

## Bible Study Guide: Week of 2-22-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### Mark 8:31-38

Then [Jesus] began to teach [the disciples] that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup>He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’

<sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. <sup>36</sup>For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup>Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup>Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.’

**Then [Jesus] began to teach [the disciples] that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup>He said all this quite openly.**

This is Jesus’ first passion prediction (the first of three in Mark’s gospel). So far, the Pharisees and scribes have been Jesus’ main named opponent. Way back in chapter 3 Jesus first came into conflict with the Pharisees over Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath. Later in chapter 3 the scribes came from Jerusalem to accuse Jesus of being possessed by a demon. In chapter 7, the Pharisees and Scribes team up to question the actions of Jesus’ disciples. In Mark, the scribes, Pharisees, chief priests, and elders form a group with a common purpose—to oppose Jesus. Often, they oppose him on the grounds that he is disobedient to the Law (or, at least, their interpretation of the Law). Here, Jesus openly (the Greek here can mean “outspokenly,” “frankly,” or “bluntly”) states that his conflict with the religious leaders of his day would eventually lead to his suffering, disqualification, death, and resurrection.

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It is little wonder that Peter rebukes Jesus, given Jesus’ blunt and public insistence that he must undergo such suffering. After all, if a loved one told you their master plan involved suffering many things, rejection, and death, you would probably (as Peter did) suggest an alternative course of action—one that didn’t involve such trauma. Jesus turns to face not just Peter, but all the disciples. Therefore, his rebuke is directed at all those who follow him insofar as all followers of Jesus at times act in ways that are at odds with God’s will. Jesus’ harsh address (“Get behind me, Satan”) bears closer inspection. The Greek word here translated “get” means “depart” or “begone.” It is the same word Jesus uses in Matthew’s gospel when he is tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Mark doesn’t narrate that exchange between Jesus and Satan for us, but there in Matthew, Jesus famously says to Satan, “Away with you, Satan!” or “Begone, Satan!” So part of Jesus’ meaning here is to banish the evil one. When Jesus says, “behind me,” he is using the same words (Greek: *opiso mou*) he used in calling Simon Peter in Mark 1:17. There, the words *opiso mou* are translated as “follow me,” whereas here they are translated as “behind me.” For Simon Peter, these words would doubtless have reminded him of Jesus’ first words spoken to him beside the sea and, therefore, reminded him of his proper place and calling as a follower of Jesus. It is not Peter’s job to lead Jesus, but rather to follow him. In using the term “Satan” Jesus is not so much addressing Simon Peter as Satan, but rather he is showing that Simon Peter has unwittingly allied himself with Satan’s evil purpose of preventing Jesus from fulfilling his mission. The Greek word *satana* has its origin in a Hebrew term meaning adversary or accuser generally or the supernatural adversary of God (often called the devil) specifically. In the New Testament, this term is always specifically applied in this latter sense. Thus, *satana* is never translated as “adversary” in the New Testament, but always as Satan. Again, Simon Peter is unwittingly standing as an enemy of

God's plan by insisting that Jesus need not suffer the things he has predicted. Like the last time Satan was mentioned (Jesus' being tested in the wilderness in Mark 1), Satan's presence here serves as a test of Jesus' loyalty to God's plan. He passes the test by banishing Satan and reminding Peter of his proper role as a follower.

**<sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'**

Verse 34 begins a new section, one related to the previous section, but distinct in the inclusion of the crowds in the audience with the disciples. Jesus' address here and over the next few verses consists of several aphorisms or sayings that describe the nature of the discipleship he requires. The reference to taking up the cross would have been shocking to Jesus' first audience. In their day and age, the cross had not yet become a symbol of salvation and life as it is for us, but was instead a gruesome image of shame and torture and death. The prospect of following anyone while carrying a cross would have likely thinned the crowd significantly. Also, the ideal of self-denial portrayed here would serve to weed out any fair-weather followers of Jesus.

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These sayings of Jesus further explain the nature of the type of suffering and "cross bearing" Jesus' early disciples would face. The temptation to save one's own physical life (perhaps by denying one's faith or rejecting Jesus publicly) may have resulted in forfeiting one's status as a member of the church and, ultimately, one's eternal status. Jesus' early disciples would have faced regular persecutions and opportunities to suffer for the sake of the gospel. The question for them was how they would choose to respond. If they lost their (mortal) lives for the sake of the gospel, they would indeed attain the promise of eternal life. Meanwhile, if they fell away at the prospect of suffering and death, they would be giving up the very faith they claimed to hold dear. This makes many of our modern "hardships" seem trivial by comparison, but there is still room for us to bear witness to Jesus in our own lives in ways that may be costly to us. These sacrifices will not be without vindication, however. We cannot insist on the glory of the resurrection without the suffering of the cross. By the same token, we should not focus exclusively on suffering in a masochistic way without acknowledging the gracious promise of the resurrection.

#### **Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. How would you have reacted to Jesus prediction of his suffering and death had you been Peter?**
- 2. What do you think it means to "take up one's cross and follow Jesus?" How do you (or don't you) do this daily?**
- 3. What does Jesus mean by "those who want to save their life?" Where do we draw the line between being willing to risk all for the Gospel and being foolhardy or seeking out suffering and pain? How might we find a middle ground here between these two options?**