Lent 2 Mark 8:31-38
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Lenten Lessons on the Cross
I. Lessons on Jesus and His cross.
II. Lessons on the Christian and his cross.

Dear Christian friends,

Just picture it. ***"Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him."*** The Greek word for ***"rebuke"*** is a STRONG word. Peter was worked up. He **just** had to put his FOOT DOWN and stop this **nonsense**. Jesus was talking SO FOOLISHLY – ***"being killed!"***

Yes, just picture it – **Peter thinking** that he KNEW BETTER than Jesus. But we really don't have to **picture** that, do we? We've had our own times when **we thought** that WE KNEW BETTER than God. Maybe it was in our **personal** life – **family** life – **church** life. We were GOING THROUGH some pretty rough, tough times. It WASN'T FUN or **easy**. We couldn't see how **dealing with whatever** was ACTUALLY GOOD – even necessary! – for us. We needed to ***"rebuke"*** God. God needed to IMMEDIATELY STOP **whatever the problem** was – FIX whatever was wrong. It would be SO MUCH BETTER **for us** – for the **congregation** – or SO WE TOLD God!

But ***"Jesus rebuked Peter. 'You do not have your mind set on the things of God, but the things of men.'"*** That difference between **God's thinking** and man's thinking becomes so clear AT THE CROSS. Today we have LENTEN LESSONS ON THE CROSS – 1)lessons on Jesus and **His cross** and 2)lessons on the Christian and **his cross**.

I. Lessons on Jesus and His cross.

Jesus had just finished teaching His disciples a **big lesson** – His REAL IDENTITY. Right before this Jesus had asked His disciples, ***"Who do people say I am?"*** There were some good answers – people recognized Jesus as SOMEONE SPECIAL – a **prophet perhaps** – but those answers weren't GOOD ENOUGH. Then Jesus asked them, ***"But what about YOU? Who do YOU say I am?"***

That's when Peter gave that **beautiful** confession, ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*** As we make our LENTEN JOURNEY to the **cross** we must be so clear on this. THAT MAN ***"Jesus of Nazareth"*** is in fact the **eternal, almighty, beloved** Son of God Himself born our flesh-and-blood brother. If Jesus is **just** a GOOD GUY – if Jesus is not ***"Immanuel"*** – God Himself with us – then Jesus' death on the cross could NOT ***"take away the sin of the world."*** It's not the blood of a "GREAT GUY" but the ***"blood of God's SON (that) cleanses us from all sin."***

With the disciples clear on His **real identity** Jesus had another BIG LESSON **to teach** them – the REALITY of His mission as the Savior. Just because Jesus IS God's Son the disciples shouldn't think that Jesus' WORK AS the Savior would be easy, **grand** and **glorious**. It's the exact opposite! ***"Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things; be rejected…; be killed; and after three days rise again."*** Jesus being the Savior MEANT His ***"being obedient unto death, even death on a cross."*** There was NO AVOIDING the cross for Jesus. Jesus ***"must"*** suffer and die on the cross. The cross was NOT A TRAGEDY but a DIVINE NECESSITY.

Jesus' cross shows HOW SERIOUSLY GOD TAKES sin. If sin is NO BIG DEAL – a **mistake** – a **poor choice** – then what is Good Friday REALLY ALL ABOUT? **God** doesn't shrug off our sins. He doesn't accept our **excuses**. GOD DOESN'T and we dare not! **All those times** we didn't ***"deny"*** our sinful natures – **those times** we refused to ***"carry our cross and follow"*** Jesus – **those times** we were ***"ashamed"*** of Jesus and embarrassed by God's Word – CRY OUT for God's punishment – the eternal punishment and **banishment** of hell. THAT'S what Good Friday is all about

Our Lenten journey takes us to JESUS' cross. There on the cross – as prophesied by Isaiah – Jesus ***"was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him – the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all."*** LEARN the Lenten lesson of **Jesus'** cross – God's grace made JESUS' cross a ***"must"*** – a ***"necessity."*** Jesus suffered and died on His cross IN OUR PLACE punished for our sins – **yes**, the sins of the whole world! WITHOUT **Jesus' cross** there is no forgiveness. Jesus' triumphant cry of ***"It is finished!"*** proclaims we ARE FORGIVEN.

"And after three days rise again." Jesus knew His death MEANT FORGIVENESS of all sins and that **His death** would be followed by His **triumphant resurrection** from the dead on Easter morning. Jesus repeatedly stressed to the disciples, ***"and after three days rise again."*** But all the disciples HEARD was ***"the cross – be killed."***

Before we jump **all over** them for that realize how often WE DO the **exact same thing**! Like Peter – we HEAR AND SEE the **negative** and we freeze **in fear**. We watch the news – we get BOMBARDED by all that's bad and **wrong** and THERE'S PLENTY that **is bad** and wrong. God never promised us an EASY LIFE and **good times now**. But God HAS PROMISED to be with us always – to work all things for our eternal good – to answer all our prayers – to finally take us to heaven where **all will then be** perfect. Yes, see all that's BAD and wrong but ALSO SEE your God IN CHARGE and **in control** – faithful to His **promises** and to you, **His child**. Peter saw **Jesus' cross** as a TRAGEDY. Jesus saw **His cross** as His FATHER CARRYING OUT His gracious plan to save sinners. How do YOU SEE things?

For Jesus there was NO AVOIDING His cross. He ***"must"*** go to His cross. But what about Peter - the **other disciples** – you and me today? Jesus has some LENTEN LESSONS for us…

II. On the Christian and his cross.

"Jesus called the crowd and His disciples together and said to them, "If anyone wants to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."

VERY BIG LESSON – the difference between **Jesus'** cross and **our** crosses. Jesus' cross SAVES us. **Jesus' cross** is the forgiveness of **all** our sins – the crushing defeat of the devil. Our crosses DON'T ADD ANYTHING to what Jesus has already accomplished with His cross. **Our crosses** don't save us. **Our crosses** don't make us **Christians**. **Our crosses** SHOW we are Christians – that we trust IN JESUS and **His cross** for our salvation.

"If anyone wants to follow Me." Jesus doesn't force ***"anyone to follow"*** Him. Jesus does want all to UNDERSTAND THE COST of being a Christian. ***"Let him deny himself."*** Think of Peter ***"denying"*** Jesus, ***"I don't know the man!"*** Peter didn't want to BE ASSOCIATED with Jesus **in any way**. "I want NOTHING TO DO with Him!"

SO we are to ***"deny ourselves"*** – our sinful natures. **When** that sinful nature ACTS UP and tempts us – and it does that EVERY DAY! – we are to ***"deny"*** it. AS CHRISTIANS we are to daily tell our sinful nature, "I have nothing TO DO with you. I'm following Jesus now, NOT YOU!"

Rather than CUDDLING UP to and GIVING IN to our sinful nature we are to ***"deny"*** and ***"crucify"*** it. AS CHRISTIANS we need to bluntly tell ourselves, "I'M A CHRISTIAN now – I can't talk like that to my parents – I can't act like that at school/work – I can't watch movies like that – I can't carry that **grudge against** so-and-so – I can't gossip or LISTEN to gossip. I'm a Christian now – I DON'T SKIP church – I love to worship my Savior – I want to grow in my faith and be with my fellow Christians."

"Take up his cross." The sole purpose of the cross was to TORTURE and KILL. There was nothing pretty or pleasant about it. COMMON SENSE was to avoid the cross **at all costs**. But TO BE a Christian we can't avoid the cross.

"Cross" doesn't refer to **all the pains** and problems of this life. The unbeliever has to deal with all that too. The **Christian's cross** is the suffering – the trouble and **pain** – that COME OUR WAY just because we **are Christians**. In other words if you WEREN'T a Christian you wouldn't have these problems.

The ***"cross"*** can be the RIDICULE you get for standing up for what **God says** – when you let it be known **at work** – in the **family** – that cursing and swearing are **not acceptable language** – that it's not OK to **live together** without being married. In our POLITICALLY CORRECT world it's now almost a HATE CRIME to stand up for **what God says** about marriage – homosexuality – abortion, etc. The ***"cross"*** is not being ashamed of what God says but BOLDLY CONFESSING it. The cross comes when we SPEAK UP for our **Christian faith** and **values** instead of SHUTTING UP as the **world** and our **sinful nature** want us to do.

"And follow Me." That sounds so easy but DON'T KID yourself! ***"Following"*** Jesus means He's leading – NOT US! Jesus is in charge – **not us**! ***"Following"*** means we're NOT TELLING Jesus, "This is how we're going to do things and if **You don't like** it, Lord, well, TOUGH LUCK!" ***"Following"*** Jesus is telling the sinful nature, "TOUGH LUCK! Jesus is leading me now!" ***"Following"*** Jesus is TRUSTING His ways – ACCEPTING His will for our lives. ***"Following"*** Jesus is not ignoring Jesus – avoiding Jesus – ARGUING with Jesus – trying to correct Jesus. Jesus doesn't force anyone to ***"follow"*** Him but there is NO BEING a Christian without ***"following"*** Jesus.

Jesus isn't painting a PRETTY PICTURE of **being a Christian**. He couldn't avoid HIS cross and we can't avoid OUR cross – NOT if we want to **be a Christian**. Jesus wants all to COUNT THE COST of being a Christian – to understand what's REALLY AT STAKE. So He explains, ***"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for My sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? In fact, whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."*** You can't miss Jesus' point with those BLUNT words!

Those are the LENTEN LESSONS Jesus wants us to learn about HIS cross and OUR crosses **as Christians**. The TEST now comes in living those lessons **each day**. That means we DAILY GO BACK to Jesus' cross for forgiveness and for renewed strength to ***"take up our cross and follow"*** Jesus. Amen.

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