

Normal Christianity

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[0 : 0 0] And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way, he asked his disciples, who do people say that I am? They told him, John the Baptist.

And others say, Elijah. And others, one of the prophets. And he asked them, but who do you say that I am? And Peter answered him, you are the Christ. And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

And he began to teach them that 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.

And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, Get behind me, Satan, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

[1 : 1 5] But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

And he said to them, Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power. Well, there's a number of profound passages in the Bible and there's a number of particularly confronting passages in the Bible and there are a number of shocking passages in the Bible.

I think this passage is all three. Profound, shocking and confronting. In a word, it's pretty out there, really. It's one that calls for a radical appraisal of the way that you and I would naturally think.

I can remember asking the question once of a preacher and it went like this. If we told people what it meant to be a follower of Jesus, no one would ever become one.

[2 : 4 4] Now, his answer to me was, well, you did, didn't you? Now, it might have been because I hadn't heard what being a Christian meant before.

I hadn't been well-schooled in the Bible. But this morning, as we come to the Scriptures, we come to one of those high points in Mark's Gospel, as we've heard.

And Jesus makes absolutely clear what is normal, what is basic, what is fundamental Christianity, right? What is entry-level Christianity?

What discipleship looks like? And this is the way that Jesus calls everyone, every single one of his people to live, not just son.

And so as we come to this passage, it's my prayer that this will shape our lives more and more as we line ourselves up with the Scriptures. Now, we've been working our way through Mark for a while now, and last week we saw the unusual way that Jesus has worked, right?

[3 : 54] He opened the eyes of a blind man, and it didn't just happen instantaneously, he got his eyes opened up, seen clearly. It took two goes.

And at first he saw, kind of, all right, and then Jesus laid his hands in his eyes again, and he saw everything clearly. Now, this week I've actually got the slides, it was my fault last week they weren't there, but they're there this week.

I've doubly checked on that one. So sorry to those who might have been maligned by me not putting them up last week. Anyway, there you go. Slide, you can see here that Jesus has gone, is on his way, right, from Bethsaida, and he's heading up now to Caesarea Philippi.

And on this journey northwards, he has this conversation with his disciples. And we see the radical identity of Jesus being revealed.

We see a two-stage revealing of who Jesus is. We get various opinions. Some say John the Baptist. Well, that's who Herod thought he was, but remember, John the Baptist is dead.

[5 : 03] Some say Elijah, right? Now, that's the big one. That's the big one. We know that Malachi the prophet said, that Elijah will return before the great and awesome day of the Lord.

Malachi chapter 4 verse 5. But for those of us who remember Mark chapter 1, John the Baptist was actually the Elijah figure.

And in the very next chapter, in chapter 9 verse 13, Jesus says that Elijah has come and they did whatever they pleased to do with him, as it's written about him.

So John the Baptist, the Elijah figure, was killed. And the day of the Lord then is getting much, much closer, isn't it? If Elijah's come, the day of the Lord's getting much, much closer.

Well, some say a prophet, maybe like one of the prophets of old who came to bring a word from God. The Muslims believe that Jesus is a prophet. But that's insufficient.

[6 : 10] Jesus pushes things further though, and he asks the disciples who they think he is. And Peter jumps in, you're the Christ. Now I like Peter. That's a politically dangerous thing to say in Caesarea Philippi, a place named after Caesar Augustus, the first great Roman emperor.

And we've known from chapter 1 verse 1 that Jesus is the Christ. We've known that, right? Finally the disciples have come to see, or know, to recognise that Jesus is the Christ.

They've had their eyes opened, a little bit. The Christ is the anointed king of Israel. The one who would bring the kingdom of Israel to come. The kingdom of God ruling.

That's how Rome doesn't rule anymore. A glorious kingdom where Israel was the splendour of the whole earth. The one to sit down on the throne of David and rule forever.

However, it's a revelation that expects a reversal of fortunes in Israel. It expects an uprising when God finally restores the fortunes of Israel to be the glory days.

[7 : 18] Peter's got it right. He sees, but does he see clearly? And we see the radical work of Jesus in these following verses, verse 31 to 34.

Peter gets it wrong. He hasn't seen things clearly yet. He hasn't got it, right? So Jesus teaches the disciples that the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

You see there in verse 31. Now, for those who have been around for a while, been around long enough, will know who this Son of Man is. It's a favourite way that Jesus loves speaking about himself.

It's a loaded term, Son of Man. It's Daniel chapter 7, verse 13 to 14. At one level, it's a way of speaking about every human being, Son of Man. Psalm 8 speaks about the sons of man.

Or the way God addresses his prophets of old, like Ezekiel. Ezekiel was his favourite way of being referred to, Ezekiel is the Son of Man. But in another, the Son of Man is someone far, far, far greater, right?

[8 : 30] And Daniel 7 is a key place to go to. Let me read out to you. Daniel chapter 7, verse 13. So did you get those three things about this Son of Man?

He's given universal rule over all nations, over all people. Every nation on earth comes under this one. The Son of Man is given an eternal kingdom.

This kingdom lasts forever. It will never pass away. And the Son of Man is given an indestructible kingdom. A kingdom that shall not, will not, cannot ever be destroyed.

This kingdom. No one's going to break in and destroy this kingdom. And it comes when the Son of Man comes to Almighty God and it is given to Him.

God, the Father, will give it to the Son of Man. This Son of Man is someone who sits at the right hand of the throne of God and rules universally, eternally and indestructibly.

[9 : 55] In short, He is God who rules the kingdom of God. Can't be anyone else. Something far, far greater. Somewhere, some place, some range, some region.

Far, far greater than the tiny land of Israel. There's no getting around it. This is God's plan before the beginning of time. What's going to happen to Him is no accident.

Jesus must suffer many things. He is the suffering servant of God who will bring about this kingdom. He'll be rejected by the religious authorities of Israel, the elders and the chief priests and the scribes.

Every level of religious hierarchy will reject Him. And you'll be killed. The Christ must be killed. No two ways about it.

Jesus must die. Die for the sins of the world. For my rebellion and your rebellion against the rightful rule of our lives. To bear the penalty for our failing to live in obedience to Him.

[10 : 59] But that's not all. After three days, He will rise from the dead. Jesus must rise again. Does it ever strike you as strange that when Jesus says this, it doesn't seem remarkable to disciples?

They don't sort of go, wow, what are you talking about, Jesus? Rises from the dead? No one's ever done that. It would seem absolutely crazy to anyone who'd read it today.

Rises from the dead? That's impossible. And yet, the Jews believe that the dead will be raised. At least the Pharisees did. That's what was distinctive about them.

It's what the way to the Old Testament teaches. Jesus must be raised from the dead in order to bring about the kingdom of God. To return to judge the world in righteousness in order to give new life to the dead.

He must rise from the dead. And we believe that Jesus rose from the dead and that changes everything. But here we see Peter gets it wrong. He doesn't see it clearly.

[12 : 03] He still can't see who Jesus is. Absolutely crystal clear. And he rebukes Jesus. And notice how serious this is.

Jesus then rebukes Peter and says, get behind me, Satan. Satan. Satan is the one who is opposed to the plans of God.

Opposed to the rules of God. He's the one who accuses people. And notice how Satan blinds people to God's agenda for the world. Peter has his mind set on the things of man, not the things of God.

See there? Get behind me, Satan. Verse 33. What does it look like to have a mind set on the things of man?

Well, I guess exactly the opposite of having your mind set on the things of God. Living denial of what God reveals. Living in the things of this world of power, prestige, wealth.

[13 : 12] Self-glory. Jesus is the one who is about power greater than death.

Jesus is going to conquer death and will bring and be the pioneer, the first man to rise from the grave, never to die again.

God's going to bring about the glorious kingdom and the way the kingdom of God comes is suffering first, then glory. That's how it works. Suffering now, glory to come.

Guaranteed. And the things of God are infinitely greater than any man can get from this world. I'm glad the scriptures are so honest, really.

I mean, we don't get Peter airbrushed, do we, to be perfect? We see him warts and all. I like reading about him. It grounds us in earthly reality.

[14 : 16] For I am also all too often like him. You know? Like Peter, it's possible to say that Jesus is the Christ, but for us to have all the wrong expectations of him, to have our minds sit on the things of men, not the things of God.

If we've got our minds on the things of men, it may be they're actually on about the things of the evil one, the opponent of God, the kingdom of men, the kingdom of darkness, not the kingdom of God, the kingdom of light.

And notice what Jesus tells them, teaches them plainly, openly. He doesn't conceal it from them. The Christ is the son of man who must suffer many things, be rejected, killed, and rise again.

Unless they get that clearly, they cannot tell anyone about him accurately. Unless we get it clearly, we cannot communicate Jesus accurately.

either. But let's have a look at this radical call of Jesus. He then speaks to them in verse 34 and calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

[15 : 55] Notice who he's addressing here. The crowd and the disciples. There's no distinction in what he's about to say.

There's no exception for some from what he's about to say. Look what he says, if anyone would come after me, if anyone would be a follower of Jesus, this is what he's calling us to.

He's not calling us to a profession, to a lifestyle, to a career, to anywhere except himself.

That is the usual way that call is used in the Bible. A call to follow Jesus. Jesus calls us to follow him.

He doesn't call us to our profession. the follower of Jesus is called to deny themselves. Now, we're in the time of Lent, just so you know, where the religious leaders of some denominations set up expectations that people will deny themselves some particularly enjoyable form of life.

[17 : 13] I don't know, you might give up some raisin bread toast or some lollies or some chocolate or something like that. For a season, for a little while. But that's not what Jesus is talking about here.

He's not talking about asceticism either, you know, just making sure you whip yourself hard enough. Going without something good, thinking that it will get you closer to God, is not going to do it.

And it's only just for a little time too, it's not forever. If you go without food long enough, well, you'll starve to death and then you're sure to meet Jesus.

No, he's talking about denying self-rule. That's what he's talking about here. Denying our natural disposition to reject God's rightful rule over our life. That's what he's talking about. Ignoring his word, letting me set the course to the agenda of my life.

Being on about the things of men, not the things of God. That's what it means to deny self. And die to self. The follower of Jesus is called to take up his cross.

[18 : 19] Now, we're not talking about the phrase the cross I bear here, like it's some discomfort that I carry around for a little while. No, that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about taking up your cross means only one thing, one thing only.

Taking up your cross means that the very next thing to come is your death. No two ways about it. When Jesus took up his cross and was on the road to the Golgotha, the very next thing that happened to him was crucifixion, being nailed up and hung on it for the world to see his ultimate humiliation and finally his God forsaken death on Golgotha.

Taking up our cross means following Jesus in his death. That's what taking up our cross means. God and then living for him as the Lord of heaven and earth in obedience to his wonderful word.

For then keeps following on see verse 35. Now this is the reason for taking up the cross and following Jesus. Have a look at it with me. Consider carefully verse 35 to 38.

for whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it. And here we get to be very very very very confronting words of Jesus and we get very very very practical.

[19 : 58] Right? Notice the connections that will keep flowing. Here it is. Right? I hope there's a bit of a slide might come up here. If we save our life now right by living for self rejecting the lordship of Jesus the Christ it means that then in the future we lose it.

Doesn't get much clearer than that. Right? He also says now if we lose our life now right by dying to self for the cause of Christ for the cause of the gospel means that we will save it in the future.

That's what Jesus teaches clear simple open confronting reality we are saved by dying to self we enter the kingdom where Jesus is Lord by having Jesus Lord that's it we enter the kingdom where Jesus Lord by having Jesus as Lord and the connections keep flowing verse 36 for what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit their soul the answer is according to Jesus nothing zero zilch there is no profit no gain no advantage in having the whole world and let lose your soul being cut off from the kingdom of God the eternal indestructible kingdom of God now every one of us has a soul everyone does it's what separates us from the animals a soul is that part of us inside of us we know it yearns for life it recoils that there is death it seeks to avoid death as long as the money in the medical system will hold us off from it

I was speaking to someone the other day it was a strange conversation there's a man they know who's trying to have a scientifically designed diet so that he will live forever and then her friend is actually copying that diet it seems he's on the diet because it's a calorie restricting!

has been run hasn't it? Billions of times over billions of time over and one out of one people the stats say die so science is sort of against this person at this stage he might be the one person in history but everyone dies Jesus tells us the way to save our soul and that is by taking up our cross and following him it's by seeing that and knowing that clearly that everything is turned upside down right but actually right side up so why wouldn't anyone take up their cross and follow Jesus why wouldn't they why wouldn't we why wouldn't anyone lose their life only to be guaranteed gaining it for all eternity verse 35 what can a man give in return for his soul and the answer nothing zero zilch not even if we gained the whole world even if we were the multi billionaire tech mogul not even if we were the ruler of

[23 : 53] Europe the ruler of China the ruler of America the ruler of Australia even if we were the media mogul controlling what people see and hear even if we had the great property portfolio in Brisbane even if you Jesus says that we can never purchase our soul that's not how the economics of the kingdom of God work no if you want to save your life you can't purchase it you can't earn it we can't deserve it we need to deny ourselves deny to self-rule we need to take up our cross die to self-rule we need to follow Jesus live with him as our Lord master and king that's all there is to it and give our lives for the cause of the gospel that's what he says here see what for what does it profit a man to gain the whole world verse 36 and forfeit his soul what can a man give in return for his soul verse 37 you can't do it but verse 35 whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it now do you see this is not just for people we might think are super

Christians it's whoever right it's not the super Christians who the missionaries who go out with CMS no no not just for them it's not for someone else right my neighbour but not for me right there's no first class second class Christians there's no somebody else here there's not some need to take up their cross and some don't it's not some need to deny themselves self-rule and some don't it's not some need to live for the cause of the gospel and some don't who normal everyday garden variety Christianity is this right losing our life for the sake of Jesus and the gospel there's no getting around it it's the great exchange that's normal Christianity every follower of Jesus every disciple of Jesus every learner of Jesus is called to this all of us are called to this it's wonderful to see it in so many ways around us let me tell you people who don't take the promotion at work so they have more time to be involved in gospel work people who are not out to seek and gain the whole world but actually so generous with their financial support people who choose to teach

RI to the kids in school take Tom off to do that people who open their homes up for growth groups to care for people people who give generously people who meet up with others to show genuine Christian love in our community and care for people people who use their gifts to make our gatherings possible it's fantastic to see notice we lose our lives for a reason right we don't just lose our lives for no point there's a purpose we lose our lives for a reason do you see it there the cause of the gospel the gospel cause is why we lose our life sometimes it might seem hard might seem difficult might feel like giving up I do occasionally let me tell you and yet every time we realise we're losing our life even more acutely it's for the gospel's sake should actually remind us of the future life beyond this age to come again that's normal

Christianity notice how the chain of logic continues verse 38 whoever is ashamed of me and my words in his adulterous and sinful generation of him will the son of man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels notice now even the crowd get to hear and know that Jesus is the son of man king the eternal king of the eternal kingdom the indestructible kingdom of God it's very easy to try and explain away these words of Jesus they sound very extreme very challenging which is why we say we love the word of God we will not be ashamed of God and what he says being ashamed of Jesus words now denial of what he teaches now will mean that

Jesus will deny us be ashamed of us in the future then on that judgment day be gone from me I never knew you for Jesus to hold us at arm's length on that day will be of infinite loss won't it notice how Jesus describes the age that we live in an adulterous age an age that's given to unfaithfulness not faithfulness fidelity to God it's how the prophets of old described faithless Israel of old you read Hosea sometime read Ezekiel 16 sometimes see how graphically God speaks of the faithless people of Israel like a husband treated shamefully by a wayward wife a sinful generation an age in which lives in opposition to the very word of God

[30 : 33] God but notice the future is sure the son of man is coming in glory his rising from the dead guarantees it Jesus doesn't call us to do anything other than what he does himself doesn't seek his own glory doesn't live to gain the praise of men in his generation he denies himself takes up his cross seeking the father's glory and then is rewarded with the father's glory which we will see on that judgment day between the living and the dead those who gave their lives to him will then receive their life their souls eternal life in the kingdom of God but those who are ashamed of him will lose their life be cut off from the glorious future of kingdom of God for all eternity so what is a prophet it's pointless to gain the whole world and forfeit our very soul what can we give there's nothing we can give

God to gain eternal life who is ashamed us or Jesus which leads us to a radical vision doesn't it God leads us to a radical vision which in the end is!

not that radical really it should be clear for us all to see every follower of Jesus is to honour about the cause of the gospel of Jesus that'll be the very heartbeat of those who are saved those who are saved won't be able to help themselves from wanting others to be saved as well we will love love the lost verse 35 whoever loses his sake for Jesus sake and the cause of the gospel will save it this means that every follower of Jesus every disciple of Jesus will give themselves to the cause of the gospel of Jesus and the priority then will be for the cause of the gospel as God enables I think the clearest way to think about this is like that of a war effort really where everyone's united in the country for the cause of defeating evil every person young old male female is united in the effort to overthrow to defeat evil aligning ourselves to do whatever we can to further the cause of righteousness energy is focused at defeating the enemy and the enemy is not us the enemy is

Satan and his kingdom is broken destroyed by the power of the gospel and if we see that clearly we will see that Jesus left us here with a clear task we will align ourselves and our energy with fulfilling this task to take the gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth starting where we are here in St.

Lucia and the way we'll do that is through disciples of Jesus following Jesus who love Jesus love his word love his people and love the lost love the clear focus of the disciples of Jesus is simply this denying ourselves taking up our cross losing our lives for the sake of Jesus and his gospel and unashamedly labouring together in making more and more mature disciples of Jesus so will you pray with me along those lines let's pray our father in heaven thank you that you don't mince your words help us as we're confronted by these challenging truths that we might be those who take up our cross deny ourselves and give ourselves to following Jesus and the cause of his great gospel that he is the king of the kingdom the indestructible kingdom the eternal kingdom please help us to live with

[34 : 51] Jesus Lord and to put aside all earthly desires and worldly flesh and thinking of men as we live in this adulterous generation that we might see your kingdom grow and that you might bless our labours in it help us never to be ashamed of Jesus and never be ashamed of your word and never be ashamed of those who preach it we pray in Jesus name amen