

## **FOLLOWED**

Mark 8:31-9:1

Approximately one year before His crucifixion, Jesus began to prepare His disciples for what was going to happen at the next Passover celebration in Jerusalem.

After Jesus fed the five thousand people he walked on the sea and calmed the storm. When He arrived at the other side of the lake, many people came to Him that needed healing and those who just touched His garment were healed. He was challenged by the Jewish leaders about the noncompliance of Jesus' disciples with traditional ceremonies and He taught the people about what was important and what was not. He left the region and went to Tyre (Mediterranean Sea coast) and healed the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman. He then went to Decapolis (east side of the Jordan) and He heal the man who was deaf and could not speak. While in that area He fed a large crowd of four thousand people and immediately left to go to Dalmanutha (on the west side of the Sea of Galilee). Once again, the Pharisees showed up and even after all that had been done, they wanted Jesus to show them a sign from heaven. This makes you wonder, "what does it take for some people to believe?" Anyone who was observant (and especially those familiar with Old Testament prophecies) should have been able to figure out Who Jesus was.

There were a lot of speculations about Who Jesus was during that time with some saying He was John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets of the Old Testament, or maybe the Messiah. Jesus told them that the kind of signs they were wanting to see would not be given to them. Matthew added that Jesus told them to check out the story of Jonah if they wanted a sign. They then return to the boat and left to go back to the east side of the sea.

As they were going across the lake, Jesus gave them a warning to be on guard regarding the yeast or leaven of the Pharisee and Sadducees. The doctrines of these groups were the extremes of the Jewish religion of that day. The Pharisees were the super fundamentalists while the Sadducees were the ultra-liberal or worldly sect of the Jewish religion. The teaching of the Pharisees was to dot every "I" and cross every "T" and keep every rule and work hard in carrying out the rituals and ceremonies of the religion as a means of pleasing God. However, they were not especially concerned with applications of the principles to their everyday relationships. The Sadducees discounted anything and everything spiritual and lived for the pleasure of the moment with little or no regard to being answerable to God and they blended in quite well with the Romans or anyone else. The advice of Jesus was to "watch out!" In other words, "Do not buy into either of these philosophies and approaches to life."

After all this whirlwind of activity and change, Jesus knew that these events signaled a new phase in His ministry in which the challenges and dangers to Him and His disciples would intensify. Even though His disciples had been close to Jesus for more than two years, they were still having difficulty in thinking about and seeing things in spiritual terms rather than physical terms. When Jesus mentioned the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they immediately thought about having only one loaf of bread with them for their trip across the lake rather than realizing it was a metaphor for philosophies that people embrace. It is possible to be participating in an event and not really know what is happening.

There are no coincidences! Jesus had just given the disciples a stern rebuke about "seeing but not perceiving" and "hearing but not understanding." As soon as they got to Bethsaida a blind man was brought to him. Jesus took him aside for some one-on-one, hands-on ministry. He then quizzed the man about what he could see. He was (at that point) not seeing

clearly. He then did some additional hands-on ministry and the man could see clearly when he looked intently. He encouraged the man to not tell anyone what had happened. What does this healing event mean? This miracle is a parable or picture of what Jesus was doing with the disciples. They were unable to see.

Jesus took them aside for personal interactive ministry and he quizzed about their understanding. When they could not see clearly, then He did more hands-on teaching. It was still the responsibility of the disciples to look intently before they could see clearly. The conversation in the boat and the two-step healing miracle were teaching opportunities with the intent of getting the disciples ready for the reality of the crucifixion.

Jesus and the disciples (along with the ever-present crowd) headed north from Bethsaida to go to various town in the Caesarea Philippi region which was located at the base of Mount Hermon in northern Israel. It was as they were going that Jesus brought up the subject of what various people were saying about Him.

Are we aware of what the present-day world is saying about Jesus? Do we get the message that is being sent by our government that says we cannot have prayer or teach Biblical truth in publicly sponsored programs such as schools? Do we hear the media people and realize what they are saying about who Jesus is when they ridicule the church that Jesus is building? Jesus asked His disciples, "Do you know what the world is saying?" The world did not know who Jesus was. They were saying John the Baptist, Elijah, a prophet – but they were wrong. The world is usually wrong and if we base our values on what the world says, then we will not recognize the true worth of God's way. Jesus thought it was important for His disciples to have clear thinking about Him (the promised Messiah) because in about twelve months they would not have time to "figure it out."

### Get Behind – 8:31-33

<sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> 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." Mark 8:31–33 (ESV)

Jesus began to share with His disciples about what was to come regarding His sacrifice. This new information was not pleasing to hear. Suffering, being rejected, dying are all negative things and we don't want to face the negatives in life. We don't want to have to consider paying the price for the things of value. The price of eternal life for every person that will accept it is more costly than we can pay and what Jesus is describing is the way He would pay the price for us.

Peter was still thinking as those in the world system think. The world system teaches wrong beliefs and has distorted values. The definition of "winning" in the world's way of thinking is to conquer the opponent. It is an "I win, you lose" mind set. The requirements for winning have no boundaries – all is fair. We see it being played out in the "justice" system in that truth seems to play no part in the process – only winning is important. The result of such a system is that everything is eventually destroyed.

Peter thought that he might find a better way and he was ready to protect Jesus from the suffering, rejection and death He had just described. Jesus had already been presented with alternatives when He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. The way of the world is a product of the same system that caused the original problem. It is just common sense that we cannot solve our present-day problems with the same way of thinking that created the problems. In the same way, the way of the world can never save us from the problems that the way of the

world created. The true answer to the question of "Who is Jesus?" was given to Peter by God and it was different from what those in the world had decided. In the same way we need to know God's solution to problems and not depend on the opinion of the world or the religious crowd.

### Follow Me – 8:34-38

<sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> For what can a man give in return for his soul? <sup>38</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of 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." Mark 8:34–38 (ESV)

As mentioned earlier, there were other people going along with Jesus and His disciples. After the private teaching conversation with His disciples regarding His death, Jesus called for those in the crowd (as well as His disciples) to listen as He taught them what those who followed Him could expect in their lives.

Sometimes we get the idea that denying self is to not have anything material. This is simply denying things to self. That kind of self-denial can be very self-serving and self-seeking. It is similar to the Pharisee who prayed, "I fast twice during the week, I give to the poor, I, I, I." What Jesus meant was that we are to say "No" to self-love, to self-seeking, and to self-assertion. Jesus may have been thinking about the motive of Simon Peter in saying "Not so, Lord." Was Simon just trying to be a hero or just wanted to have his own way in what Jesus was going to do?

The alternative is to put self to death. This is a choice we make. Just as Jesus made the choice to go to the Cross, we must voluntarily take up our instrument of "death to self" and follow the example of Jesus. That which may seem like "losing" by the world's evaluation is the way to eternal life. The benefits may not be seen in this life except by faith. But our faithfulness is what pleases God and, in the Judgment, will be rewarded.

We started talking about identity. With whom do we identify? Another way to ask that question is to consider "What are our priorities?" Here's our chance to choose. If we could have all the world's possessions versus eternal life with God, the best choice is eternal life. All the world's possessions would not compensate for a life lived in pursuit of soul-destroying goals.

We cannot measure success in the same terms the world uses. Success is measured by the progress we make toward the correct goals in life. If our goal is to be as Jesus, then the material things do not even enter into the "success equation."

Our Christian walk should be one that takes us closer and closer to Jesus. It should cause us to be conformed to His image – to be like Him. Our walk and our destination are something we must resolve to do and as we pass decision points along the way, we must make choices in accordance with the destination of our resolve. We cannot make that resolve unless we know who Jesus is and grasp the significance of what God was doing in Jesus. We could argue that the opposite of being ashamed of Christ is to be conformed to His character and to live our lives as an expression of the Life of Christ. This is the essence of our salvation. As Paul stated in Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"

Jesus had just described the price that He was going to pay to secure redemption for humanity. He now told His followers the price that they must pay to experience the benefits of that redemption. Yes, there is a price to pay. That price is expressed by Jesus in terms of taking up our cross and following Him. The price is perhaps better described as an exchange that

involves putting the old nature to death and taking on the new nature that is Christ Himself. It involves a transformation and reevaluation of what is valuable in life and what is worth having. It is giving up everything that you have in order to have the most valuable asset in the universe. It is really the best deal you will ever make; we exchange our poverty for His riches, our wretchedness for His righteousness, our guilt for His forgiveness, our death for His life, our hell for His heaven, and our misery for His majesty. How can we say “No” to such a great salvation!

#### See His Power – 9:1

<sup>1</sup> 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.” Mark 9:1 (ESV)

Jesus had just told them about some really difficult things that were going to happen approximately a year from then. There were some brief mentions of positive outcomes such as “the Son of Man would rise again” and “the Son of Man would return in His glory.” However, there was also a call for faithful commitment and the need to be transformed and become more like Jesus by “taking up their cross.” Then Jesus returned to this theme with a statement regarding some of them (those in the crowd and His disciples) would “see” (recognize the reality of) the kingdom of God after it would come with power.

Some have said that this statement was a reference to the transfiguration that happened six days later. Others look to the events on the Day of Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the fulfillment of this, while some think that this was clearly a reference to what happened in A.D. 70 when as Matthew Henry commented: “the kingdom of the Messiah shall be set up in the world by the utter destruction of the Jewish polity, which stood in the way of it; this was the restoring of the kingdom of God among men, which had been in a manner lost by the woeful degeneracy both of Jews and Gentiles.”

Further comments by Matthew Henry adds: “That it would come while some now present were alive; ‘There are some standing here, that shall not taste of death, till they see it;’ this speaks the same with Mt 24:34, ‘This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.’ Those that were standing here with Christ, should see it, when the others could not discern it to be the kingdom of God, for it came not with observation.”

It is important to know Who we are following and what the outcome and final disposition will be for us. God is eternal, He is all powerful, He is all knowing, and His basic most fundamental essence is that of pure love. The benefits of His salvation are available to us as we draw near to Him and abide in His presence in His kingdom.