

Mark 8

You may or may not be able to see on the slide: a grotto cut into a rock wall. This is Caesarea Philippi, in North East Israel. This is the scene of our account today. Along this cliff is a cave, several of these grottos, and, at one end, the ruins of a temple. Each cave, each grotto, each temple, dedicated to some false god or another. Pan, zeus, you name it. You name it, you pick which one you offer tribute too, and then you go on your way, I suppose.

You can maybe picture the disciples walking by, following Jesus. And in the midst of this territory Jesus asks, “Who am I? Am I just one of these? Or something else?”

The answers the people give are closer to the mark than pan or zeus, thankfully. But they are still off. Jesus is not John the baptizer reincarnated, he is not Elijah, in fact John was the one who fulfilled that prophesy. And Jesus certainly isn't JUST one of the prophets. He is THE Prophet the One who speaks God's Word authoritatively, because he is the Word made flesh.

Peter, in the midst of idols, gets the answer right. He is the Christ, which is, the Messiah, which is, the long promised Savior of all creation.

And yet, the account is quite jarring, as you know, in the very next paragraph Peter is called satan. How can someone be so right and so wrong so quickly, or perhaps at the same time?

Well, as you may have heard before: Peter had the answer right, in that he confessed Jesus was the Savior. But he didn't correctly confess HOW Jesus would save.

It is the suffering that trips him up. This is obvious because Jesus makes a grand statement. He says "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again."

There are two things in that statement that Jesus says he will do. He says he will suffer and die, and then he says he will rise again. One of those, I would think, should get more attention than the other. And I think it should be the resurrection. Why? Because people suffer and die all the time! There's nothing terribly special, don't get me wrong it's horrible and evil, but there's nothing terribly unique about suffering and dying.

But rising again. Now that's new. Isn't it? Indeed, it is the sign of Jonah we have been given to know that Christ is the Savior and true God. Paul says the same, "If Christ has not been raised then our faith is in vain." It's the linchpin of Christianity.

It's literally death defying, it is world changing. It is life changing. It is a game changer. It's an extraordinary claim – that he would predict it!

But Peter mentions nothing, zilch, not a thing about it.

He can't get past the suffering. He is hung up on the suffering. He doesn't see how that could possibly fit into the plan, it's impossible, it's terrible! "Not you, no, we won't let it. Can't be. I hate it."

And you see, he thinks he is being faithful in this. He thinks he is being a good friend. Because all good friends and faithful followers want nothing but happiness and glory for those they love right?

But where does that leave the people whom Jesus loves? It leaves them unatoned for in a broken, evil, and dying world. And Jesus will not have that. Though the devil certainly wants it. He wants you and all the people whom Jesus loves alone, unatoned for and in a broken dying world. And so Jesus calls a thing what it is: To reject the suffering of the Savior is to reject the Savior, because the Savior is One who suffers and Peter should know better because the Savior, the Christ, is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. And so yes, the answer is "get behind me satan." Get behind me with that nonsense of a Savior who won't suffer, because then that isn't a Savior at all.

And the irony of it all, of course, is that to get hung up on the suffering, to want to skip the suffering, means you miss out, like Peter does in our text, on the fullness of the glory! The glory of the resurrection victory OVER suffering and death, not just for Jesus but for all whom he loves and who love him.

Jesus will not be a king of ashes. He will not come with his legions of angels and lay waste all evil, which, lets not forget, includes us! If he avenged all evil without his suffering, there is literally no one left for we are all evil. But no, he will suffer to pay for our evil that we may live. Live in an eternal kingdom where we, redeemed, will give him praise and Glory and “alleluias” (I can say it because it’s Sunday!) forevermore! Rejoice! This is who Jesus is! The real one. He will have his glory, and we will too! God be praised. And he will have his glory through, and it has to be through, suffering. This is who he is – the true Savior.

Now, we are not in the region of Caesarea Philippi, we are here in Idaho. But make no mistake, there are other opinions on who Jesus is here. Some say he didn’t exist, but that’s harder and harder to substantiate with the preponderance of evidence we have. Some say he was a good teacher, like a buddha, or something. To which, I wonder if they have read his teaching? Saying he is God, saying such stern condemnations about sin and evil which probably aren’t popular. Why do they call him good? Unless they are just cherry picking his lines. Do we do this too? Read all his words, I might challenge you to do that this lent. Let’s not cherry pick, but

hearken to the words of the One who said he was true God who would die and rise. And of course we must mention here CS Lewis' famous line regarding this idea: Jesus says he is God. Which means he is either a Liar, a Lunatic, or Lord. He can't be just a good teacher.

Some say he lived, died, and stayed dead, to which we offer our evidence for the resurrection and the testimony of the eyewitnesses and history which you have heard many times.

Some in our town say he died, and rose, amen! Yet as what? A lesser being? A god among other gods? Is it "the same with just some little differences." Folks, who are we talking about? Let's be clear here. Or is this question Jesus asks today "no big deal"? Does he treat it as "no big deal" even when Peter gets half the answer exactly right? No, this is a big deal. Who is Jesus?

He is the long promised Christ and Savior, the suffering servant. He is The Word was made flesh and the Word was with God in the beginning and the Word was God. And still is, as he lives and reigns to all eternity.

He has and will forever have his glory, but did you catch it in there? The suffering. Don't skip over the suffering and don't get hung up on it either.

To skip over the suffering is to have a Savior who cannot sympathize, who is distant, who, like the other false gods at Caesarea Philippi would have you offer it

something, purchase something, and then, maybe, maybe if they are so inclined, they will bless you. To have a savior without suffering is to have evil go unpunished or punished on your head – have fun. To have a savior without suffering is to have a prosperity gospel that if you believe enough everything will go well with your life. And it's attractive because we are like Peter: We don't want suffering, surely God wouldn't either. "So just tell me what to do and believe so I can avoid it and have the glory only, please."

And yet our Lord says, "Pick up your cross."

Which isn't a lot of fun, is it? But the dirty little secret about the false prosperity gospel is that everyone dies someday. I guess you didn't believe enough. I guess you didn't pray sincerely enough. Guess you're on your own now. So glorious!

And so in our desire to avoid the suffering, we miss the resurrection glory.

And so let's not forget the suffering. But let's not get lost in it, hung up in it either.

The darkness of this world will choke you. It will spiral you. Into toxicity, into negativity, into "it's better to not have been born." To "I will end it on my terms" , to "what's the point of anything!" And these are the horrible, dark, hopeless landscapes that the world with all its conveniences and distractions is not saving our kids from. This is the lie of the darkness and depression, it tells you there is no hope at all. And it is a lie. Didn't you hear it? The Son of Man must suffer and die

(that's depressing), and on the third day rise again! Why doesn't Peter have anything to say about that? Why don't we in the midst of darkness?

Be honest about the suffering, but lift your eyes to the hills and look to the light, to the resurrection. To a bright eternal day. To life everlasting. To endless victory and meaning!

In a world that tempts us to ignore the suffering or get lost in it, remember Jesus. Jesus says, you are not alone or forgotten even in your suffering. He says "I will take your sins, I will fulfill justice, I will be with you, I will love you in the muck and mire. I will be with you in the hospital room, I will be with you as you die. Even as I have suffered and died and my death is yours so will my resurrection be yours."

That's Jesus.