

Mark 9:30-37

Introduction: Sometimes we can become so familiar with something that we no longer see it for what it really is or appreciate it. For example, if we live in a very scenic place, after a while we can take it for granted. Likewise, we can read the Bible and become so familiar with what we are reading that it does not impact on us as it did at first. This means that we can often miss out on what God wants us to know.

The disciples were always falling into this trap. Take the passage we heard today from Mark Chapter Nine. In the first section Jesus is explaining to his disciples what is going to happen to him when he goes up to Jerusalem. Verse 31, '... The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.'

This was not the first time he had told them this. You can read that in Mark 8:31 to 33. As with that first occasion, so here, verse 31 says, 'they did not understand the saying and were afraid to ask him.'

Here is a case of listening but not hearing. If that was not bad enough, the next part of the passage proves that nothing had sunk in at all. There they were arguing about who was going to be the greatest. On another occasion two of them asked Jesus if they could sit on his right hand and on his left when he came into his kingdom. The other disciples were furious at them because they wanted those places.

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Had they learnt nothing in the more than two years of following and listening to Jesus? Yet we should not be too hard on them because we are the same. We can become so accustomed to what we hear that we don't actually hear it anymore; like living in a beautiful place and not seeing it anymore. So what *does* this passage want us to know?

Take the first part. Jesus gives them the shocking news that he is going to be delivered into the hands of the authorities and killed. He says that, but they are arguing about who of them is going to be the greatest. Apart from their worldly ambition, their idea of the kingdom of God was about a political revival when the Messiah, like King David of old, would rule in Jerusalem over an empire in the name of God. But Jesus, when he stood before Pontius Pilate, said that his kingdom was not of this world.

More to the point, think about what Jesus had just told them; the one who could heal the sick, still the storm, feed the crowds, walk on water, was going to be dragged away and killed. How could that happen? Why wouldn't God protect him? Why wouldn't he call down legions of angels to deliver him?

The answer to that, and Jesus had spoken about before as well, was that his death was going to be 'a ransom for many.' That is, as Isaiah had predicted hundreds of years before, he was going to offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins. As we read in 1 Peter 3:18, 'For Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God.'

On top of that, there is prediction of resurrection; verse 31 says, 'after three days he will rise.' Think about that; dead in the grave and on the third day alive again. But they didn't hear either. All they could do was

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argue about which of them would be the greatest in a worldly kingdom that was never going to be. On that point, in the next section of our passage, Jesus said that in *his* kingdom it is all about service, where greatness is measured in child-like humility. His own life and death was the model for that. They didn't see that either.

Of course, later, after they had passed through the trauma of the crucifixion, the joy of the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, it all made sense and they saw the kingdom of God as it was meant to be; a spiritual and eternal relationship with God.

Sadly, before they saw things as they really were, they had to pass through their 'valley of the shadow' and so do we. We may not have to experience the horror of what they saw happen to Jesus but we all have to pass through the pain of repentance. We all have to confront our own failings and sinfulness and, like them, throw ourselves on God's mercy. When we do that, we experience what they did; forgiveness, renewal, God's presence within and then, a life of service towards others.

This passage teaches us to be grateful for the love that Jesus showed when he allowed wicked people to take him and put him to death. It shows the triumph of his resurrection, a resurrection which we who put our faith in him, will share. It also teaches us about the stupidity of ambition for greatness in a world that is destined to pass away.

The challenge for us is to see these things as for the first time and be moved to open our hearts to our Lord, and receive all the blessings he died for that we might have.