

Group Study Outline

Aim for this study ...

This passage is 'all application'. But ensure first that people really understand the **this-world/next-world contrast**. If that is grasped clearly, you will have a far better, less jargony, more specific/practical discussion than otherwise!

LAUNCHING

What kind of things in this world do people chase after? Why?
Which of those things are just as much what Christians chase after? Why?

QUESTIONS

READ Mark 8:31-9:1

Why do you think Jesus only now 'begins' to teach something? Why now?
What is new about what he is teaching now?
What is it about his teaching here that Peter finds so offensive?
What is it about Peter's rebuke that Jesus finds so offensive?
In what way does Jesus say that Peter is being Satanic?

Re-READ 35-36

When and where do we 'save' and 'lose' our life?
How does this relate to 'the things of God/the things of man' in verse 33?
Can you give an example of someone losing his life in this world 'for the gospel'?
In what way is Jesus doing what these verses describe?

Re-READ 37

What does **Psalms 49:7-9, 15** tell me to help me understand Mark 8:37?
How does that make more sense of what Jesus came to do?

How does the 'then' and the 'now' of verse 38 help us understand this section?
What are the only two options that Jesus is presenting?
Can I not gain at least some of this world and save my life in the next? (!)

CONCLUSION / APPLICATION

In what ways do I try to save my life in this world, even as a Christian?
In what ways do I lose my life in this world for Jesus and the gospel's sake?
What might it mean to say that the world is crucified to me, and I to the world (cf Galatians 6:14)? Is this similar to what it means to 'take up your cross'?

In the light of the rest of this passage, what do you think it looks like to be ashamed of Jesus and his words in this adulterous and sinful generation?
(By the way, why do you think it also includes the phrase 'and my words'?)

What will motivate me to lose my life in this world for Jesus' sake?
Pray for one another to be like Jesus in a world that is so attractive to us!

Mark 8:31-9:1

Mark at a glance

When we read Mark's Gospel, we are listening to Mark preaching the gospel: he's not merely telling us a story, but aiming to persuade us about who Jesus is and what he came to do ... so that we respond to Jesus accordingly.

Mark 1:1 sets up the whole book: 'the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' It is a story about some good news, and the news concerns Jesus ... who is the Christ (the anointed king promised in the OT) and the Son of God (another OT kingly title showing a unique relationship to God the Father).

This opening statement is reflected in the two halves of the book. The first half (1:1-8:29) begins with a declaration from the heavens about Jesus' identity (at his baptism) and ends with someone (Peter) realising that Jesus is the Christ. The second half (8:30-end) begins with an early declaration from the heavens about Jesus' identity (at the transfiguration) and ends with someone (a Roman soldier) realising that Jesus is the Son of God.

In broad terms, the first half of the book concentrates on who Jesus is, with bold demonstrations of his awesome authority over everything. And then at 8:31, Jesus begins to teach that he must suffer and die, so the storyline focuses on Jesus' march towards his death, to give his life as a ransom for many.

Theme Sentence for 8:31-9:1

Jesus lives not for this world, but for the next; he wants us to share his priority.

How this passage fits in

It has taken a miracle for the disciples to come to 'see' who Jesus is. They had eyes but did not see (8:18), failing to understand (8:21) because of their hardened hearts (8:17). And just as Jesus opens the eyes of the blind man (in the strange incident in 8:22-26), so he does the same for his disciples, so they reach better conclusions than 'others' in 8:28. But this passage shows they still only half see ... they are like the blind man saying 'I see men, but they look like trees walking' (8:24). The disciples see Jesus, but he doesn't look like the Christ they were expecting, as Peter their spokesman is quick to blurt out (32).

Jesus immediately 'began to teach' the next important lesson, in a section which continues to 10:45, and thence to the cross itself: with three predictions of the cross (8:31; 9:31f; 10:33f), he now explains what sort of a Christ he is. The strong rebuke of Peter (33) indicates how serious it is to misunderstand ...

- that Jesus' concern is with saving us *from* this world and *for* the next
- that Jesus the Christ achieves his kingdom *in a weak and unpopular way*.

Jesus is working towards his next-worldly kingdom rather than seeking what this world has to offer; he will suffer and die since that is the only way to accomplish the redemption of his people for this next-worldly kingdom.

Commentary

- 8:31 It is striking that Jesus only now begins to teach something to his disciples. Presumably they needed to be clear that he is 'the Christ' before he can begin to teach them what 'the Christ' has come to do. (Without the declaration of 8:29, the teaching that he now gives would not have the same relevance and urgency.)

This is the first of three increasingly detailed predictions of the cross (cf 9:31, 10:33-34), and the start of a section of teaching that will climax with the pregnant-with-meaning 10:45 (before the story of the only other healed blind man in Mark [10:46-52] after which Jesus goes [11:1] to the death he's explained).

- 32 In simple terms, Peter's rebuke is a 'No, Lord'. How contradictory to presume to tell the 'Lord' that he shouldn't do something!

- 33 The first-century Jew expected that the Messiah would arrive in victory to gather 'the righteous' and to destroy his enemies. In many ways, their view of the Messiah's coming was almost identical to what we expect at the Second Coming. Imagine someone coming along and teaching that when Jesus comes back, it won't mean judgment, Satan's rule ended, death destroyed and endless celebrations. Instead, Jesus will be defeated and those who stand against him will kill him in the most degrading way they can devise. This is very shocking teaching!

So this passage is usually explained as the disciples misunderstanding how Jesus will achieve what he came to do – not by victorious military conquest, but by suffering and death.

In fact, their misunderstanding is far more profound. They not only misunderstand how he will achieve it, they also misunderstand what 'it' is! They misunderstand what Jesus came to achieve. To put it in terms of **a this-world / next-world contrast**: Jesus is working towards a heavenly kingdom and rescuing people for that, whilst his disciples are thinking entirely in terms of a kingdom in this world which is why it makes no sense to say that the king of that kingdom can be killed. But Jesus is teaching that he must die because that is the only way he can get people into that next worldly kingdom to be with him forever. The thought of a next-worldly, forever-kingdom is far from Peter's mind: he is entirely focused on this world. And of course that is to be like Satan (who wants us never to consider the consequences of our actions in this world, or anything to do with the next-worldly kingdom of Jesus).

- 34 So what does it mean to follow this Jesus? It means to live for the next world. 'Denying self' means treating every pleasure, every achievement, every conquest, everything that we would consider as something that marks us out ... to treat all of that 'as rubbish' (Philippians 3:7-11). To become a disciple of Jesus means that the world is crucified to me, and me to the world (Galatians 6:14).

- 35-36 The clearest way to understand what these verses are really saying is to insert the phrases 'in this world' or 'in the next world'. Without such phrases, the verses make no sense. So ... 'whoever would save his life in this world will lose it in the next, but whoever loses his life for me and the gospel's in this world will save it in the next.' It's all about losing my life in this world for the sake of Jesus and the gospel. It's not doing this *in addition to* living my own life in this world, but *instead of* seeking what I want.

Why would you do that?

Because life in the next world is incomparably more important than life in this world. You can gain the whole of everything this world can offer, but it is of no 'profit' (36) if you lose your life in the next world.

- 37 However much of this world's belongings or pleasures I might have, those things cannot buy my soul. Psalm 49:7-9, 15 give an interesting commentary on this ... and they also introduce the idea of 'ransom', which lies behind this section of teaching all the way to 10:45. What can a man give to save his soul? what is the price of the required ransom? The price is so costly that God himself must do the ransoming, paying for our salvation at the price of the Christ who came (as Peter could not understand) not to be served but to serve by giving his life. (Of course, Peter later came to 'see everything clearly' [8:25] when he wrote that exiles like us were 'ransomed ... by the precious blood of Christ' [1 Peter 1:18-19] for our heavenly home).

- 38 When Jesus returns in glory at the final judgment, he will be ashamed of those who have not lived like that, who have not lived for him whilst they are in this world. 'Ashamed' means not 'a bit embarrassed about' but 'disowned'.

So, the main point is that we are to live for the next world whilst we are in this world. Of course, that is exactly what Jesus did (as we'll see that he did do for the rest of the gospel). He didn't seek glory and greatness. He turned away from popularity and crowds and adulation. He chose the path of apparent weakness. He chose the cross. Why? Because the next world is far more important than this world

- 9:1 'Kingdom of God' is better translated 'Reign of God' – not so much a geographical place as the dynamic, visible state of God ruling. Jesus is saying that some of his audience are going to get a chance to see that. Obviously, such visible-to-all power will only really come when Jesus returns, so some have (wrongly!) said that Jesus was mistaken: he (and his disciples) thought his second coming would happen within a generation, but it didn't! The simpler understanding is that 9:2f links this verse with the events 6 days later. 'Some' of the disciples were given a glimpse that Jesus is the glorious, other-worldly king through whom God will exercise his powerful reign. The events in the rest of the gospel may cast doubt on that, but Peter et al. know the truth!