

## **“There is nothing for you” Mar 8:31-38**

**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. And he said this plainly.**

**And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 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.”**

**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. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? 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.”**

Today for our meditations we have one of these passages which usually doesn't make us feel much better. Dear brother Peter is called Satan for wanting to protect Jesus, and then Jesus says to all His disciples this unpleasant 'deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me'.

Like it or not but this is one of the most significant passages in the New Testament, and it is really helpful for us if we want to understand what was Jesus mission and what it means to be a Christian, to be Jesus' follower.

These are two questions that we are going to look at – what does this passage tell about Jesus' mission and how does it help us to understand what it means to be Jesus' disciple.

These are challenging verses. They are. They go against our hearts. Just before these conversations took place Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of living God. What a wonderful confession!

Jesus praised Peter for saying this, but He also said that it wasn't Peter himself who came up with this confession, it was the Father who revealed it to him. But obviously it was not enough, simply to know that Jesus was the Christ.

What really was important, was to know what it meant – that Jesus was the Christ. The faithful of the Old Testament times had been waiting for a long time for the Christ to come. And they had their own ideas what He will be like.

Sure, there were various expectations, but one thing which we can see in many places in the New Testament – people were waiting for victorious Christ, who will re-establish the kingdom of David, who will liberate them from their oppressors.

Christ who will come in power and glory, Christ who will overcome all opposition. And you can see a little bit of this in Jesus ministry. Sure there were signs of this power and glory. He could do whatever He wanted and nobody could resist Him.

That's why many wanted to follow Him, even to make Him a king. What a king He would be! One who can feed and heal and protect His subjects, one to whom even powers on nature, and even demons and death obey. Who wouldn't want this kind of king? Would we object to have one like this today?

People had been waiting for one like Jesus, and now they could see that He could be the One. And Peter had just confessed that Jesus is the Christ, and Jesus himself affirmed that it is true. What a joy! What a good times are coming!

We can see it many places in the New Testament how the apostles were looking forward to coming glory. Who is going to sit at the right hand and who at the left, who will be higher when His reign begins, etc.

This is why Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone who He was. For then people would follow Him and could ruin His true mission. The true reason why He had come.

"And he began to teach them ..." Mark puts it as 'began to teach' for it will take a long time, it will take Jesus death and resurrection until this teaching will sink in into disciples minds. And it takes a long time until we are ready to take it in.

"... 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. And he said this plainly."

How well does this go together with disciples' expectations? Where is the glory, where is the triumph, where is the victory? What is in this for us? For we have left so much to follow you? What are you talking about?

Suffering, rejection, death... no, no, no. This is not what your ministry is supposed to be about. No! This sounds like total failure. Why would you, Jesus, even talk like that? What is wrong with you?

How does this go together with our ideas about God? If God is almighty and just, isn't He supposed to come and destroy all evil and to restore justice and to get rid of all our enemies? Isn't this what we may sometimes think?

And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke him. "Jesus, come to your sense, you are the Christ, stop fooling around with this suffering and death talk." But Jesus turning and seeing his disciples, 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."

Obviously Peter wasn't expressing his thoughts only, but the thoughts of all Jesus disciples, that's why Jesus rebuked him so publicly. So that they all would start to realize that Jesus mission is not about earthly glory.

We want to think about God as someone like us - just much more powerful, and we expect Him to do what we would do if we had that much power. Quite obviously the true God is not much like us, and we need to be grateful for that.

True God is not like us. He sees us as the Creator of the Universe and of all life. He sees us in a way we can't even comprehend. He not only has counted our hair, but He also knows all our thoughts.

We can evaluate others according to what they say or do, and we tend to evaluate even ourselves according to what we say and do, but He sees our very inner being, our very hearts. He sees in us that place where all evil thoughts and desires dwell.

He sees our corruption. He knows what we are capable of if left on our own. He knows all of this and He has unlimited power to destroy all evil, and one day He will, when all is revealed. That is a scary thought.

You see, if God wants to restore the goodness of His creation, He has to restore entire creation. There are no good people left whom He could simply rescue from amidst of this crooked generation.

No, when He looks at our hearts, there is not a one who is righteous, not a one who searches for God. None! What should He do? He is your Creator, and He loves you and He desires to restore you, He desires all people to be saved.

He could come in His glory, and we would all perish because of His holiness. No man can stand before God and live. That would happen if God acted like man. Coming with power and wiping out all evil... wiping out all of us.

Instead, He chose to come not as a victorious king, but as a humble servant. He comes to us not from above, but from below. He, the Creator of the Universe reveals His love coming to you humble and vulnerable. We can reject Him.

He puts us in position of power. We have this terrifying ability to say 'no' to His gentle invitation. We can reject Him. For He doesn't want to force us to love Him. He doesn't want us to cling to Him because of His power and might.

We know how easy it is to get new 'friends' when you are rich and famous and powerful. But how much they are your friends and how much they are friends of your wealth or power or fame?

The same about Jesus Christ. He is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, to Him all authority is given in heavens and on earth, but He wants to you to respond to His love, to His self-sacrificial love and not to His glory.

This is how He showed His love. He revealed that God is justly angry with us, His rebellious creatures, but then He Himself took responsibility of all our wrongs, He received the death that we deserve, so that now He could offer you life which you don't deserve.

This is what Jesus mission was about. About revealing the truth about our wickedness, about God's wrath, and about receiving what we deserve – death and separation from God, so that we could receive what belongs to Christ – eternal life with the Father.

**Now, let's talk a little bit about what does it mean to be a Christian,** to be Jesus' disciple. How do we understand it? How do we teach it to others? How do we try to bring people to Christ?

Or, let's ask it from the other side. How would someone look at the church? What are these question that people are asking? What is there for me in this Christianity? What would it give to me?

How would I benefit from being a Christian, instead of simply going ahead with my life? Can you see, all these questions are about – ME! What is there for ME! What can you offer to ME! I would like this and that.

Do you know where we as the Church are going wrong? When we start to answer these questions. When we start to think how to offer to people something that they would love, instead of giving them what they truly need.

We get caught in others' self-centeredness. Instead of helping them to get off their eyes from their own belly buttons, and to begin to look at and listen to Christ, we try to dance under their music.

Have you heard how Christians try to attract others? Come, come to us, this is going to be such a fun. We are having this event or this service or this camp and it is going to be so awesome, so cool.

We can fall in this trap in so many ways. We begin to believe that if only we could give those outside what they want here and now, they would join our club. Let's change this and let's change that. Let's do like this world does. Let's become like this world and then, then they will come. No...

Instead we should say to all these ideas as Jesus did - 'get behind me Satan, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.' Let's stop deceive ourselves and others!

If we are not clear about where we invite people, then we are simply lying to them. 'Come we'll have such a nice event, it is going to be awesome'. No. It is not. It is totally different. No awesomeness and no coolness as the world understands it.

We are not here to invite people to awesomeness or to friendship with us, or to enjoy music or to have fun or to waste their free time. None of these. None. We are here to bring them to Christ.

There is only one true reason why people are in the church. That is Christ. There is only one true reason why people are not in the church. That is Christ. For they don't want Him. They may come up with hundred excuses and demands, but there is only one true reason, - they don't want to do anything with this Christ.

Yes, they are happy if you serve them, if you teach them Christian values, just don't push on them this Christ. It is so offensive. Of course, it is, for He comes and says: "You are a sinner and you deserve death, and I gave my life to save you, repent of your sins and receive eternal life!" Of course it is offensive.

But this is the reason why we are here. Let's be clear about that. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."

If someone asks what is there for me, you should reply - it is not about you. It is about denying yourself, it is about not focusing of yourself, but instead responding to God's love and trying to make Him proud by living for others.

This is not about you! If you want to be a Christian, learn to forget about yourself! Live for Christ as Christ lived and died for you. "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Jesus sake and the gospel's will save it."

It is not about you, it is about losing yourself to gain Jesus. You can love both more than anything, it is either Jesus or yourself. This is how it works with God. And it gets even worse.

When you will try to live for Christ, your life will become even more difficult. For then you will have to fight not only against your desires to care about yourself and to love yourself more than anything...

... you will have to suffer from others, for they will abuse your kindness and they will make fun of you and will reject you when you try to bring them to Christ.

This is what Christian life is about. Be realistic. It is an ongoing battle with our selfishness and it is an ongoing crosses when others reject you and humiliate you because of your message. Isn't this awesome, isn't this cool?

In fact, it is. It is awesome and it is cool and even much more that we think. See, we all know that we are happy to give up something to obtain something else that we consider more valuable.

What would make us to give up ourselves and to choose this path of sufferings and rejection? Only if there is something that we value so much that everything else seems not important.

Let me suggest that it could be Jesus. Why? Because this is exactly what He did for you. He had everything. He is eternal God, not lacking anything. Just one thing didn't belong to Him. That is, - your love.

He gave up all that He had to gain your love. He knew that in many cases He will not succeed. With so many He will be rejected and ridiculed. But He was not afraid to leave behind His heavenly glory, His absolute power so that only He can gain you. You! Each of you.

He was ready to give up His life for you. When the Holy Spirit persuades you of this truth, you have a very good reason to deny yourself and take your cross and to follow Jesus.

For if you do, you will experience His love and presence already here. And there is nothing you could compare with it. He will be with you when you deny yourself, for by denying yourself you obtain Him.

He will be with you when you are rejected, and His presence will make the worst moments the best. This is what being Christian is about, and it is infinitely better than anything we do to amuse ourselves. For this is truly divine experience.

When you are with Christ doing what He calls you to do, this is where the greatest joy comes and the closest we can get to heaven. But all of this is just for a little while. For if you respond to His love Him, when He comes to you vulnerable, you need to remember these words.

“Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.” (Mat 10:32-33)

This is what it means to be a Christian. To choose this joyful path of self-denial and rejection, and to follow Jesus Christ where He is. Be realistic and enjoy it.

Amen.