

Introduction

This section in Mark's Gospel, beginning with the confession of Simon Peter at Caesarea Philippi (**Mark 8:27-30**) presents the turning point of Jesus' ministry. From this point onwards, Jesus is on the way of suffering to Jerusalem. The focus of attention is on the cross, and the implications it carries for Jesus' disciples.

Summary

In Mark 9:30-37, Jesus continues to teach his disciples regarding his impending sufferings, death and resurrection and their implications for them.

1. Absent Understanding vv. 31-32a

Three significant things are said about the disciples.

Firstly, they could not understand Jesus. Nothing could have been more repugnant to their minds than to believe what he was telling them.

Since Jesus was still with them, how could they take in that he was already handed over to be crucified?

What was particularly difficult for them to grasp was that Jesus was interpreting the Old Testament Scriptures in a quite different way from the way they had been taught them. How could the figure of glory (the Son of Man; **Dan. 7:9-14**) also be the figure of shame (the Suffering Servant; **Isa 52:13-53:12**)?

They simply could not understand. Only later would they see that it was through his death as the Suffering Servant that he entered into his glory as Son of Man.

We have not rightly understood the identity of Jesus until we have seen that he is both the glorious Son of Man and the Suffering Servant of the Lords.

The immense importance of our Lord's death and resurrection comes out strongly in this fresh announcement which He makes. Let us never forget this.

The incarnation and words of Christ are not good news without the death of Christ.

2. Reluctant Inquirers vv. 32b

Secondly, the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus.

Why? Jesus' repeated stress on his passion underlined just how central it was in his own thinking and the implications of it were just too enormous for them to accept.

His commitment was a silent summons to them to share it.

Now, as later, they found the message of the cross a stumbling block.

They were not the last disciples to react like that.

3. Contending Rivals vv. 33-37

Thirdly, the disciples argued about position and status. As though to drive home the spiritual weakness of the disciples, Mark records the sad story of their argument.

Jesus had just spoken about his own forthcoming shameful rejection, but meanwhile the disciples, supposedly his followers, had been arguing about their status.

We may find it difficult to believe that this really happened but any disciple who knows himself hears the echoes in his own life of such unfaithfulness.

Jesus once again took time to teach them the principles of the kingdom of God.

It is one in which service, not personal status, is the central theme.

The disciple is recognized not by the honor he gives to those who are important in the world's eyes, but by how he responds to those who possess neither position nor importance - like children in the ancient world.

The ambition and love of pre-eminence which the disciples exhibited is recorded for our instruction.

Pride is one of the most common sins which beset human nature.

We are all born Pharisees. We all naturally think far better of ourselves than we ought.

We all naturally fancy that we deserve something better than we have.

It is an old sin. It began in the garden of Eden.

It is a subtle sin. It rules and reigns in many a heart without being detected.

It is a soul-ruining sin. It prevents repentance, keeps men back from Christ.

Let us watch against it and be on our guard.

Let us also note the standard of true greatness which our Lord sets before His disciples. Mark 9:35 "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

The man who lays himself out most to serve is the greatest man in the eyes of Christ.

Let us strive to make a practical use of this heart-searching principle.

Let us mark what encouragement our Lord gives us to show kindness to the least and lowest who believe in His name.

The principle here laid down is a continuation of that which we have just considered.

It is one which is foolishness to the natural man.

Flesh and blood can see no other way to greatness than crowns, and rank, and wealth, and high position in the world.

The Son of God declares that the way lies in devoting ourselves to the care of the weakest and lowest of His flock.

Mark 9:37 "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."