

Afraid to Ask

Following Jesus to the Cross: Part 5
Mark 9:30-32 (Mt.17:14-23, Lk.9:37-45) 9/6/2019

What should you do when other people have control over some area of your life to your detriment? That can be the worst possible punishment from God, and yet, when it happens to us, we can have hope because of what this passage teaches.

Summary: Jesus again taught his disciples about his suffering, this time adding that he would be delivered into the hands of men, the worst of all possible punishments. This implies his followers' suffering as well, which causes blindness and deafness because we are afraid of suffering. And also because we are focused on self-exaltation, so when Jesus calls us to lowliness, we can't understand. When you are handed over to men, remember that it is by the hand of God.

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Mark 9:30 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because 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." 32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

Jesus Thrown to the Humans

We left off last time with Jesus driving a demon out of the boy after the disciples had failed. They are way up north of Israel, the farthest Jesus ever went from Jerusalem, and now it's time to begin his journey down to Jerusalem for his appointment with the cross. And so in today's passage we find him sneaking around in Galilee.

Background

30 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because he was teaching his disciples.

So he's sneaking through there, trying to go unnoticed. This is the last mention of Galilee until after the resurrection. Jesus is done with Galilee. They had their chance and blew it. From now until he gets to Jerusalem will be a traveling classroom where the disciples get their final semester of training. And you'll never guess what the topic is.

Delivered into the Hands of Men

31 ... 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."

Here we go with that again. Jesus keeps¹ bringing that up, and each time he adds something new. What's new here is the part about being **delivered² into the hands of men (v.31)**.

The Worst Punishment

Of all the possible punishments God gives, being delivered over to the hands of men is the worst. When God lets human beings mete out your punishment— Remember when David displeased God with the census and God told him, “Pick your punishment, David. Three years of famine, three months of fleeing from your enemies, or three days of plague—your choice. David’s answer is, “*Anything* but #2.”

2 Samuel 24:14 David said ... “Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.”

Being turned over to the mercy of human beings is a horrible fate because human beings, once they feel justified in hurting you, there are no restraints. It turns into a mob mentality, conscience disappears, and it’s a feeding frenzy—no mercy.

And it’s more painful than other suffering because of the hatred behind it—people hurting you on purpose because they hate you. You’ll notice when you read the biblical accounts of the crucifixion, they talk just as much about the spitting and the mocking as they do about the physical torture. That hatred makes the suffering so much worse. Of all the hardships I’ve faced in life, I can tell you nothing has been as painful as when God has given me over to the hands of my enemies. There are layers of anguish that come from that that are hard to even put into words. And, of course, in Jesus’ case the anguish was infinitely worse because of how much Jesus loved those people who were mocking him.

And Jesus wants his disciples to know that’s what’s coming. Jesus won’t get the three options David got. He just gives him the one that David said, “Definitely not that one.” Jesus will be thrown to a pack of vicious, hateful men insane with jealousy. And there will be no restraints. The twelve legions of angels protecting Jesus will be told to stand down. When Jesus cries out to the Father to let the cup pass from him the answer will be no. Everyone will forsake him and God will allow Jesus’ enemies to do their worst. A terrifying prophecy.

Implies Our Suffering

And if you think back to the first time Jesus spoke of his upcoming suffering, you’ll remember that if Christ must suffer, so must those who follow him.

So whenever Jesus speaks of his rejection and suffering and death, included in that is our suffering and rejection and death.

So Jesus explains all that, and what’s their response?

¹ Commentators often say there are three occasions in Mark where Jesus tells them of his coming suffering and death, this being the second. But that overlooks the 9:9-13, where Jesus spoke of his suffering and death to the inner three after the Transfiguration.

² The NIV translates this word “betrayed” here, but the word simply means to be delivered over to the control of those who want to capture or harm you. The idea of betrayal is not part of the meaning of the word—it only comes from the context in cases where delivering someone over to enemies is done through a betrayal. There is nothing in this context to suggest that. In fact, just the opposite. If the one handing Jesus over to men were a man, it wouldn’t make sense, because Jesus would have to already be in the hands of men prior to the handing over. The NT speaks of Jesus being handed over multiple times. In Mark 14:10 Judas delivered him to the Jewish leaders, in Mark 15:1, the leaders deliver him over to Pilate, in Acts 13:12 the people of Israel as a whole delivered him up, and in Mark 15:15 Pilate delivered him over to the executioners. But before any of those people could hand Jesus over to someone else, God had to hand Jesus over to them.

Acts 2:23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge

This is not the same word for delivering over as in all the passages above, but it is a synonym and in this context has the same meaning. The word in all the previous passages *paradidomi*, and this word is *ekdotos*. In the OT, the word is most often used to describe something God does. And that is clearly what we see here because human beings are the ones to whom he is being given.

Disciples Don't Understand

32 But they did not understand what he meant

The disciples are now 0 for 3 in their ability to get this. The more clearly Jesus says it, the more confused they get. I am red/green colorblind. That means I can see most colors, but have trouble making out those two shades. The disciples were suffering-blind. Everything else Jesus said they could see just fine, but they went blind and deaf whenever Jesus talked about suffering.

Willfully Blind

And it was a willing blindness and deafness. If they wanted to understand, all they would have had to do is ask, but they don't.

32 they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

We saw the same thing at the transfiguration. They had two questions—what about Elijah, and what does “rising from the dead” mean? They asked the Elijah question but not the question about Jesus dying and rising. They're afraid to ask about that. That catches our attention because it's different from what we've seen previously in the book. Up to now, the main difference between the crowds and the disciples was whenever Jesus said something hard, the crowds went away confused but the disciples asked Jesus what it meant. But not on this topic because they are afraid of the answer. They didn't fully understand what Jesus meant, but they understood enough to know they didn't want to understand any more.

32 they were afraid to ask him about it.

Any time God starts talking to us about suffering, our ears tend to clog up and we get real hard of hearing because we're scared of death of suffering. We don't want to hear it.

That part is easy enough to understand—no one wants to suffer, but there's more to it than that. There's a deeper reason why the disciples go so tone deaf to Jesus whenever he starts talking about this. And Mark's going to show us why. He's not going to *tell* us why, because Mark writes with a paintbrush instead of a pen—he likes to show more than tell.

Three times Jesus teaches the 12 about his suffering, and all three times, guess what Mark places in the very next paragraph? The first time Jesus brought it up (in ch.8), one of them rebuked Jesus. He brings it up again here in ch.9 and they get into an argument about who is greatest. In ch.10 he'll bring it up again. How will they respond there?

Mark 10:33 "... the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34 who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise." 35 Then James and John ... came to him. "Teacher," ... 37 Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

It's the same thing every time. Jesus says, “I'm going to suffer,” and they say, “Um, yeah, whatever—by the way, aren't we great?”

This is not to suggest they had that response immediately. Time elapsed between Jesus' talking about his suffering and their focus on their own greatness. But the point Mark is making by his arrangement of the material is very clear. He's showing us why they were unable to understand. There was a disease in their hearts causing this selective blindness and deafness, and Mark paints us a picture (or shows us an x-ray) of that disease by the way he arranges the material.

And even if you're not trained in reading x-rays, the disease isn't hard to spot. What is it? Self-exaltation. The first time Peter exalted himself above Jesus and rebuked him. The second time they all try to exalt themselves above one another arguing about who is greatest. And the third time the sons of thunder are jockeying for the top two spots in the kingdom. Self-exaltation, self-exaltation, and self-

exaltation. And what did Jesus teach them was the proper response to his instruction about suffering the very first time he brought it up? Self-denial.

Mark 8:31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

Then Peter and Jesus rebuke each other, then this: **34 "If anyone would follow me, he must deny himself** The teaching about Jesus' suffering calls for self-denial. One reason Jesus died was to help us stop living for ourselves.

2 Corinthians 5:15 [Christ] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Not living for yourself is another way of saying, "deny yourself." So you can see how if your life is oriented in the direction of self-exaltation, you'll go deaf and blind every time Jesus tries to teach you something that implies self-denial, because self-denial and self-exaltation are like oil and water. If I'm climbing the ladder of earthly greatness, the moment you talk to me about suffering and lowliness, my brain is going to go to a blue screen. Internal server error. System shutdown. Does not compute.

When Mark keeps on showing us the disciples' confusion over and over, the point isn't for us to say, "Wow, Jesus sure did pick some dummkopfs as disciples." The point is to show us how different Jesus' attitude is from the natural, human attitude. The disciples' attitude was the normal, human way of thinking that we all have. We all turn into dummkopfs when God tries to tell us that the path he has for us right now is a path of lowliness—don't we? "God, show me your will!" "My will is for you to go and do that." "What?? I don't get it. I can't make out what you're saying. Why are you being silent God? I'm praying for guidance, why don't you show me what I should do?" "I want you to go do that hard thing." "What??!! You're breaking up God. Hello? Hello? God, why won't you speak to me?"

Whenever God calls us to do something that hinders our quest for earthly greatness—humbling yourself, forgiving someone who really hurt you, going to a person to reconcile a broken relationship, giving up comfort or money or security to go do something that has no guarantees—anything that's going to put you in a position of lowliness, we just naturally get really confused. Why? Because if you eliminate the right answer to a question, trying to figure out another answer is really confusing—no matter how easy the question is. If you're working on 2+2, but you rule out 4 as a possibility, it suddenly becomes an incredibly complicated problem that leaves you stumped. When you're seeking human greatness, suffering and humiliation are eliminated as possibilities.

Jesus is going to give us the remedy in the next passage, but for now, let's just apply Mark's x-ray machine to our own hearts. Instead of reading this and thinking, *boy those guys were morons*, we would do better to ask, *Is there anything the Lord wants to teach me right now that he can't teach me because of some attitude in my heart that's blocking it?* We would do well to take a little time and search our hearts—ask God to search your heart and reveal any attitude that is causing deafness whenever God wants to teach you certain lessons.

Trust God When You Are Delivered Over

One other thought I'd like to leave you with. Regarding this issue of being given over into the hands of men. It's good for us to remember that whenever that happens, it's God's doing. He's the one who gives you over.

There are plenty of people who would like to control your fate. You might have enemies who are actively trying to destroy your life, or it may just be people around you who want to use you or manipulate you in some way for their agenda. Or maybe you're just in the way of their agenda, and they want to run over you.

Whenever you encounter someone like that, one of two things is going to happen. Either God will give you over to their power and they will win, or he won't give you over, and you'll be safe. Why would

God give you over? In some cases it's chastisement for sin, like it would have been for David in 2 Samuel 24. In other cases it's a result of you obeying God, like it was for David before he became king. It might be for the purpose of testing your faith or some other purpose. But the important thing is to realize that whatever the reason, it's all from God. When we are given over to the hands of men, that's usually the hardest time to remember the sovereignty of God. We get so focused on what people are doing to hurt us, we lose sight of the fact that the situation is from the hand of God, just like every other trial.

But if we can remember, then it makes it so much easier to take, because you know it's for a good purpose. When other people are in control of your life in some area, and they are making decisions that are to your detriment, it's so natural to get all worked up as if your life were being ruined. But we need to remember that when God gives you over to the hands of men, if you are his child, then he's doing that for your ultimate good, and you can trust him in that just as much as anything else. And how do we know that it's not just pure punishment and retribution for our sins? Because Jesus was handed over to the hands of men out of punishment and retribution for our sin in our place.