

Follow The King

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- [0 : 0 0] A little boy was asked by a Sunday school teacher to draw a picture of Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus in the midst of their flight into Egypt.
- They were studying Matthew 2 verse 13, where the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and warned him to flee with his family from the murderous clutches of King Herod.
- And so this little boy put his best evidence into drawing a picture of an aeroplane. And when his teacher asked him, what have you done?
- He said, well, that's the flight to Egypt. And he pointed to the middle of the plane and said, can't you see? There's Joseph, there's Mary, there's the baby Jesus.
- And the teacher said, well, who's that? Pointing at the front of the aeroplane in the cockpit, a little figure that was drawn there. The little boy glanced at her in a quizzical look, thinking, you're the Sunday school teacher.
- [0 : 5 8] How could you be so ignorant? And he said, really? That's Pontius the pilot, of course. Of course. It's so easy to be familiar with bits of the Christian faith and yet to totally misunderstand what it's about.
- In fact, there are millions of people in this country who have rejected the Christian faith. They've got little bits of it, but have rejected the Christian faith for what is nothing more than a pale imitation of the Christian faith.
- And so Mark's gospel, as we've been going through in the last number of weeks, is that he does not want us to be vague about the Christian faith at all.
- Above all, he wants us to get Jesus' identity right and his mission right. And for us to get those things right totally changes our view of this world and purpose and meaning and everything else.
- And so he longs for us to get an accurate picture of who Jesus is and what Jesus came to do. And so Mark 8 is the pivotal chapter in this gospel.
- [2 : 2 3] It is the climax of the first act in which the disciples finally begin to see the true identity of Jesus.
- And we see that just before this passage which is in front of us here in the early section of Mark 8. And from here on in, all events move towards Jerusalem.
- The betrayal, the whipping post, and the bloody cross. And so in this few verses in front of us this morning, Jesus says two things. He says, firstly, I am.
- Peter, you're right. I am the king. I'm the king who goes to the cross. And secondly, he says, if you want to follow me, you've got to come to the cross too.
- So firstly, verse 29, Peter answers the big question of the first half of Mark's gospel. Who is this Jesus? Jesus. And Peter declares, you are the Christ.
- [3 : 3 7] He's using a word that literally means you are the anointed one. The anointed one. The Messiah. The king to end all kings. The king who will put everything right.

And when Jesus, sorry, when Peter says that, when he makes that declaration, Jesus accepts it. Doesn't question Peter at all. He accepts it. And then the very next thing that comes out of his mouth, they, Peter, the disciples, find it appalling.

It is shocking. Take a look at verse 31 with me. He then began to teach them that the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teacher of the law, and that he must be killed.

And after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. He says, the son of man must suffer.

Now, when we read the son of man in Mark's gospel, we automatically think that, well, as opposed to him calling himself the son of God, he's affirming at this point his humanity, not just his divinity.

[4 : 52] But what he's doing here in this moment is that Jesus picks up the title of son of man from the passage we just read from Daniel chapter 7, verses 13 and 14, the Old Testament.

There in Daniel 7, the son of man is a divine messianic figure who comes with the angels to put everything right.

And yet what Jesus does here, he picks up that image from Daniel 7 and he adds something. He says, this son of man must suffer. And this is the first time in the history of Israel that anyone had ever connected the Messiah, the Christ, with suffering.

There are many prophecies in the Old Testament about the mysterious servant of the Lord who suffers. But nobody before Jesus has ever connected those prophecies with the hope of the Messiah.

The notion of the Messiah's suffering makes no sense at all to the disciples. You see, the Messiah was meant to defeat evil and injustice and make everything right in the world.

[6 : 15] That's what they were looking forward to for centuries. So how could the Messiah do all of that by suffering and dying? But Jesus is emphatic here.

He uses the word must. He's planning to die. He's not merely predicting that he will die.

He is planning to die. This is a voluntary act on his behalf. He must die. And so at this point, Peter is offended.

This is the one thing for Jesus to say that, you know, sorry, it's one thing for Jesus to say that he will fight and be defeated. It's another thing for him to say that the reason I came was to die.

I came to die. And the moment Jesus says this, verse 32 says that Peter rebukes him.

[7 : 22] This is the word that's used elsewhere in the first section of Mark for what Jesus does with the demons. Peter is condemning Jesus in the strongest possible terms.

So what has got Peter so worked up? He's just declared Jesus the Messiah. So what's got him so worked up? Well, the reality is for Peter, ever since he could crawl, he was told the Messiah would come.

The Messiah would come and defeat evil and injustice and ascend the throne. And Jesus says that he is the Messiah, the king, to end all kings, but he has come not to live and to rule, but in fact to surrender and die.

Jesus has come not to take power, but to lose it. He's come not to rule, but to serve. And that is how he is going to defeat evil and put everything right.

Jesus says he must suffer, not that he would suffer. And the word must is so essential in these verses that it's used twice.

[8 : 43] The son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

And so what that means is in those sentences, the word must controls the whole sentence. It controls the whole sentence in such a way that everything that's listed there is an absolute necessity.

Jesus must suffer. Jesus must be rejected by the authorities. Jesus must be killed.

Jesus must be resurrected. And all of those musts have to happen for people to be saved and for the world to be renewed.

So let me just look at a couple of them very briefly. There's a personal necessity for Jesus' death. That is, we need Jesus to die. That is, that's the personal necessity of it.

[9 : 56] We all know the difference between false and true love or fake and authentic love. That's a reality for everyone. In false love, our aim is to use another person to fulfill our sense of happiness.

That's what happens with false love. That is, our love at that point is conditional. It is only given when the other person is affirming us and meeting our needs.

The moment they stop affirming us and meeting our needs, that's when our false love turns into more of an aggression towards them, which operates in most marriages and relationships.

False love, therefore, will never allow itself to be vulnerable. You always have to hold something back in case you need to cut your losses and run.

And the aim of true love is, in fact, to spend yourself and use yourself for the happiness of the other because your joy is wrapped up in their joy.

[11 : 04] That's true love. And this love, true love, is unconditional. You give it whether your needs are being met or not.

And it's radically vulnerable. You spend everything. You hold nothing back. You give it all away. And the problem is that there's not a single person on the face of this earth who's actually fully capable of giving true love.

Not a single individual. We desperately need it. Every single one of us wants it and needs it. But none of us are capable of giving it.

That just screws everything up. Not that we can't give any kind of true love, but nobody is fully capable of giving true love.

All of our love towards other people is somewhat fake and flawed. So what are we going to do? We need to be loved like we need oxygen or water.

[12 : 19] We cannot live without love. And unfortunately, the result is a kind of mercenary nature to our love.

We invest our love where we get good return of personal affirmation, where we get love back. Therefore, our love is always conditional and it's non-vulnerable.

And obviously, there are some people who are more able to love than others, but nobody can give anyone else, nobody can give anyone else, the kind or the amount of love that they are starving for.

We are all the same, really, groping for true love and incapable of giving it. What every one of us needs is for someone to love us who doesn't need us to love them.

We need someone to love us who doesn't need us at all, in fact. Someone who loves us radically, unconditionally, vulnerably.

[13 : 38] And that person is Jesus. We've just celebrated, remembered this last weekend at Easter. You might remember an earlier message in this series, and I'll forgive you if you don't, where I talked about God being three persons in one.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. And I mentioned that the very essence of God, before anything was made, the very essence of God, is self-giving, mutual love relationship.

God existed in unconditional love, for everlasting to everlasting. Within himself, God has forever had all the love, all the fulfillment, and all the joy that he could possibly want.

And so Jesus doesn't need us in order to extract more love for himself. He is already filled up.

He lacks nothing at all. And the only way we can get true love is from someone who's already entirely filled up with love.

[14 : 51] Let me read to you one person's testimony on the difference Jesus' love makes to their life now. She wrote, A major issue in my life has been people-pleasing.

I needed approval. To be liked, admired, accepted. But for the first time, I was able to see how important it was that I identified with Jesus.

His love towards me has enabled me to set up emotional boundaries with people that I never could have before. This has enabled me to love my friends and my family for who they are and not seek more from them.

Because I find whatever is lacking in me in Jesus. It's been a huge relief to finally feel free enough to love people and know that in Jesus I am safe and protected.

You see, the security of Jesus' love enables her to need less and to love more. True love actually creates more true love.

[16 : 10] It's self-perpetuating. It's a self-perpetuating motion. True love actually creates more true love. It makes more of itself as it goes along from one person to the next person to the next person.

That's what true love does. And so Jesus must die. He must love us by giving himself for us.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. He must die because without it this world has got nothing to break the destructive cycle of manipulative conditional non-vulnerable love where we seek to extract it from others.

But there's also a legal necessity for Jesus' death. Jesus must also die because it's not just a personal necessity and a relational necessity it's a legal necessity for his death.

When someone does wrong to you by trying to extract love from you for instance what happens in that moment is a debt against that person has accumulated. It's established.

[17 : 33] A debt's established. And it could be an economic debt for instance if someone came and took my iPad and you know ran away with it you would owe well not technically me you would owe St. Paul's Chatswood approximately I don't know what these things are worth seven, eight, nine hundred dollars I've got no idea whatever they're worth and there's two options in that moment.

I would either say with the permission of the wardens that will be nine hundred dollars please or I say I forgive you don't worry about it there's only two options either give me the money or I forgive you now in the first case you pay the debt you hand over the money in the second case I pay the debt or we collectively pay the debt you see the value of the iPad doesn't just disappear it doesn't just go it still exists and the value of the iPad doesn't disappear either I have to pay for a new one or I have to pay for a new one by not buying a new one and going back to paper and pen either way

I have to pay for something it's either go and if I just say forgive you I've still got a debt that needs to be paid so I have to go and either buy another iPad or I have to insert to paper and pen either way there's still a debt that has to be paid the debt has to be absorbed in some way and this happens at every level of our interpersonal relationships and society if someone robs us of an opportunity or of our happiness or of our reputation or of something else it creates a sense of relational debt justice has been violated and a debt has been accrued and there are only two choices in that moment you can make them pay their debt by destroying their opportunities by ruining their reputation by stealing something of their happiness you can hope that they suffer potentially even pray that they suffer maybe ensure that they do suffer there's a personal toll to this when you making them pay off their personal debt to you by suffering what happens is you become like them that's where it doesn't win that's where it doesn't work the moment you reciprocate like for like you become like them you become harder you become colder and evil wins and the only alternative is to forgive but that's really hard it is agony to refrain from vengeance and to forgive instead it is agony because instead of extracting payment for the debt you're choosing to absorb the debt you're absorbing the cost you're not trying to get your reputation back by tearing down their reputation true forgiveness always requires suffering there is no sense of forgiveness without suffering debt never just vanishes either you pay either you pay or they pay it doesn't just vanish but here's the irony only if you pay the price of forgiveness only if you choose to absorb the debt only if you choose to go the path of suffering is there any chance of wrong being put right it's the only way it's the only way of anything being resolved only when we have refrained from vengeance and paid the cost of forgiveness in our hearts will we ever get a perpetrator to listen to us in a way that they will see their error and hopefully for the relationship to be restored and even if they won't listen and don't listen the forgiveness in our heart means that the cycle of further reprisals is finally broken

and so it should come as no surprise whatsoever that God would say the only way I can forgive the sins of the human race is to suffer either you have to pay the debt or I have to pay the debt either way it's suffering your suffering or mine sin always requires a penalty to be paid guilt and shame cannot be dealt with unless someone pays and the only way God can pardon us and forgive us and not judge us is to go to the cross in our place and to pay the debt for us to absorb it himself for us his love is truly unconditional and so

Jesus says here I must suffer he's saying that he is the king the king to end all kings but not like any other king you've ever imagined this is the only king who rules who rules with mercy and unconditional love now he's the king who must die but he doesn't stop there verse 34 he keeps reading he keeps speaking and we read from verse 34 then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves take up their cross and follow me whoever wants to save their life will lose it but whoever wants to whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it what good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet forfeit their soul or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul and so what Jesus is saying here is you know guys

[25 : 19] I'm not just a king on a cross but he says that if you want to follow me the king you too must go to the cross what does it mean to lose our life of the gospel in order to save it the word translated life verse 35 there's a word that's translated life it's a word that literally means our identity our personality our selfhood our sense of self it's the things if you like that make you distinctly you so Jesus isn't saying that you need to lose yourself of being you Jesus is not saying that you don't need to lose your sense of being you that's the teaching of some eastern philosophy and if he meant that then he would have said you must lose yourself in order to lose yourself that's not what he says what he's saying is that you don't build your identity on gaining things in this world he says that in verse 36 what good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet forfeit their soul every single culture whatever culture you come back come from every single culture points to certain things and says if you gain those things if you acquire those things or if you achieve those things then you will know that you are really valuable you're really someone that your identity is attached to those cultural markers if you like so traditional cultures would say that you have no sense of self as an individual unless you gain the respect and the legacy of family and children individualistic cultures are different we say you're a nobody unless you've got a fulfilling career that brings you lots of money reputation and status individual status is what matters now either culture ultimately says the same thing they're saying that your identity of who you are is performance based is achievement based and

Jesus says no no they're both wrong he says if you gain the whole world you can gain the whole world and it won't be enough you can be the most powerful famous person in the world you can come from the best lineage and everyone knows it but it won't be enough to fill you up no matter how many of these things you gain it's never going to be enough to make sure you know who you are and so if you build your identity on the fact that someone loves you or that you've got a good name or a good career what happens when those things are gone what happens when they go your sense of self vanishes that's what happens so

Jesus did not come to try and convince us to shift from one performance based identity to another performance based identity he wants us to go in an entirely different way he wants us to lose the old self the old identity and base our sense of worth and value and self on him and the gospel that we are much loved children of the father did you notice verse 35 forever wants to save their life will lose it but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it he's quite specific there in that last sentence the application we cannot just go oh okay so what I need to do now is I need to build my life on God so what I need is a bit of religion in here I need a bit of extra stuff a bit of religion and that's just way too general he calls us to lose our life for the gospel

Jesus went to the cross and on the cross he lost his identity so to speak the father turns his face away so that we can have one so that we can be called home into the father's house and once we see the son of God loving us like that we begin to get a strength and assurance and identity that sets us free to break the cycle of evil perpetuating evil and so Peter here is furious with Jesus when he hears Jesus is going to suffer he's furious because this is not part of Peter's agenda this is not the Messiah that he was expecting at all this is not what he wanted this is not why I've come to follow you Jesus Peter's agenda led from strength to strength and it didn't include suffering and if we relate to

Jesus in exactly the same way we have our agenda we have our goals we have our vision for our lives and we think it's great if we get also on top of that we get Jesus on our side if we have our end of what we expect and what we want to achieve in life and we just add Jesus to that add God to it in a religious sense then we are using him but if Jesus is the king to end all kings then he is never never a means for us to get to our end king and he go to with a, you know, I'll obey you, Jesus, and follow you, Jesus, F.

[32 : 10] We're actually not seeing him as the king to end all kings. We're not seeing him for what Peter saw him was in that moment as the Messiah. We need to see this king as the king on the cross.

And if he was simply a king on a throne, it's quite possible that we would obey him because we have to obey him. If we just see him as a king on a throne, at that point he becomes the divine ogre and we just have to obey him.

And that's called legalism. External physical constraints of my life, but not a heart that worships God.

He is the king who went to the cross for us, and therefore we can submit to him out of love and trust. He is good and he is merciful. And instead of negotiating, we just simply say, Lord, whatever you ask, I will do.

And whatever you send, I will accept. Whatever you ask, I will do.

[33 : 23] And whatever you send, I will accept. If he has utterly given himself to us, how can we not give ourselves utterly to him?

Taking up our cross means dying to self-determination. It means dying to self-control over our lives, dying to using him for our own agenda so that he might meet our needs.

So in closing, I've got a quote here from C.S. Lewis from his book, Mere Christianity. In fact, these are the very last words of his book, Mere Christianity. His final conclusion of what it means to follow this king.

Lewis writes, Let's pray.

As the music team come up, we are going to sing in such a way, sing a prayer of committal and confession, in fact, as we seek to surrender all to Christ.

[35 : 18] Gracious Father, we thank you for your word and your word is hard. And yet, Lord, it is life-shaping.

The paradox of, it's just astounding to surrender our life and yet to gain it, to give it, and yet to win. Lord, how is it possible that the ones who are the losers are the ones who win forever?

Turn our values on their head. Help us to see with clarity the cultural assumptions that we work with that we just assume are just normal.

Help us to see that you have come and you have not called us just to refine a little bit of our way of life, but to totally overturn it. Father, help us to see that you are not just a king on a throne, but that you're the king on the throne that went via the cross, that you love us, that you gave everything for us, and help us to give everything to you.

Amen.