

The Passion Predicted



SABBATH AFTERNOON

BORN TO DIE. With all the controversies that have swirled around Jesus of Nazareth down through the ages, the one fact agreed upon by believer and skeptic alike is that He died on a Roman cross. But the Christians never attempted to deny or explain the Cross away. They were not embarrassed by it. Rather, they had the attitude of the apostle Paul: “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (*Gal. 6:14*).

For Paul and the other believers, the Cross was more than a miscarriage of justice. Instead, it was part of the outworking of God’s plan to save the world. The Cross was necessary, and indispensable. Jesus was indeed born to die. As powerful a witness and example that His life provides, it is His dying—and only His dying—that will solve forever the problem of sin and evil.

The Week at a Glance: Why did Jesus talk to the Syro-phenician woman as He did? How did Jesus work to remove prejudice from His disciples? How many options does Jesus leave us in regard to His identity? What does it mean to “take up the cross”?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 7:24–9:13*.

Memory Text: “And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (*Mark 8:34*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 7.

Dogs Eat the Crumbs

The journey to Syrophenicia was one of the longest that Jesus took during His ministry and brought Him to the farthest point northward. Even here, far from Capernaum and the familiar sights of Galilee, Jesus' presence could not be kept secret. Word about Him had reached into this region, leading an unnamed Gentile woman to hope that He might be able to help her demon-possessed daughter.

Study the incident with the Syrophenician woman (*Mark 7:24-30*). Compare the parallel account in *Matthew's Gospel (15:21-28)*. **Why did Jesus speak to her as He did? What indicates that the woman did not understand Jesus' words to be a rebuke?**

Although Jesus' words about the dogs seemed to slight her, the woman must have detected something in His manner and tone of voice that made her realize that He did not mean to call her a "dog," that He was responding as the Jews typically would in order to teach His disciples a lesson. Indeed, perhaps the saddest part of this whole account is what appears in Matthew, with the attitude of the disciples. They, the very ones who should have been encouraging her, who should have been eager for everyone to benefit from Jesus, were, instead, working against the purposes of the Lord. They let their own prejudices and preconceived notions of God and truth and faith work against God and truth and faith. Hence, Jesus said what He did to the woman probably more for the benefit of His own disciples than for her.

Despite so many factors working against this woman, so many reasons to not have hope, Jesus says to her: " 'Woman, you have great faith!' " (*Matt. 15:28, NIV*). As we look at this woman, we can see many great elements of faith being manifested despite so many factors working against her. What was working against her, and yet, what elements of faith did she manifest anyway? And, most importantly, how can we ourselves manifest these elements in our own lives even when we face many discouraging things?

Key Text: *Mark 8:31-33*

Teachers Aims:

1. To understand why Jesus' suffering and death were necessary.
2. To stress that in God's eyes we are all equally valuable and worthy of salvation.
3. To explain how Christ's passion was central to His messiahship.

Lesson Outline:

I. In the Cross (*Mark 8:31*).

- A. Christ's death was a success, not an embarrassment or failure.
- B. Without Christ's death, His life and teachings would have little meaning.
- C. If Christ were not who He claimed to be, His death would have little meaning.

II. Christ's Impartiality (*Mark 7:26-29*).

- A. In His comments to the Syro-Phoenician woman, Christ was satirizing the attitudes of His time.
- B. Christ's example in this episode encourages us to put aside our prejudices.
- C. The woman's assertiveness is an example to believers facing discouraging circumstances.

III. Who Is He? (*Mark 8:27-29*).

- A. We do not have the option of claiming that Jesus was merely a good man.
- B. If we accept that Jesus was the Messiah—and divine—we must also accept the necessity of His suffering and dying for us and the necessity of our following His example.
- C. Jesus' death was effective for our salvation, because He is God.

Summary: Many are content to say Jesus was an extraordinarily good man and a "great teacher." Christians who take the Bible seriously, however, must regard such descriptions as true but inadequate. Jesus was neither a great teacher nor a good man if He were not the Messiah and the Son of God.

COMMENTARY

Our study this week focuses on Jesus as the Lord of all, the Son of God, the Lord of the Cross, and the Lord of glory.

I. Jesus, the Lord of All.

No religious figure or philosopher has ever taught the oneness of humanity as Jesus does. Himself the Creator and Redeemer, Jesus admits no divisive factor to become between people—no gender, race, tribe, or caste (*Gal. 3:28*). Two miracles in this week's study stress that Jesus recognized no such barriers. The first miracle occurred when a Syro-Phoenician woman approached Jesus on

Jesus Feeds the 4,000 *(Mark 8:1-22)*.

Earlier, Jesus had fed the 5,000 in Galilee. Now He does a similar miracle in the Decapolis region, to the east of the Lake of Galilee. Notice the attitude of the disciples. Though they had seen Jesus feed the 5,000 some months before, they again question His ability to care for this situation.

“Again the disciples revealed their unbelief. At Bethsaida they had seen how, with Christ’s blessing, their little store availed for the feeding of the multitude; yet they did not now bring forward their all, trusting His power to multiply it for the hungry crowds. Moreover, those whom He had fed at Bethsaida were Jews: these were Gentiles and heathen. Jewish prejudice was still strong in the hearts of the disciples.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 405.

To the disciples the amazing and unexpected thing was not that Jesus could supply the bread but rather that He would do so for Gentiles. What does their reaction (as seen also in yesterday’s lesson) teach us about the power of prejudice to negate the impact of the gospel in our lives?

Probably one of the greatest tragedies in Christian history has been the racial bigotry spewing from those who claimed Jesus as their Lord and Master. It’s a scary testimony to the evil of prejudice that even among churchgoers evils such as racism, tribalism, rampant nationalism, and bigotry have remained entrenched. Even worse, people have attempted to use the Bible to sanction these attitudes, much to the detriment of the Christian witness. It’s one of the tragic ironies of history that people should promote prejudice by using a book that was meant to expunge it.

Below are a few texts dealing, in their own way, with the issue of bigotry and prejudice. Using them, and whatever other ones you can think of, write out a paragraph stating what you believe is the Bible’s basic message on this topic. How well do you, or does your church, measure up to what the Bible says about this? What might need to be changed? *Gen. 18:18, Isa. 56:7, Mark 11:17, Luke 6:27, Acts 10:28, 17:26, 2 Cor. 5:19, Col. 3:11, 1 John 2:2, Rev. 14:6.*

behalf of her demon-possessed daughter. Consider the odds against her. She was a woman. She was a Gentile. She spoke Greek. All these condemned her as the worst of pagans. Yet, her faith, combined with her parental love, urged her to come to Jesus. Add a mother's love for her child to faith in Christ, and you have a potent combination. But the Savior's answer seemed harsh: " 'Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs' " (*Mark 7:27, NKJV*).

The woman's faith, however, was farsighted. In the midst of what seemed harsh, she saw hope. First, Jesus used the Greek word *kunaria*, which refers to little pet dogs rather than the word *kuon*, which refers to wild, scavenger street dogs. Second, her faith asked not for loaves but for crumbs. Saving faith grasps at every opportunity Jesus offers, no matter how small.

The woman's daughter was healed, and the disciples learned Jesus is Lord of all, that Gentiles were not outside His mercy.

The second miracle is the feeding of the 4,000 (*Mark 8:1-9*). Whereas the feeding of the 5,000 (*Mark 6:35-44*) took place among Jews, this miracle served the Gentiles, thus showing that Jesus, the Bread from heaven, is for both. "Caste is hateful to God. He ignores everything of this character. In His sight the souls of all men are of equal value. . . . Without distinction of age, or rank, or nationality, or religious privilege, all are invited to come unto Him and live." —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 403.

II. Jesus, the Son of God.

" 'Who do men say that I am?' " (*Mark 8:27, NKJV*). The answer determines our destiny. It is amazing that Jesus asked this question in Caesarea Philippi, where Baal once reigned and Roman gods and Greek mythology condoned a permissive lifestyle. But perhaps in the face of numerous gods and indulgences, Jesus offered a choice that mattered.

The disciples' initial answer was one of evasion. Some say this, some say that. To Jesus, what others say is immaterial; what counts is a personal answer. So Jesus rephrased the question, " 'But who do you say that I am?' " Then it was that Peter made perhaps the greatest confession in history: " 'You are the Christ' " (*Mark 8:29, NKJV*). The Son of God, the Savior of the world. Upon that confession hangs everyone's destiny.

III. Jesus, the Man of the Cross.

Peter's confession led Jesus to outline the path before Him. Christ's entry into history, leaving His heavenly throne to take upon Himself human flesh with all its humiliation (*Phil. 2:5-8*), had a divinely ordained purpose. He did not come just to teach, heal, or reveal His kingdom. He came to die on the cross (*vs. 8*). He foresaw He had to "suffer many things, and be rejected . . . and be

The World's Greatest Question

“Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, ‘Who do people say I am?’

“They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’

“ ‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ ”

“Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ.’

“Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him” (*Mark 8:27-30, NIV*).

Why is Jesus’ question, “Who do you say I am?” (*Mark 8:29*) the most important question in the world? What’s wrong with the logic of those who give the following answers to this question? (1) Jesus was just a good man; (2) Jesus was just a wonderful teacher; (3) Jesus was just the greatest Person who ever lived. See *Matt. 18:20, 26:64; also John 8:58; 10:30; 11:25, 26; 14:6*.

Notice how C. S. Lewis deals with all such answers:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patroni[z]ing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.”—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Shuster, Inc., 1996), p. 56.

In verse 29 the “you” is emphatic in the original text. Jesus asked the question in such a way that the disciples were forced to give a personal answer. The question comes to every person today with just the same force, challenging us all to search our hearts and give an honest response. Every one’s eternal destiny hangs on the answer he or she gives; for if, like Peter, they acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah, their lives cannot stay the same.

Many people speak highly of Jesus. They take offense at those who assert that Jesus is the only way of salvation. How shall we help such people to confront the searching question: “Who do you say I am?”

killed, and after three days rise again” (*Mark 8:31, NKJV*).

The Cross is an insult to some and a mystery to others; but it is always an inevitable part of God’s redemptive plan (*Col. 1:19-22*). Satan would have us renounce it, for without it, salvation is impossible (*Mark 8:33*).

Christ, who bore the Cross for us, bids us to carry our cross as we follow Him (*vs. 34*). We cannot be disciples if we reject either cross.

IV. Jesus, the Lord of Glory.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John pre-

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Matthew 15:21-28, Mark 7:24–9:13, Luke 9:28-36, 2 Peter 1:16-21.*

- 1 One of the embarrassing legacies handed down by previous generations of religious practitioners is spiritual arrogance, the idea that God loves some more than He loves those from different religious or racial backgrounds. Describe a time when you left your comfort zone to help someone who was different from you. Tell about a time when you were helped by someone of a different religious or racial background.
- 2 There comes a time in our religious experience when we all have to answer Jesus’ question: “ ‘Who do you say I am?’ ” (*Mark 8:29, NIV*). Our answer has eternal significance, but it also has significance in the present. How does your answer make a difference in your life every day?
- 3 Compare the concept of taking up the cross (*Mark 8:34*) with the idea of giving our burdens to Jesus (*Matt. 11:28-30*). What are the practical implications that come from blending the two concepts?
- 4 Jesus Christ is just a historical figure until He interrupts our mortal existence with a demonstration of His supernatural power and presence. What experience in your life made Jesus real to you? How have you grown in your relationship with Him since that experience?
- 5 The cross was an instrument of torture and death. Yet, Jesus promised His followers “ ‘life . . . to the full’ ” (*John 10:10, NIV*). In what ways is the Christian life a life of self-denial? In what ways is it a life of fulfillment?

The Cross, Jesus' and Ours (Mark 8:31–9:1).

For us, long centuries after the Cross, the idea of Christ, the Messiah, suffering and dying is fundamental to our faith. Yet, imagine yourself in the role of Peter and the disciples, who have a whole other conception of what they believe the Messiah would do. How did Peter and the disciples react to the idea that Jesus must suffer? (Mark 8:31-33). Why do you think they reacted as they did? Might there have been some personal, even selfish reasons, for their reaction?

“The very vehemence of their opposition is meant to suggest that it is more than a matter of the intellect, more than a simple failure to understand what Jesus meant; the disciples did not want Jesus to suffer. And that was because it goes against the grain to be the followers of a Messiah who suffers instead of producing spectacular victories by an effortless exercise of power; it brings no kudos, and offends the pride of the natural man. And judged by ordinary standards, there seems no point in the suffering and death of the Messiah. What is more, if it is the will of God that the Messiah should suffer, it might well be his will that the Messiah’s disciples should suffer a similar fate; from that again the natural man shrinks. So by their reaction to Jesus’ prophecy the disciples reveal even more clearly than before the truth about themselves, that their minds and wills are governed by the standards of this world, of the unredeemed, natural man—‘ “they think as men think” ’ (v. 33).”—D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1963), p. 226.

What does it mean to “take up the cross” and follow Jesus? What does Jesus mean by our need to deny self and by losing our lives? Most of us find these notions rather unpleasant. Why?

In this context, read Galatians 2:19, 20. How have you (if you have professed Christ) experienced what Paul is talking about here? If someone were to look at your life, what examples would they see of this principle? If none, what does that tell you about your walk with the Lord?

viewed the glorified Jesus and heard heaven's confirmation of His ministry (*Mark 9:2-8*). Moses and Elijah communed with Jesus. They symbolize all the saints who will inherit God's kingdom. Moses represents those who will be resurrected at the Second Coming, while Elijah is symbolic of Jesus' disciples who will be alive and taken up when Jesus returns (*1 Thess. 4:16-18*). Because of the event that occurred on the mountain, Peter, James, and John wanted to make the site their permanent home. But before glory, there comes work—work that involves listening to Jesus and following Him with our own cross.

Witnessing

Our study this week contains a number of provocative statements that invite a closer look.

“Jesus was . . . born to die.” Amazing! It's inconceivable to us that one would bring a child into the world for the express purpose of consigning it to death. Yet, Christ, One with the Father and Lord over the universe, left His throne and His heavenly home to be born in human form for the sole intended purpose of losing His life on the cross. He willingly and lovingly took upon Himself the unimaginable burden of humanity's sins, the sins of all who would ever inhabit earth. He offered His sinless life to God the Father as substitution for humanity, because that was the only way God's law could be fulfilled. Telling everyone we can about this incredible gift of salvation should be the primary goal of our life here on earth. If we aren't making this a priority in our lives, what more would it take for us to do so? What could Christ possibly do to catch our full attention?

“It's a scary testimony to the evil of prejudice that even among churchgoers evils such as racism, tribalism, rampant nationalism, and bigotry have remained entrenched.” Another heavy statement to digest! Is it possible you're thinking this statement is long overdue for those around you to whom it applies? Are you absolutely sure it doesn't apply in any way to you? What makes you so certain you're exempt from engaging in this type of behavior? Since it's said that you “lead by example,” what example do you set for others in this area? Would you be prepared to look deep into your soul, and if you don't like what you find there, would you take the next step to right the wrong? What is the next step?

“If, like Peter, they acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah, their lives cannot stay the same.” How true this is. And what a powerful statement to end on and reflect upon.

The Transfiguration *(Mark 9:2-13).*

Read the account in Mark 9:2-13 and in Luke 9:28-36 about the Transfiguration. Who was involved in this incredible scene? Who benefited from it, and why? Why do you believe this happened when it did?

How fascinating that the voice of the Father from heaven should say to the disciples, “This is my beloved Son: hear him” (*Mark 9:7*). Though they certainly had so many reasons to believe in Jesus and His authority, they had a hard time with Him talking about being rejected and dying, even the point where Peter rebuked Jesus for talking that way (*Mark 8:32*). Thus, the Voice from heaven, whatever else it might have accomplished, certainly gave them more impetus to, indeed, “hear him.”

Read 2 Peter 1:16-21, Peter’s later account of the Transfiguration. What point was he making by talking about this event?

At the same time, too, there’s no doubt this experience was a blessing to Jesus, as well, a reaffirmation of the Father’s love as Jesus, now in human form, would soon set His face to go to Jerusalem and certain death. Three times the Father audibly declared the divine identity of Jesus Christ (*Mark 1:11, 9:7, John 12:28*), and each occasion marked a turning point in Jesus’ ministry, a time when Jesus, in His humanity, was to face a great trial.

No matter who we are or at what stage we are in our walk with the Lord, we all face moments of discouragement, moments in anticipation of an upcoming trial. What does it say to us that even Jesus, the Lord Himself, benefited from an encouraging word? How have you been benefited by someone who spoke words of encouragement? If you know people who are going through a hard time, consider what you could say to help them in the same way that the voice of the Father helped Jesus and the disciples.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “James, the brother of Jesus, and James, the son of Zebedee, preach and are killed by mobs in Jerusalem; Matthew is slain with a sword in Ethiopia; Philip is hanged in Phrygia; Bartholomew flayed alive in Armenia. Andrew is crucified in Achaia, Thomas is run through with a lance in East India, Thaddeus is shot to death with arrows, a cross goes up in Persia for Simon the Zealot and another in Rome for Peter. Matthias is beheaded; only John escapes a martyr’s grace.”—Frank S. Mead, in *Draper’s Book of Quotations for the Christian World* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), entry 2825. These are men who bore the Cross. Why was it worth so much to them? Would you really do the same today as a testimony to your commitment?

Thought Questions:

- ❶ The Cross is a powerful symbol of what Christianity is all about—pain, suffering, sacrifice, and, ultimately, victory. The Cross was something only one Person in the entire universe could bear. In today’s commercialized world, the Cross is sometimes nothing more than a fashion statement. What does the Cross symbolize? How does society’s perception of the Cross affect its Christian symbolism?
- ❷ Paul is a perfect example of what it means to bear the cross and follow Jesus. This man gave up all he had to follow Jesus. Self never played a role in his walk with the Lord. What does it mean to bear the cross and follow Jesus today? Does God expect you to give up everything as Paul did? In what ways is the bearing of the cross the same today as it was back then? In what ways is it different?
- ❸ What is the role of the Cross according to this week’s memory verse: “And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (*Mark 8:34*)?

Application Question:

Carrying one’s cross is more than merely accepting Christ and following His example. It is about complete self-denial. It is about dying to your sinful nature and about Christ living through you. In what practical ways can you carry your cross in your everyday life?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White’s “Barriers Broken Down,” “The True Sign,” “The Foreshadowing of the Cross,” and “He Was Transfigured,” in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 399–425.

Discussion Questions:

- ① **The concept of identity is powerful. Human beings want to belong to something. Unfortunately, there is a natural tendency to deem one’s group, be it racial, national, religious (or any combination thereof) as superior to others. This, of course, can lead to bigotry and even subtle forms of prejudice. The earlier followers of Jesus weren’t immune to this problem. We, no doubt, aren’t either. What can we learn from Jesus that can change this sinful trait, which, unless checked, manifests itself in all of us?**
- ② **Go back and read from Tuesday’s lesson the quote that C. S. Lewis wrote about the identity of Jesus. How, in a parallel manner, could that logic be used in defense of the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White? What claims did she make about herself? What are some of the incredible things she claimed to have seen in vision? Why, then (again using the same kind of logic that Lewis used), would it be “patronizing nonsense” to simply assert things about her like, “Well, she was just a good woman but had no prophetic gift”? Does she not leave us the choice of either accepting her as someone who manifested the gift of prophecy or as a lunatic, a fool, or even worse?**

Summary: It is easier to believe in a Messiah who will lead a victorious army and bring freedom and full stomachs than one whose path leads to Calvary. Jesus was not the Messiah of popular expectation. His badge was a cross, not a crown. And He was God’s Messiah for everybody, not just for the Jews. The disciples had much to learn and a great deal to unlearn. We see Jesus patiently attempting to set their thinking straight, as the shadow of the Cross begins to loom.