July 21/22, 2012

Simply Jesus: Two Visions Collide

Simply Jesus Series

Mark 8: 27-38; Mark 9: 30-32; Mark 10: 32-45

Pastor Mark Kremer

About seven years ago Jeff Petersen came to me and said, "Hey, would you like to go with me to India?" And I thought, "Wow, what an opportunity. I mean, that's a part of the world that I thought I'd never get to see." We were going to go through Japan and Thailand on our way and I thought, "Now who better for your first great excursion out into the unknown world than Jeff Petersen? I mean this guy's the world traveler and he's got it down. This is going to be a great adventure and, 'Sure, I'll be happy to go.'" Jeff made the plans meticulously—everything timed out down to within a five-minute time frame—and we were good to go. We got on the plane and he had a note of some kind that he always gets the bulkhead seat, and we were living in comfort on the way and everything went smoothly—until we got to Tokyo. We landed in Tokyo and it was snowing. We pulled up to the gate and what unfolded was the worst snowstorm in twenty-five years. What was supposed to be a two-hour layover turned into a full day—a night and a day—and there were thousands of people in this terminal. There was no food; there was no place to stay, and nobody knew what was going on. We ended up sleeping with our heads on our briefcases right next to one of those moving sidewalks that had the computerized voice that every time it started to move, it announced: "Please watch out for…" You know, hold the rail or something like that. And then, on top of that noise was this endless computerized voice announcing the cancellation of hundreds of flights. Why didn't they just say, "All flights are cancelled"? No, it was just hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of these announcements and, you know, if you were here last week, you might start to wonder about traveling anywhere with me—under any circumstances! I've gone on three international trips with Jeff and we have had a major disaster on all three of them (*laughter*). But I need you to know, I went on one without him and it went smoothly. (*laughter*) So the reality is *he's* the problem, not me! You know, that was a great adventure and a journey!

You know, what just kind of boggles my mind is the disciples being invited by an unknown man—really, who was this Jesus who came to these twelve guys? He sought them out, out of their ordinary daily life. Four of them were fisherman; one was a tax collector; one was a nationalistic figure. The others we don't really know much about. But Jesus came and sought them out and invited them on a journey with Him—and they went! They didn't even ask Him at that point where they were going. They didn't know anything, really, about Him. They didn't know what He was inviting them into. But what unfolded in the months and years to come had to be just really heady stuff for them because, within a matter of weeks, everywhere Jesus went there were huge crowds of people following Him. I mean, this guy was very, very popular. People hung on every word He said—they'd never heard such profound teaching! He really couldn't get away from the crowds; they were everywhere. People wanted to be around Him, pressing in to Him. And then, His ability to heal disease and to make the lame to walk and the blind to see, to be able to cast out demonic powers in a dramatic sort of ways, that just made people marvel at His ability—and the ability to have power over nature and over death, even to raise people from the dead!

And these were His right-hand guys; these were the men who surrounded Him. I mean, they were everywhere He went. You might say that was His inner circle, who saw everything that He was doing, and then His message was that the kingdom of God was coming—and He was presenting Himself to the world as the King! And even though there was some opposition, He seemed to

handle that without any problem at all. In fact, He could silence the hardest question with just another question. Even one time when the crowd took Him up to the edge of a cliff, attempting to throw Him off, Jesus somehow miraculously just sort of walked through the crowd and escaped. And these disciples have got to be thinking, "Wow, we are really on an amazing journey," and they had to be racing ahead in their minds and thinking, "When is this kingdom going to come? What's going to happen? When is it going to happen? Where is it going to happen? And what's our role going to be? I mean, if Jesus is going to be the King, He's the Messianic King who is going to restore the nation of Israel. Hey, we're the guys that are going to be right alongside in the seats of power."

That's what they're thinking…until we get to our text for today: Mark, Chapter 8, beginning in verse 27. They've probably been with Jesus over two and a half years at this point and they have big dreams and big ideas. But all of that is about to change, and they are going to struggle big time with where Jesus is going and what He's calling them to do. Verse 27:

> **And Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" And they told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; others say Elijah; others, one of the prophets." And He *continued* by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." And He warned them to tell no one about Him.** (*NASB, Mark 8:27-30)

Now we're going to look at three separate incidents that all have a considerable amount in common. Each one of them begins by telling us where they're at. In this case, this conversation with the disciples takes place around Caesarea Philippi. That's in the far north part of Israel, way beyond Galilee, and this is the farthest Jesus would go from Jerusalem. This is the far-outreaches of the nation of Israel, and that's where this is taking place. And as they're going from village to village, Jesus is having a conversation on the way. You're going to see that all of these conversations take place on the road to somewhere. And so He's saying and asking the question, "Hey,"—you know, He's kind of taking a poll—"what's the pulse of the people and the crowds; who do they say that I am?" And the disciples answer—well, they have all kinds of answers. You know, "They think You're a prophet; they think maybe You're sort of a spiritual guru; they think You're Elijah." Various answers were being given with a lot of different opinions out there. Jesus then asked the disciples themselves, "**But who do you say that I am**?" And in typical fashion, Peter, being sort of the brash one, speaks on behalf of the twelve and says, "**You are the Christ**." Now that term is clearly from the Old Testament and it refers to the Messiah. The Anointed One is literally what it means, which means that Israel and all those who believed in the Scriptures were waiting for the Anointed One to come, the one who would free them from the bondage to Rome, the one who would restore the Kingdom to its full glory, the one who would come and conquer and reign in righteousness and bring justice and peace to the nation of Israel, and Peter says, "You're that guy; You're the Christ; You're the long-expected One."

Interestingly enough, Jesus says, upon hearing that, "Don't tell anyone who I am." Now that's a very curious thing. You would think He'd say, "Right answer. Spread it around; that's who I am." But instead He says, "Don't tell anyone." And I think it becomes very obvious why Jesus doesn't want Peter or any of the other disciples telling others that He's the Christ as you read the next verses. Verse 31:

> **And He began to teach them** *(the disciples)* **that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly.** (Vs. 31-32a)

Jesus begins for the first time to point these followers towards the destiny, towards the mission that He had come to fulfill. He says **that the Son of Man *must* suffer**. This is not just Jesus predicting what would happen to Him. This is Jesus declaring, "This is My mission. This is why I came. I came to suffer and to die and to rise again." Now that wasn't on the radar of the disciples, as you can clearly see, beginning in the middle of verse 32:

> **And Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but on man's."** (Vs. 32b-33)

We see immediately from Peter's response that they did not want to hear the mission that Jesus had come to fulfill. They were dreaming of glory; they were dreaming of power. They were dreaming of a political kingdom with themselves being a part of it, and ruling and reigning over people, and Jesus says, "I'm on a mission to suffer and die and rise again." And Peter takes Him aside, as only Peter could do, and starts to chew Jesus out. Now that's some audacity and boldness, isn't it? "Jesus, I don't want to hear any more of this suffering, dying talk! I mean, we've already got a good thing going here. Look at the crowds. Look at the power You have! Why are You talking about suffering and dying? Nobody can stop You!" Jesus turns around and sends the rebuke right back at Peter and says, "Peter, **Get behind Me, Satan**. You don't have God's plan in your heart. You're thinking from a human perspective. You're thinking politically. You're thinking human kingdom. You're not understanding the kingdom of God. You don't understand the mission; you're standing in the way, Peter. Don't stand in front of Me, because I'm on a mission to go to the Cross. Get behind Me; don't try to take control and power. Follow; follow Me, Peter." In verse 34:

> **And then He summons the crowd along with the disciples, and speaks this truth, "If anyone wishes to come after Me** *(Jesus says)***, he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."** (Vs. 34-38)

Jesus here is identifying why He is going to the Cross because, if we're left to our own devices, if we're left to try to run our own life, to try to grab life and manage it and run it ourselves, we will die. We will lose everything. And it's only in acknowledging the Cross—the death of Jesus on our behalf—that we deny our selfish, sinful self and our stubborn pride and we turn to the One who is on a cross, and believe that His sacrifice there, His payment there for sin satisfies the justice that is demanded because of our unrighteousness, and then follow Him, will we experience life. Only then will we experience life in the kingdom. The kingdom is not going to be this political kingdom. It's a spiritual kingdom. It's a kingdom where God reigns and it starts in the heart. The problem is not external; the problem is internal. The problem is the sin within. The problem is the sin within, Satan, and these disciples and everyone else. They need a Savior. Jesus said, "You need to embrace Me on My journey to the Cross. You need to embrace Me as a suffering Savior, and that's the way You're going to find life."

You think: Probably they got it, don't you think? He spoke it plainly to them. He couldn't have been any more clear: He's going to suffer; He's going to die; that's what He's come to do. Chapter 9, verse 30. Just a few days—probably a week or so—later He took Peter, James and John to the Mountain of Transfiguration on Mount Hermon, and now they're on a journey again. They're back on the road. In verse 30, it says:

> **And from there they went out and *began* to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it. For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later." But they did not understand *this* statement and they were afraid to ask Him. (**Mark 9:30-32)

Now do you see that Jesus is journeying; now He's no longer up in the farthest part. He's journeying through Galilee, only He's not stopping. He's not just going from village to village. Now you get this sense of movement, that something turned in chapter 8 and Jesus is now clearly marching towards the destiny, the reason for which He came, the mission which is to go to the Cross. And once again He takes time on the road, as they travel, to explain to them that He came to suffer and die, that He's going to be betrayed by someone and handed over, and He's going to be killed—but He'll rise three days later! And it says **they did not understand**, and **they were afraid to ask**. Don't you get the sense that maybe those disciples just had a sense of foreboding? I mean, they were a little taken back that their kingdom vision has already been kind of crushed when Jesus told Peter to get behind Him, and they just don't really want to know what's coming. They're afraid to ask, but He explains to them very, very clearly. Surely they're thinking about it. Surely they're at least processing what He's saying. Verse 33:

> **They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He *began* to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" he asked. But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.** (Vs. 33-34)

You've got to be kidding me! Jesus has explained to them now three times—to Peter, James and John—"I'm going to suffer; I'm going to die. We're going to the Cross. This is about laying My life down for people so that they can have forgiveness and new life." And while He's explaining that to them, they're arguing among themselves about who's the greatest: "I mean, we're really something! But who of us—even though we're all great—is really the greatest? I mean, who is going to really have the great places in the kingdom?" They are so stuck in their worldly thinking. They're so stuck in their pride; they're so stuck in their selfishness that, even though Jesus is very clearly explaining to them what's to come and what He's come to do, they just simply don't get it. So what does Jesus do? Verse 35:

> **Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all." And taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."** (Vs. 35-37)

Jesus is now not only saying that the way of salvation would come through the Cross, but He's introducing that the kingdom life He's calling them to live, on the other side of the Cross and the Resurrection, will be a life of laying one's life down for others. In other words, greatness in the kingdom is about becoming the least of all, and that was being a servant. The least were servants

and the kingdom was about being a servant to others. And who are we to serve? He says that we are to serve the least. The least were the children. In that culture, children were almost non-entities; they didn't really matter. Nobody really had any particular need or use for children until they got to be a little bit older. But Jesus took a child and said, "The kingdom is about becoming the least, the servant, and serving the least, even a child." And He says, "Actually, unless you are one of the least, unless you have a heart like a child, you won't ever even enter into the kingdom." You see, if you don't have that hunger and that desire to just follow Jesus, like a child wants to follow someone they trust, then you'll never experience the kingdom. Surely they got it, don't you think? Surely, having explained this to them several times—what His mission was and what it meant to be a part of His kingdom and what the kingdom values were—surely now they got it. And then we just read over a few verses in chapter 10, in verse 13, that

> **People were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them!** (People were bringing children to Jesus and the disciples are saying. "Hey, hey, keep the kids away. This is an important guy here!") **Jesus**, it says, **became indignant and said**, **"Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."** (Mark 10:13-14)

They still didn't get it, so stuck in their way of thinking—from a worldly, human, selfish perspective. They're just not getting it. So we come to verse 32 of chapter 10. It sounds very familiar as it begins:

> **They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, *saying*, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him to the Gentiles. And they will mock Him and spit upon Him, and scourge Him, and kill *Him*, and three days later He will rise again."** (Mark 10:32-34)

Now where are they? Now they have come all the way from the far north, all the way through Galilee, and now they're in Judea, approaching Jerusalem. You see, Jesus is on a journey to the Cross. And whether or not those disciples know it, they're on the journey with Him. They're following along behind, and He's explaining to them yet one more time, "This is where I'm going. This is the destiny; this is why I was sent. I was sent to be a sacrifice for sin; I was sent to lay My life down, but I'm going to take it up again in order to give everyone who believes in Me—believes in what I'm going to do on that Cross—new life, resurrected life. That's My mission! That's where I'm going." Surely, surely they got it. Surely they're listening—they're with Him now. They're paying attention. Verse 35:

> **James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And they said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right, and one on Your left in Your glory."** (Vs. 35-37)

You've got to be joking me! There's no way! Matthew, Chapter 20, even adds a more amazing twist to this, because it says in chapter 20 that these two men came with *their mother*. These were grown men, and they bring Mommy along to say, "Hey, can my boys sit in the seats of power? Jesus, when You come up to Jerusalem, when You get to the glory of Your kingdom, and this

incredible new kingdom is going to be established, I want my boys there in the seats of power." Four times He said, "I'm going to suffer; I'm going to die. The values of the kingdom are about laying your life down for others." And still they're so, so stuck in their worldly way of thinking they can't let go of their vision, even though it's in direct collision with the vision of God. What does Jesus do?

> **Jesus answered to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"** (Vs. 38)

Jesus is saying, "Are you able to endure the suffering? Are you able to take the cup of the wrath of God that is going to be poured out on Me because of your sin? Are you willing to be baptized, submerged in the calamity that I'm about to endure for the sake of others?" Verse 39:

> **They said to Him, "We are able."** (Vs. 39a)

Not only are they selfish, they're extremely naïve. We would say, "These people, these guys, are dense! They are spiritually dense." Really! I don't know what they thought the cup and the baptism meant—they must have thought they would be part of some grand, glorious thing. They didn't get that He was talking about suffering. Verse 39:

> **Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."** (Vs. 39b-40)

Jesus said, "You will suffer. You have no idea, really, what I'm going to be calling you to do—to lay your life down for others." They couldn't see it; they didn't know it yet, but ultimately James and John would sacrifice their lives for the sake of others to hear this message and embrace it. But He said, "I'm not in a position to decide who is going to sit in the seats of power. That's reserved to God the Father." I think He's just saying, "Just follow Me. Stop thinking about yourself and follow Me; embrace Me." Verse 41:

> **And hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John.**

I mean they're not happy about the fact when they heard that James and John and their mother are up asking for the seats of power—because frankly, *they* wanted the seats of power. "How dare you be up asking for those seats of power? Hey, we want to be a part of it too. Don't you go get the special seats!" Oh my goodness, so stuck...so stuck in their way of thinking. Once again, verse 42:

> **Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."** (Vs. 42-45)

A ransom is the price that would be paid to free somebody out of slavery or out of bondage. And Jesus said, "I came to offer Myself as the ransom, to free the world for all people—out of their sinfulness and out of their selfishness. In fact it's only in My ransom being paid, My death on the

Cross, that you will ever be freed men from the selfishness, from the pride, from the worldly thinking that you're so caught up in, that has caused all the problems in the world. You see, the problem isn't out there—it's not other people—it's sin. It's what's within each and every one of us. Sin wreaks havoc; it ruins the shalom; it ruins human flourishing. It happens in all kinds of little ways day after day, in families and in workplaces. Sin rears its ugly head, and then sometimes roars like a lion—this ugliness in places like Colorado this week. Jesus was on a journey to the Cross to pay for that sin, to free us from that evil that is within us and to give us new, resurrected life. His life, the life that can lay itself down for others, the life that serves rather than demands, the life that gives rather than takes—a life like Jesus.

It's interesting in this series of conversations, that there is Jesus literally on 2a physical journey to the Cross, and these men are following along behind—as clueless as they were—but they're moving with Him toward the Cross as well. And I think it's not only literally what He was doing, but there is a symbolism here too, of the spiritual journey that He was taking these men on—out of their blindness, out of their being stuck—to a place where they, too, one day would embrace His finished work on the Cross and the empty tomb, and experience forgiveness and new life that would radically change their lives. Jesus was taking them to the Cross.

Jesus invites all people to come to the Cross. It's only at the Cross, in recognizing what He did there for us that we could not do for ourselves, that we will ever be free from the selfishness and pride that wrecks our lives and our relationships. Jesus invites us to come to the Cross, and once we've come to the Cross and received that forgiveness, that new life by believing in Him, then He invites us to see the Cross as a way to live as His followers, to see that the way of Jesus—that followers of Jesus—to really follow Him by being a servant and caring for the least, not by trying to be somebody great themselves.

It's very easy as you read this story to just shake your head at these disciples. I mean, "How could they be so foolish, so stuck?" And then I have to look in the mirror and say, "How many times did I have to hear the gospel and hear Jesus calling me and hear Him say, 'It's not about you. It's not about you reforming yourself. It's not about you trying harder. It's about you believing in Me, about you coming to the Cross with Me.'" And so we ought to have some sympathy, some empathy with these disciples, because we are so much like them...so much like them. And I am amazed at the incredible patience of Jesus. Aren't you? I mean, do you not just stand back in awe of Jesus' patience? Because I would have zapped these guys and sent them home a long time ago. But I am reminded that He has been patient with me and He is patient with those that are still trying to figure out who He is. And I would encourage us to continue to be patient with those who are on the journey towards Jesus. Sometimes it's frustrating. We've shared the gospel; we've invited people to church. We think they've heard it. We *think* they've heard it! These were guys who spent their life with Jesus, and they heard it again and again and again, and they still didn't get it. And He patiently hung in there and took them on a journey all the way to the Cross. And I would encourage us to be that patient with the people we care about, who we want to see come to Jesus and find new life.

Ultimately those men got it. They got it! They were filled with this new, resurrected life, and they went out from Jerusalem after the Resurrection, and took this great Good News to places far and wide. And you and I sit here this morning as a result of them getting it, because God entrusted the kingdom message to these men, and they got it—and they shared it. And Jesus invites us, as we get it, to join with them in taking this message of hope and new life through His death and resurrection, to the ends of the earth. That doesn't mean you have to become a missionary or a pastor. It means

wherever you go, that if your life is all about Jesus, then you're going to be serving and loving others and inviting them to come and meet the One who has so radically changed your life and all of us. All of us, as His followers, can be on mission, just like Peter, James and John were, once they truly got it. In just a minute we're going to sing and then we're going to celebrate communion, just a time to reflect on the Cross—it's message, it's meaning, it's life that you and I have received.

Our Father, thank You for the Cross. While we don't understand it initially, once we see what You did and why You had to do it, we are so thankful, because there is no other way for us to have the life we want and the life You want us to have, apart from coming to the Cross, and then experiencing Your resurrected life. Make it a reality. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

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