

Follow: Exalted Through Suffering

Mark 8:27-33

At Yale University one of the most influential student organizations is called the Yale Political Union. It was started in 1934 and still exists today. A whole variety of leaders from all political stripes have been a part of the Union. People such as William Buckley, John Bolton, John Kerry, Bob Taft and others were a part of the union during their time at Yale. So, what does the union do?

It's a debate society, but not in the way we typically think of debate. In a typical debate you crown a winner at the end based on the strength of arguments and presentation. But in the Yale Political Union there are no official winners because the goal is not to "win" the debate, but to gain converts to your side.

If you were a student who wanted to be in leadership in the union and you were being interviewed for a leadership position, you would get asked two important questions during your interview. First, did you ever break someone on the floor? In other words, did you ever change someone's mind, right in the middle of a debate, in front of everyone. The second question was, have YOU ever been broken on the floor? You would think they would want people who had never been broken on the floor, but in reality, the answer they were looking for to the second question was yes, I have been broken on the floor. In other words, they wanted people who could follow the evidence to the best conclusion.

I'm sure most of us have not been involved in formal debates in this way, but I wonder if you have ever had the experience of being "broken on the floor?" Of holding one set of beliefs your entire life and then having everything change. This change may happen in an instant, or, it may happen over the course of a year. But in our passage this morning we are going to see the beginning of this process for the disciples and they are not "broken on the floor" easily. But, they must be broken. They must come to see everything differently.

So, open to Mark 8:27-33 this morning and we are going to reach the crux of this gospel. The disciples are going to be confronted with a question that is designed to put them on the spot. Then, Jesus is going to flip everything on its head in such a way that the disciples have to come to grips with an entirely new way of seeing

the world and themselves. So, we are going to study **2 Features of the Ministry of Jesus that are necessary for life as disciples.**

1. He is the Promised Delivering King (vv. 27-30)

Let's start in verse 27. If you remember from last time they were in Bethsaida where the blind man was healed. Now Jesus takes the disciples on a journey to Ceasarea Philippi. Now, this is one of those moments when turning to that little map in the back of your Bible will prove invaluable. Or, you can just look at the screen because Ceaserea Philippi is nowhere near Bethsaida.

This was about a 25 mile walk and along the way Jesus poses an important question to the disciples. If you were here last week you know that the entire first half of this gospel has been presenting the authoritative ministry of Jesus. In essence, he has been demonstrating who He is by his actions.

If you were living in Israel during this time you had to find some explanation for what Jesus was doing. He has been healing people, casting out demons, and feeding people by the thousands with almost no food. There has to be some explanation and so he poses this question to his disciples. What have people been saying? Look at verse 28. John the Baptist was revered by the Jews, Elijah never died and was translated to heaven and was one of the premiere prophets of the OT.

Some people also believe Jesus was one of THE prophets. Prophets played an important and respected role in Israel's history. They spoke for God and most Jews believed there had not been a true prophet since Malachi, hundreds of years prior to this. So, to believe that a prophet, endowed with God's word was once again on the move in Israel was substantial. These three assessments were weighty and full of praise. But were these assessments correct? Jesus presses the same question on the disciples. Look at verse 29.

They had been with Jesus for many months and probably years at this point. They had seen it all and had even been privy to private instruction from Jesus. They have been blinded and operating with partial vision, so what is their view at present? Continue reading in verse 29.

Peter most likely represents all the disciples as the spokesperson. His answer requires some further reflection from us. What does he mean by "the Christ?"

Well, this word was used in the OT and literally means the anointed one or the smeared one, the one who had been smeared with oil. A person was anointed with oil for a specific task or purpose for God. Kings and priests were anointed ones. The Greek word here is *Christos*, but the Hebrew word is *Masiah*.

Because kings were anointed to fulfill a specific role for God this word came to be associated with an expected Davidic King. God had promised David in 2 Samuel 7 that one of his descendants would sit on the throne of Israel and his kingdom would last forever. He would be the anointed one. When Israel failed and went into exile, the prophets wrote about a coming anointed one who would reestablish the Davidic Dynasty and reign over all. He would be a ruler of strength and authority who would defeat Israel's enemies and bring success and flourishing to the nation.

This was a hope in the back of the minds of many Jews during this time. Israel was under the thumb of Rome and it had been a long time since a Davidic King had reigned. The people knew God was faithful to his covenantal promises and so the time period into which Jesus came was rich with messianic expectations.

So, it makes sense here that the disciples would have seen Jesus as the Messiah. He had come onto the scene preaching that God's kingdom had arrived in the present. They had seen him display superhuman capabilities and leadership qualities. Their designation of Jesus as Messiah here means they hoped he would be the fulfiller of OT expectations. The time of exile would be over and he would be the one to throw off the chains of oppression and usher in a kingdom of peace and prosperity. The disciples rightly saw Jesus as the promise delivering king. But notice how Jesus responds in verse 30.

He doesn't deny or affirm what Peter says, instead he tells them to keep this assessment quiet. Why? Because although he is the promised delivering king, they don't yet fully grasp the way in which he will take the throne. They only have part of the story. They need to be "broken on the floor" and the news that is coming will shatter their expectations and dreams. This brings us to our second necessary feature of the ministry of Jesus.

2. Deliverance will Only Come Through Suffering (vv. 31-33)

“Christ” is the proper title, but the wrong understanding of that title. Look at verse 31. If you go back and read Mark up to this point, this really is the first time that Jesus has begun to teach these truths. This is new info. Of course, the beginning of the gospel clues the reader into the reality that we are reading about the Son of God and the Christ. But the disciples are digesting something new.

Notice here that Jesus calls himself the “Son of Man”. He’s not denying the title of Christ, but the popular understanding of that title with the political ramifications could be greatly misunderstood. So, he uses a different title here, “son of man.” This title certainly has roots in the OT and points his status as a unique individual. But it doesn’t carry the kingly weight of being the anointed one.

The crux of this new teaching has two sides to it. First, the son of man will suffer and be rejected and this will lead to his death. Of course, we’ve already talked about the common Jewish view that Messiah would be a conquering hero, which is very much built on OT promises and expectations. But Jesus says here that he will be rejected by the key religious leaders in Israel. These three groups essentially hold the religious authority in Israel and define what is holiness and what is not. And these people will reject Jesus.

Not only will he be rejected by these people but he will suffer death. A suffering, dying Messiah is a contradiction in terms. It’s like dry water. One author says this about the turn toward suffering given here.

"Not only does Jesus not fit the messianic stereotype, but he defines his mission in scandalous contrast to it. The meaning of his life and mission is not about victory and success, but about rejection, suffering, and death." -James Edwards

This is a paradigm shift, but it’s vital for the disciples to get this. Why? We’ve talked about the fact that Messiah will suffer death, but notice the other side of this teaching. It says in verse 31 that he MUST suffer and be rejected. In Greek this word means “it is necessary.” In what sense is it necessary that Jesus suffers and dies?

God is both just and loving. Those qualities are not in competition with each other. They are not two parts of God that battle to see which triumphs. God created mankind out of love and mankind fell into sin. God loves his creation and desires to redeem, yet his love would not be a truly just and holy love if it just

winked at sin and opened the door to heaven without judging sin. So, it was absolutely necessary for God the Father to pour out His wrath on the God-man, Jesus Christ, in order to justly forgive and redeem sinners. Romans 3:23-26 tell us how this works.

So, it was necessary for Jesus to suffer and die to redeem, but that redemption is the very means by which Jesus wins the victory over sin and evil and ushers in the messianic kingdom. He reigns and delivers through suffering and atonement.

What has Jesus been preaching throughout the gospel of Mark? The good news of the kingdom. God's rule and reign is beginning to break into the world and things will be set right. He will triumph. We've seen hints at this triumph in healing and casting out demons, but this victory will be made complete through his suffering. And of course, his rejection and suffering will not be the end. He will not reign as a dead man. Look at the end of verse 31. He will rise from the dead and sit on his Father David's throne.

Can you imagine what it would have been like for the disciples to try and absorb this? And look at how Jesus spoke it at the beginning of verse 32. We saw back in Mark 4 that Jesus spoke in parables that were often difficult to understand. No longer. He spoke with a frankness and openness here. He was telling it like it is.

If you've ever been hit in the stomach with a ball while playing sports and had the wind knocked out of you I imagine that's what this was like. It was so disorienting that the disciples can't grasp it and assume something must be wrong. Look how Peter, speaking for the group, responds in the rest of verse 32.

This is the same word used to describe Jesus rebuking the demons and the wind and waves. It's a strong word. How does Jesus respond to Peter? He gives it right back to him and explains why he and the other disciples have to come to grips with the reality of his suffering. Look at verse 33.

So, he turns from Peter, who has taken him aside, and addresses all the disciples, which tells us they were all thinking the same way Peter was thinking. Notice in Jesus's rebuke of the disciples he draws a distinction between two ways of thinking. The disciples were thinking normal human thoughts. They were believing what came naturally and a suffering Messiah would not be natural or normal.

Jesus puts man's way of seeing his kingdom at odds with God's way of viewing his kingdom. God's way sees the vital connection between suffering and deliverance between rejection and reigning. This is God's way of seeing this because it is according to His plan and path. God's values do not square with the values of men. This is why the preaching of the cross is foolishness to Jews. For God's king to die is silly. It makes no sense.

If you've ever studied economics there are certain principles or laws that govern how economies work. What we are seeing here is that God's economy runs on different principles than man's and God's principles are the true ones. What is the basic value in God's way? Exaltation only comes through suffering. Denying self leads to victory. You must become low before you are raised up. Humble yourself before God and you will be exalted. We see this most clearly in the work of Jesus.

Listen to how this is described elsewhere in the NT. Hebrews 2:9. 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

This is the exact opposite of how the disciples are thinking and how we often think. They believe the path to glory goes straight up. Grab all the power you can. Be a winner, not a loser. Be the center of attention. Talk about yourself. Get what you can while you can.

But this way of living will not lead to life. It will not lead to joy or happiness and it certainly won't get us for life in the kingdom of God. Our problem is that we are so used to operating in this worldly manner that we are blind to God's way. Peter was so blinded by his own way of ordering the world that he rebuked Jesus for telling him the truth that suffering must precede exaltation. What we need is to be "broken on the floor". These next few verses, 34-38, may just do the breaking. Jesus will take this fundamental principle of how God works and apply it forcefully to what it means to be a disciple. And we will get there in a few weeks.

But while we are waiting to study that passage, I want to leave you pondering the connection between God's upside down ordering of things and our lives as followers of him.

Perhaps no one lays this out better than Paul in Philippians 2:3-11.