

Mark 9:30-37

³⁰They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." ³²But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. ³³They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?"

³⁴But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. ³⁵Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." ³⁶He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

DON'T GIVE UP. THESE WORDS CAN BE BOTH A PART OF A PRAYER WE SAY, AND A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT WE RECEIVE.

THE BIBLE PROMISES US THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL, GOD LISTENS TO OUR PRAYERS, AND GOD KNOWS OUR WEAKNESSES.

THE NEW LIVING BIBLE TRANSLATION RECORDS THE WORDS OF PSALM 103:13-14, IN THIS WAY:

THE LORD IS LIKE A FATHER TO HIS CHILDREN, TENDER AND COMPASSIONATE TO THOSE WHO FEAR HIM. FOR HE KNOWS HOW WEAK WE ARE; HE REMEMBERS WE ARE ONLY DUST.

THIS IS GOOD NEWS BECAUSE IT GIVES US A REASON TO ASK GOD TO STICK WITH US IN SPITE OF OUR SINFULNESS, WEAK FAITH, OR LACK OF UNDERSTANDING.

IT IS BECAUSE OF SCRIPTURE'S PROMISES OF GOD'S LOVE FOR US AND KNOWLEDGE OF OUR FRAILTIES WE HAVE REASON TO CALL UPON THE LORD.

TODAY'S READING FROM THE GOSPEL OF MARK OFFERS ONE EXAMPLE OF JESUS NOT GIVING UP ON HIS DISCIPLES.

FIRST SOME BACKGROUND MAY BE HELPFUL: NEAR THE END OF MARK CHAPTER 8 JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR THE FIRST TIME.

PETER REBUKES JESUS FOR HIS NEGATIVITY, THEN JESUS REBUKES PETER FOR SETTING HIS MIND ON HUMAN THINGS INSTEAD OF ON GOD.

THEN JESUS AND THE TWELVE TRAVEL TO A MOUNTAIN WHERE HE, ALONG WITH PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN, WALK TO THE TOP.

THERE JESUS IS TRANSFIGURED, AND THE THREE DISCIPLES SEE HIM SPEAKING WITH MOSES AND ELIJAH.

THEY ALSO HEAR THE VOICE OF GOD IDENTIFYING JESUS AS HIS BELOVED SON, WITH WHOM HE IS PLEASED.

MEANWHILE, AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN THE OTHER DISCIPLES TRY, BUT FAIL TO HEAL A BOY WHO IS POSSESSED.

WHEN JESUS HEARS ABOUT THEIR FAILURE HE EXCLAIMED: "YOU FAITHLESS GENERATION, HOW MUCH LONGER MUST I BE AMONG YOU AND PUT UP WITH YOU?"

HE THEN HEALS THE BOY AND MOVES ON WITH THE TWELVE, STOPPING AFTER A WHILE TO GIVE THEM A PRIVATE TEACHING.

THIS BRINGS US TO THE SECOND PREDICTION ABOUT HIS DEATH JESUS MADE TO HIS DISCIPLES, ONLY THIS TIME NONE OF THEM SAY ANYTHING BECAUSE THEY ARE AFRAID.

YES-THEY FEAR WHAT JESUS MEANS BY THIS STATEMENT, AND THEY FEAR TO COMMENT LEST THEY ARE REBUKED LIKE PETER WAS EARLIER.

PERHAPS THEY EVEN FEAR WHERE IT WILL LEAVE THEM IF JESUS DIES LIKE HE PREDICTS.

ANOTHER WAY TO PUT IT IS- THAT THE DISCIPLES FEARED THE WILL OF GOD, WHICH THEY DID NOT COMPREHEND.

BUT THE GOOD NEWS HERE, IS- EVEN THOUGH JESUS HAD BEEN DISAPPOINTED IN THEM, HE DID NOT GIVE UP ON THEM, BUT CONTINUED SOME PRIVATE TEACHING WITH THEM.

CONSIDER JESUS' FAITHFULNESS TO THE TWELVE WHO ARE HIS CLOSEST FOLLOWERS, AND THEREFORE, THE ONES UPON WHOM HE COUNTS TO BE WITH HIM MORE THAN ANY OTHERS.

HE GIVES THEM THE MESSAGE ABOUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN JERUSALEM IN ORDER TO PREPARE THEM.

BUT SADLY, AS WE KNOW, THEY DO NOT REALLY LISTEN TO HIM OR BELIEVE HIS PREDICTION.

NOT LISTENING TO, OR BELIEVING THINGS WE DO NOT WISH TO HEAR IS A COMMON HUMAN RESPONSE TO UNPLEASANT FACTS.

THIS DENIAL ON THE PART OF THE TWELVE TOOK THE FORM OF THEM TURNING THEIR THOUGHTS AWAY FROM JESUS AND ONTO THEMSELVES.

THE BIBLE TELLS US WHILE THEY WALKED BEHIND JESUS ON THE WAY TO CAPERNAUM, THEY BEGAN A QUIET DISCUSSION ON THE TOPIC OF WHO AMONG THEM WAS THE GREATEST.

WE MIGHT IMAGINE THE FACT JESUS TOOK ONLY PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN UP THE MOUNTAIN WITH HIM PLAYED A FACTOR IN THE DISCUSSION.

THERE WAS ALSO JESUS SINGLING SIMON PETER AS BEING BLESSED.

IT IS CERTAINLY POSSIBLE AT LEAST SOME OF THE OTHER DISCIPLES HAD REASONS THEY MIGHT BE THE GREATEST, WE SIMPLY DO NOT KNOW.

BUT WHAT WE DO KNOW IS THAT JESUS OVERHEARD ENOUGH OF THEIR DISCUSSION TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY WERE TALKING ABOUT.

WE ALSO KNOW THEY KNEW THEY WERE WRONG TO TALK AS THEY HAD, BECAUSE THEY REFUSED TO ANSWER JESUS WHEN HE ASKED ABOUT THEIR CONVERSATION.

POOR JESUS, HE WAS ALWAYS CONCERNED ABOUT THEM, FOCUSED ON PREPARING THEM FOR HIS SUFFERING, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION, WHILE THEY OFTEN IGNORED HIS MESSAGE.

INSTEAD THE TWELVE WERE JOCKEYING FOR POSITION IN THE EARTHLY KINGDOM THEY WANTED TO COME, RATHER THAN THE KINGDOM OF GOD JESUS PROMISED WOULD COME.

THIS STORY IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THE WORD OF THE LORD THAT COMES TO US THROUGH THE PROPHET ISAIAH.

ISAIAH 55:7-8 DECLARES: "LET THE WICKED FORSAKE THEIR WAY, AND THE UNRIGHTEOUS THEIR THOUGHTS; LET THEM RETURN TO THE LORD...FOR MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS. AND MY WAYS NOT YOUR WAYS...."

THE TWELVE WERE CERTAINLY FOCUSING THEIR THOUGHTS IN AN UNRIGHTEOUS DIRECTION, AS THEY EXHIBITED A CLUELESS ATTITUDE TOWARDS JESUS' THOUGHTS, AND HIS FATHER'S WAYS.

NOTICE-JESUS' QUESTION WAS MET BY GUILTY SILENCE. SO SURELY IT WOULD NOT SURPRISE US IF HE HAD REBUKED THEM.

NOR WOULD WE BE SURPRISED TO HEAR JESUS SIGHED IN DISAPPOINTMENT, OR EVEN THREW HIS HANDS UP IN EXASPERATION AND WALKED AWAY FROM THEM.

WHAT IS RATHER SURPRISING IS THAT JESUS DID NONE OF THOSE THINGS, HE DID NOT GIVE UP ON THEM.

INSTEAD, HE DEMONSTRATED PATIENCE, LOVE, AND A WILLINGNESS TO KEEP WORKING WITH THEM TO HELP THEM BETTER UNDERSTAND HIM, AND HIS FATHER'S KINGDOM.

THUS THE SAVIOR SOUGHT TO REDIRECT THEIR SELFISH THOUGHTS BACK TOWARDS GOD AND OTHERS.

JESUS TAUGHT THEM A LESSON HE HAD GIVEN BEFORE, AND WOULD REPEAT AGAIN IN DIFFERENT WAYS.

THE LESSON WAS THE FOCUS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT ON GREATNESS, BUT RATHER ON GOODNESS.

SELFISH AMBITION, THE NEED TO BECOME NUMBER ONE, OR TO GET AS CLOSE AS YOU CAN TO THAT POSITION, IS NOT SOMETHING THAT WILL PLEASE GOD, AND THUS IS COUNTERPRODUCTIVE.

THIS MEANS, NEITHER THE FIRST DISCIPLES, NOR CHRISTIANS TODAY SHOULD READ INTO CALLS TO SPECIAL SERVICE, OR GREAT DEEDS DONE ON CHRIST'S BEHALF, AS A SIGN OF FAVORITISM.

REMEMBER, JESUS POINTED OUT TO THE TWELVE THAT A SIMPLE ACT LIKE WELCOMING A CHILD, OR ANYONE WHOM YOU VIEW AS BEING OF A LESSER STATUS THAN YOUR OWN, PLEASES GOD.

THUS HE TAUGHT THAT OUR THOUGHTS OUGHT NOT TO BE ABOUT WHAT GOD IS DOING TO BLESS US, BUT HOW GOD IS USING US TO BLESS OTHERS, AND SERVE HIM, BY SERVING THEM.

THIS IS SOMETHING JESUS NOT ONLY TAUGHT, BUT IT IS ALSO HOW HE LIVED, AND WHY HE DIED ON THE CROSS.

WE CERTAINLY NEED JESUS' MESSAGE AND EXAMPLE, SINCE SERVICE VERSES SELFISHNESS IS AN ONGOING HUMAN STRUGGLE FOUND IN ALL CULTURES AND SOCIETIES.

AN EXAMPLE OF HOW CARING FOR OTHERS CAN ALSO BE HELPFUL TO US IS FOUND IN A STORY WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR OF MANY WESTERN NOVELS, ZANE GREY.

IN ONE OF HIS STORIES ONE INDIAN TRIBE FLEES FROM A STRONGER TRIBE WHO IS RAPIDLY ENCROACHING ON THEIR TERRITORY.

SO THE CHIEF OF THE WEAKER TRIBE BROKE CAMP AND LED HIS PEOPLE AWAY ABOUT MIDNIGHT, IN THE HOPE THEY WOULD PUT ENOUGH DISTANCE BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE OTHER TRIBE, TO BE LEFT ALONE.

DURING THEIR FLIGHT ON THAT MOONLIT, NIGHT THEY CAME UPON A SWOLLEN CREEK WITH SWIFTLY FLOWING WATER, WHICH WAS ABOUT KNEE-DEEP.

THE CHIEF ORDERED EVERYONE WHO WAS NOT ALREADY SO BURDENED WITH THE THINGS THEY NEEDED IN ORDER TO SURVIVE, TO PICK UP A CHILD, OR A SICK, OR ELDERLY PERSON TO CARRY ACROSS THE CREEK.

UNFORTUNATELY A FEW YOUNG AND HEALTHY MEMBERS THOUGHT ONLY OF THEMSELVES, AND SO THEY PLUNGED UNBURDENED INTO THE CURRENT.

BUT THE WATER WAS SO STRONG IT SWEEPED THEM OFF THEIR FEET AND CARRIED THEM AWAY.

HOWEVER, ALL THOSE WHO WERE CARRYING THE EXTRA WEIGHT OF OTHER PEOPLE WERE ABLE TO CROSS THE WATER SAFELY.

THUS BY CARING FOR OTHERS THEY ALSO SAVED THEMSELVES.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY, PUT INTO CHRISTIAN, TERMS IS THAT IF WE ONLY THINK OF OURSELVES, THE FORCES OF SOCIETY WE WILL INEVITABLY CARRY US AWAY FROM GOD.

THIS WAS ONE OF THE THINGS JESUS WAS TRYING TEACH THE DISCIPLES.

WE KNOW, OF COURSE, NONE OF THE DISCIPLES REALLY TOOK HIS WORDS TO HEART.

NONE OF THEM WERE YET ON BOARD WITH GOD'S WAY OF DOING THINGS OR CHRIST'S TEACHINGS.

AND YET, EVEN KNOWING THIS JESUS DID NOT GIVE UP ON THEM, BUT CONTINUED TO INSTRUCT AND DIRECT THEM.

THEREFORE, WE CAN TRUST THE LORD WILL NOT GIVE UP ON US EITHER.

NOW LET US TURN TO GOD'S CALL FOR US TO NOT GIVE UP ON HIM.

THE GOSPEL STORY OFFERS US THE EXAMPLE OF THE DISCIPLES BEING AFRAID AND CONFUSED BY JESUS' STATEMENTS, AND YET FOLLOWING HIM ANYWAY.

OVER AND OVER AGAIN, WE HEAR THROUGHOUT THE FOUR GOSPELS, HOW THE DISCIPLES CONTINUED TO FOLLOW JESUS, EVEN AFTER HE SPOKE OR ACTED IN WAYS THAT DID NOT FIT IN WITH THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE MESSIAH.

IN FACT, THEY DID NOT GIVE UP ON JESUS UNTIL HE WAS ARRESTED AND THEY FLED IN FEAR.

WELL PETER FOLLOWED AT A DISTANCE, BUT HE SOON DENIED HE EVEN KNEW JESUS.

BUT STILL, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF JUDAS, WHILE JESUS' DISCIPLES RAN AWAY, THEY DID NOT RUN FAR.

INDEED THEY ALL STAYED IN JERUSALEM, EVEN WHEN THE MOST SENSIBLE THING FOR THEM TO DO, ESPECIALLY ONCE PILATE CONDEMNED JESUS TO DEATH, WAS FOR THEM TO LEAVE.

YES, WHILE JESUS WAS WALKING TOWARDS CALVARY, THEY SHOULD HAVE LEFT THE CITY AND HEADED HOME, AND FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT HIM.

AND YET, THEY DID NOT DO THE SENSIBLE OR SAFE THING, BUT RATHER STAYED CLOSED BY, AND ONE OF THE MEN EVEN STOOD WITH THE WOMEN AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS.

SO LET US LEARN FROM THEIR EXAMPLE, AS WELL AS THE MESSAGE TO PERSEVERE IN FAITH, WHICH IS FOUND THROUGH OUT THE NEW TESTAMENT.

OVER AND OVER AGAIN CHRISTIANS ARE ENCOURAGED TO NOT GIVE UP, BUT TO PRAY, TO RUN THE RACE, TO FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH, AND KEEP LOOKING TO JESUS.

THIS MESSAGE IS SENT TO THOSE WHO ARE: STRUGGLING TO HOLD ON TO FAITH AND TO TRUST IN GOD.

IT GOES OUT ALSO TO THOSE WHO ARE ANGRY AT GOD'S ACTIONS, OR APPARENT INACTION.

THOSE CONFUSED BY PERSECUTION OR OTHER SUFFERING, FRIGHTENED OF DYING, AND THOSE HAVING TROUBLE UNDERSTANDING ARE ALSO CALLED TO NOT GIVE UP.

AND EVEN IF ALL ONE HAS TO CLING TO IS A SINGLE STRAND OF FAITH, OR A TINY SPARK NESTLED DEEP WITHIN, THAT IS MORE THAN ENOUGH FOR GOD TO WORK WITH.

THE CLOSING SONG WE SING WEEKLY REMINDS US IN ITS OWN WAY TO NOT GIVE UP, FOR IT SAYS: "GO WITH GOD, GO WITH GOD, AS YOU LEAVE THIS PLACE GO WITH GOD."

LET US NOT JUST SING IT- BUT ALSO DO IT. AMEN

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