

‘Afraid To Ask’

In our studies in Mark’s gospel we have paid attention to the care the Lord took to teach and prepare His disciples for their apostolic ministry. We have noticed how the Lord’s lessons were not always received and understood, and sometimes had to be repeated. This is one of those occasions. Let us not be too critical of the disciples. Often the Lord has to repeat our lessons, too.

Christ’s death is the heart of the gospel

The looming suffering and death of the Saviour must be raised again. We note how for His disciples’ comfort the Lord includes mention of His resurrection in all talk of His death. Yet, Christ’s death is the big subject that must be faced. This is still true. Whatever our religion we must deal with the fact that God, in the person of Jesus Christ, came to earth, suffered and died. The substitutionary death of Christ is the heart of the gospel.

Turning to Jerusalem

The Lord is turning His attention and His feet to Jerusalem. His arrest being imminent and certain is represented as if it is already done. He will be killed and shall rise again the third day. Words could not be clearer. However, the disciples’ old prejudices still remain. Mark tells us, ‘they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him’.

Afraid to Ask

Again, the disciples cannot reconcile their long held assumptions about the Messiah’s kingdom with the words of Jesus. They do not doubt He is the Son of God, but suffering and death just do not register in their future plans. Every demonstration of the Lord’s miraculous power, the positive reaction of admiring crowds, the disciples’ nationalistic and religious expectations from prophecy, all contradict this talk of dying. Moreover, the Lord’s sharp reaction to Peter’s protest on a previous occasion leaves none of them willing to press Him for an explanation.

Same truth by another path

Then we see the wisdom of the Lord in not pressing the point but addressing His disciples’ confusion by another route. They would learn soon enough of the suffering to come. For now, as they travel together the disciples preoccupy themselves with discussion about their own personal ambitions of greatness.

True greatness

Arriving back in Capernaum the Master challenges them about their topic of conversation on the road. Nobody speaks. The Lord takes a child and sets him in the midst of them all. Not only was their concept of a physical and political kingdom at fault, their aspirations for personal greatness were also too worldly and base. Advancement in Christ’s kingdom is gained not by self-promotion but by self-sacrifice. Greatness is measured by service and in helping the weak, not in being served.

Gentle Jesus

The care and tenderness of the Lord should not be overlooked. His affection towards the child and His gentleness with His erring disciples both speak well of our Friend. Let us never think the Lord is being unjustly harsh with us in the experiences of providence. There is always a tender care and compassion in the Lord’s dealings with His people and we shall never be tried above what we are able to bear. My trial is a measure of His strength.

Christian service

Serving the Saviour is serving the spiritual body of Christ; it is serving, respecting, receiving and welcoming the lowliest and neediest believer for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. Gospel ministry, the disciples would learn, is not about personal reputation, status and accolades. It is about sacrifice, humility and the preferment of others. This is the true measure of greatness. Welcoming a fellow believer of the lowliest condition, is receiving Christ Himself, and serving Christ is no less than receiving God the Father. Nor shall we be impoverished by such service. Recompense is beyond measure. Those who receive Christ receive all the covenant blessings of God in Christ.