuke there, that's an exorcism word.

[4 : 03] It's like Peter thinks Jesus is possessed by some madness. What do you mean you're going to suffer and die? So Peter rebukes Jesus and then Jesus rebukes Peter.

Get behind me, Satan. It's brilliant, isn't it? It's like, I think it's the harshest thing Jesus said to anybody.

And why so harsh? Why that kind of reaction from Jesus is because Jesus sees Satan at work in Peter's words.

The evil one wants to deviate Jesus from the cross because he knows it will break his power. Jesus recognizes the evil one at work here and he puts him in his place.

But now back to this word must. We've just heard about the shape of Jesus' life and it just sounds like it doesn't make any sense to us. And then we have this must word.

[5 : 07] Why must it be like this? I mean, if I asked you this question, you know, you would likely say something like, why must Jesus suffer? You'll be thinking about the cross and you'll be thinking, well, you know, through his death, Jesus is bearing the burden of God's anger against sin and stuff.

And that's completely right. But why is suffering life? Why all this rejection and such a cruel death? Why not Jesus comes to earth and sets up shop and does all his teaching stuff and then preaches and heals and it's great and then dies peacefully like Yoda, like just kind of fades away.

Wouldn't that be lovely? Wouldn't that be, does that not still work? Why all the suffering? Why the hardship? Why not a comfy life for the Messiah?

Well, there's lots of reasons. I'll give you a couple. The first thing is, given what Jesus was trying to do, there was always going to be suffering because there was always going to be opposition.

In the Old Testament, we have these sort of stories which are often shadows of Jesus' life played out in other people's lives. Like David is a great example of this.

[6 : 24] And so when you think about the story of David, you kind of have these high points. You have the, you know, you have David's shepherd, David killing Goliath. We have David winning some cool battles.

But if you read through 1 and 2 Samuel, there are just chapters and chapters and chapters of just David on the run, running away from Saul, the king who's trying to kill him.

There are chapters and chapters of this. And why is it like that? Why is these, just these huge ridge of story after story of story of just David struggling?

It was because David was the true king. And there was this apostate king on the throne. And this apostate king viewed David as a threat to his authority. So of course there was always going to be trouble.

Of course there was going to be fights and run-ins and dramas and living in caves and not castles. Of course there was going to be suffering. So why would Jesus suffer? Because he is the true king and he is a threat to the religious leaders of the day and to the secular leaders of the day.

[7 : 31] So of course there was going to be trouble as a result. Of course they were going to go after him and persecute him. That's one of the reasons why there's suffering.

But I think the big one is found in verse 34. And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

So Christ here, you notice, he calls, he was at first speaking to, you know, Peter, the disciples, and then he calls the whole crowd around him and he says, okay, sort of the shape of my life I just described to you, I know, you think that's crazy.

Well, here's the thing. That is also going to be the shape of your life. If you want to follow me, it's going to be the shape of your life, which is just a bombshell.

Jesus says to this crowd, join me on the way to opposition and execution. And it's hard to overstate how at odds this is, isn't it, with our typical aspirations for life.

[8 : 44] And just to drive the point home, just put yourself in the mind of a first century listener in the crowd, because you might be familiar with these words, deny yourself, take me cross, follow me.

You know, you're sort of familiar with these words of the cross and stuff. But Jesus hasn't been crucified at this point, obviously. So put your mind in the first century listener in the crowd. Take up your cross. So for us nowadays, we think take up our cross and we sort of think, you know, that's like, it's kind of like slang for describing some problem in your life that you kind of just deal with a bit, you know?

Like, oh, I'm just, you know, got my cross, it's like my bung knee. It's my, ah, it's the cross I bear. You know, or like I have a difficult relationship with a relative, it's just the cross I, you know, that kind of thing, right?

But for first century listeners, they here take up the cross and what do they hear? Voluntarily take up this tool of execution. You know, put it on your shoulder and walk to Golgotha.

In 71 BC, there was this huge slave uprising led by Spartacus and Spartacus was killed in battle but his 6,000 followers were eventually captured and they were crucified, the whole lot of them.

[10:06] And the Romans crucified them all along the road, the main road into Rome. So going into Rome, you had to walk past thousands of crucified rebels.

So when these guys hear Jesus saying, take up your cross, when that's the kind of thing that comes to mind, it's not like jewellery or church spires, it's unimaginable torture and death.

Like I know, it's just bonkers, right? So what is Jesus saying here? What does this all mean? So far he's said, my messiahship will look like opposition and death and he's saying, here's what discipleship will look like as well.

It's like self-denial and suffering. What does this mean? What does it mean for us? How do we even begin to think about this? Let me just throw a few ideas out here.

I think for a start it means this. It means we can't be just detached fans of Jesus. Jesus can't be just like this, you know, philosophical, moral dialogue partner in our life.

[11:26] Being a follower of Jesus can't mean, you know, just making minor adjustments to your standards. take up your cross and follow me.

It's not, it's not, it's got to be more than giving up chocolates for Lent or something like that. One scholar I read this week, Daryl Bock, his son actually goes to this church actually.

Daryl Bock, let me read this little paragraph from him. It's quite full on, so just, but just open hearts. Here we go. He says this, we face the temptation of going after a more congenial, less rigorous variant of Christianity.

We live in a consumeristic society and many approach a religious life no differently than any other aspect of their life. They come to churches as consumers wanting to know, what am I going to get out of this?

They want a full service church with pleasing worship, a good youth program, excellent childcare, nice facilities, pastoral care when they need it, and at last passable preaching.

[12:30] They want the best, but they're not willing to pay for it. They prefer religion a la carte, opt for the salads and desserts, but not the main course with its hard demands of obedience.

I think that's very good. Half-hearted devotion to Jesus isn't an option on the table, it would seem here.

And that's why this deny yourself line that Jesus says, it's not denying certain things to yourself so much.

Because anyone can do that. Just anyone. Anyone can deny certain things to themselves if they think it's going to benefit them, it's like going to be making healthy food choices.

Like, you know, anyone can deny it. It's not denying certain things to yourself so much. Jesus is saying, deny yourself to yourself. It's deny yourself to yourself.

[13:38] It's saying, recognizing that you are not the Lord. It's recognizing that you're saying, I'm not going to be my own boss anymore. I'm going to just abandon my life to Jesus.

And I'm going to say to the Lord, all my resources are available to you. And I'm accepting the fact that that would be painful because there will be great internal resistance to that.

And there will be external resistance as well. And I know all this sounds so painful and difficult, but Jesus gives us a number of reasons why we should do it.

He gives us a number of motivations here. And we see them in the passage. And they all begin with the letter, with the word for. A number of times in the passage, Jesus said, for, for, for.

And I'll read a few of them to you. Here's the first one here. For, so He's just said, deny yourself, take me a cross. And then He says, for, whoever will save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake in the gospel will save it.

[14:41] So, I hope you know it's not all just doom and gloom and depressing. The reason we don't want to be half-hearted about Jesus, the reason we want to give all our lives to Jesus and accept all the drama that goes with that is because Jesus is trying to save us.

He's telling us how to gain life. How to gain life now and how to gain life in the world to come. And what He's saying here is we gain it by giving up our self-determination.

We gain it by rejecting the idea that we are our own gods by putting all of our lives in God's hands. And as an aside, this is very different.

I hope you see, this is very different to sort of the self-denial of Eastern religions or the self-denial of Christianity in its worst sort of legalistic forms. Because it's not forget yourself.

It's not pretend you don't exist because you're nothing. No, it's not that. Jesus wants to give you life. He wants to give you joy and contentment and peace. And so He's asking you to give up the thing which will destroy you.

[15:46] And what is it that's destroying you? For whoever would save his life would lose it. What's destroying you is this sort of self-determination that destroys us when you say, I am the God of my own life.

I will make all my decisions on my own terms. You see, Jesus here says when we face God, if we say to God, if we look God in the eye and we say, you know, I've seen my whole life ignoring you, being my own boss, God will let you experience that reality forever.

And that's called hell. And Jesus wants to save us from that. So He says, give up the thing that's ruining you. Trust me with your life. Jesus follows that up with another four statement.

Verse 36. Four. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? It's a great hypothetical question. He's basically saying, even if you lived a really, really killer life, like just a brilliant life, an incredible life, even if you did that, it still wouldn't be worth it because you would lose your eternal life.

And I think what He's trying to show us here is that living for Christ, yes, it is costly. It will cost you everything, but it's not nearly as costly as living for yourself. We see this in verse 38.

[17:12] Another four statement. Four. Whoever is ashamed of me, in my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.

That last, that last verse there is very devastating in its plainness, isn't it? If we spend our life denying Christ, in the end, He will deny us. But folks, do you see, it's another way of Jesus saying, I want to save you.

I want to save you from a self-focused life which leads to disaster. Let me read to you from the last paragraph, one of the last paragraphs of mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis.

It's a short paragraph. Give up yourself and you will find your real self.

Lose your life and you'll save it. Submit with every fiber of your being and you'll find eternal life.

Keep nothing back.

[18:17] Folks, hear that? Keep nothing back. Nothing that you have not given away will ever really be yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead.

Look for yourself and you'll find in the long run only hatred and loneliness, despair, rage, ruin and decay. But look for Christ and you'll find Him and with Him everything thrown in.

Folks, the Jesus way is so counter-obturbative, isn't it? Follow Jesus to the cross. Experience some of the rejection that might entail, some of the pain that might entail, some of the self-denial that might entail.

And I know as I say this stuff, as I hear it myself, it doesn't sit well with us and we can probably be a bit sympathetic with Peter here, his sort of reflexively rejecting this idea.

But Jesus says, the way of the cross, this is where you find life. this is where there is inner healing, this is where there is forgiveness, this is where there is freedom from shame.

[19:28] I'm finishing here. After 30 years, 30 years after rebuking Jesus, the Apostle Peter, I think he learnt some things.

He wrote this remarkable little letter called 1 Peter. And in those years, I think he came to a pretty good understanding of what Christ was on about. So let me finish with the scripture.

Let me finish with some words from Peter. From 1 Peter 2, 20. Here's what Peter says. He says this. When you do good and suffer for it, you endure.

This is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you've been called. Because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his footsteps.

He committed no sin, no other was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

[20:41] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we may die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Folks, that's just about the best news you'll ever hear. I think.