

## Jason Upchurch - Mark 9:30-41 - The Good News that Sinful Disciples Won't Stop the Kingdom

We are back in Mark's gospel this morning and I'll be honest that this passage is a huge comfort to me personally. And part of the reason is because these disciples just keep crashing and burning. Just when you think they can't get any worse, it's like a new level of ridiculousness.

And that encourages me because I often feel just as ridiculous and foolish as these guys. And I take comfort and encouragement that if Jesus doesn't give up on these guys then he won't give up on me either.

If you watch professional sports at all, or have a favorite team, you know that a lot of times teams put their hopes in just a few key guys to win the game. If you don't measure up you could be traded in a heartbeat. You could be out. You could even be out in the middle of the season if you're bad enough.

Well, that's not how it works in the Kingdom.

**1 Cor. 1:27-29:** But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

I feel like that should be my life verse. God picks the losers. Jesus is the only true hero in the Bible. Why? So we never boast in ourselves.

So the big picture is that the failings of the disciples won't stop the Kingdom. Disciples being losers is not a bug in the Kingdom. It's actually a feature; and a feature that brings glory and honor to our gracious God.

Now, we're going to divide this section up into 4 basic points based on that idea: the failings of the disciples won't stop the Kingdom.

### 1) Misunderstanding Won't Stop the Kingdom. Read 30-32

So the first 2 points here come from the last sentence in **Vs. 32**. Misunderstanding won't stop the Kingdom and Fear won't stop the Kingdom.

Jesus is walking with the disciples, probably from the very northern part of Israel around Mt. Hermon or somewhere up north. And now they're taking the trek south back to the Lake of Galilee. Jesus just did a miracle - he cast out a demon that his own disciples couldn't cast out.

Jesus does this miracle and then immediately leaves. This is kind of Jesus's pattern throughout Mark's gospel. He does something amazing and then leaves because he doesn't want the crowd to take him by force and make him king.

So they slip out and head south to Capernaum which is Jesus's base of operation, on the north side of the Lake of Galilee. And along the way he begins to talk to them for the third time about his suffering and death.

Some of your Bibles say this is the second time, but it's actually the third time in Mark's gospel. The first time is way up in Caesarea Philippi when Peter cries out that Jesus is the Christ. Remember that? And then Jesus goes on to tell them about his suffering death and resurrection and Peter rebukes Jesus. That didn't turn out so well.

Then if you remember earlier in this chapter as they're coming down from the Mt of Transfiguration back in **Vss. 9-10** he tells Peter, James and John to not tell anyone about the glory on the mountain until after he had risen from the dead. And they were confused about the whole matter.

So here we are a third time now with the disciples. And Jesus is again teaching them. And to be clear: the text makes the point that this wasn't just passing comment on the way. This seems to be the substance of their whole conversation for a couple of days. If Jesus was transfigured on Mt. Tabor, that's about 20 miles away

through hills. If it was on Mt. Hermon that's 40 miles away through hills. This is 2-4 days worth of talking about how the Christ would suffer. That's a lot of teaching on the issue.

And there's an added element that Jesus includes that hasn't been present in the other 2 times Jesus talked about this: that Jesus would be delivered into the hands of men.

The disciples had heard that he would suffer and be rejected by the religious leaders. But the idea of being delivered into the hands of men is a new element. Jesus being delivered into the hands of men is likely Jesus beginning to unfold for the disciples the work of the Father in crushing his Son as **Isa. 53** talks about.

The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all...It was the will of the Lord to crush him.

The word "delivered" is used often used for the work of God the Father in something. Scholars call this the "divine passive" - when something happens and the writers of Scripture don't specifically name God taking action, but you know it's God doing it - that's the divine passive.

And the word "delivered" is often the work of God.

**Rom. 6:17:** Thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves to sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching into which you were delivered.

God delivered Israel from Egypt, he delivered Jerusalem from the hand of the Assyrians. But he also delivered Jesus into the hands of the religious leaders and Romans.

**Rom. 4:25:** Jesus was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

**Rom 8:32:** He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Listen, God the Father intentionally delivered Jesus over to the religious leaders to be crucified. This was not an accident of history. This was not a fluke or a mistake or some sort of plan B that the Father could not foresee. The Father intentionally delivered Jesus over to be crucified for our sins.

This was the eternal plan of the triune God. And Jesus isn't kicking and screaming about it. He says in John's gospel: no one takes my life from me, I lay it down of my own accord - I can lay it down and I can take it back up (**John 10:18**).

This was the plan of redemption - we often call it the covenant of redemption - between the Father and the Son from before the foundation of the world.

Jesus is teaching them - continually, probably for days - that he would be delivered up. And that he would be killed and that he would rise.

"Wow, Jesus! That's amazing. Tell us more. Thank you for that grand explanation!" That's not their response.

Instead their response is lack of understanding. **Read 32**

They don't get it. They don't understand. It's not as though Jesus is speaking in a foreign language. They probably do understand the content of what he's saying, but they can't wrap their mind around it. How is all of this possible? What Jesus is telling them doesn't line up with everything they know - or they think they know - about Messiah.

Have you ever struggled to understand something about the Kingdom? About the Bible or Jesus?

Maybe you've tried to understand the Trinity - 1 God, three persons. I think all of my kids have struggled at one time or another wrapping their minds around that.

Maybe you've struggle to understand how the Law of God applies to your life. We're not under the Law, but the Law is good, we're under the Law of Christ, how does all that apply?

Maybe it's spiritual gifts, maybe it's your role as a husband or wife. But sometimes it's just hard to wrap our minds around something. You don't understand.

Can I tell you something? The Kingdom isn't going to come apart because you don't understand. And for those of you who are maybe trying to teach your kids or neighbors or friends something about the Bible or Jesus - the Kingdom isn't going to come apart because they don't comprehend.

It's getting late in Jesus's ministry here. And these 12 knuckleheads still don't get it. The don't understand. And Jesus doesn't seem to be all that concerned.

If I were Jesus I'd be panicking. "Maybe I should trade someone out." This very thing he's teaching them about is about to happen and they're so thick they don't get it.

**Look** over at **Luke's** account in **9:43-45**. Luke records the same layout. Transfiguration, then he casts out the demon. Then he's walking with the disciples having the same conversation. But Luke adds a theological insight we would do well to remember. **Read 43-45**

Why didn't they understand according to Luke? It was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it. Who concealed it? God did.

You guys, there's a supernatural element in our understanding of God that we often leave out.

We often think of **1 Cor. 2:14**: the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

People can't accept and love the gospel without the work of the Spirit. They can know it, they can understand the propositional truths. But the Spirit has to actually work in them to accept them. That's also true with our own knowledge of the Lord **after** salvation.

**Look at Phil. 3**. This is Paul talking about how all the religious things he thought earned him favor with God are actually garbage. He was circumcised, had Jewish parents, a Pharisee, a persecutor of the church, followed the law. He thought all those things were positives for him. But actually they were losses because he thought they earned him salvation. And so he had to give them all up to know Christ.

His righteousness was all in Christ, not in himself. His hope in the resurrection was all because of Jesus, not his own work. Yet at the same time he keeps pressing ahead following Jesus. **Read 7-11**

He counts all his good deeds as loss. They never earned him salvation. Salvation was only through faith in Jesus. That's a lot to digest. He knows that. He also knows God has to teach them that. **Read 12-16**

He says everything that I have is in Jesus. Yet, I strain to know Jesus more. This is the classic struggle between simply finding our ultimate rest in Jesus and at the same time striving with all we are to know Jesus more. How do we balance that? How do we come to final understanding of that struggle?

**Verse 15**: Those who are mature in Christ probably have a good grasp, but ultimately who has to reveal it to us? God.

See a lot of times we think knowing God is like knowing a physics book. Just memorize the formulas and - boom - you've got it figured out. As though God can be boiled down to a formula.

No, we teach people, we strive to explain, we strive to exposit Scripture. But ultimately God has to do the work not only in salvation but sanctification as well.

I think this should come as some comfort to you who struggle to understand some basic concepts about God. It's okay that the Bible and theology and God are confusing and difficult. We don't need to be upset or frustrated. God will reveal things in his own time.

One of the jokes among my pastor friends is that we preach for years on a certain issue and then kids go to camp and learn it or adults go to a conference and learn it. And they come back and they're like "Man, that conference was so great! I've never heard anything like that before." "Yeah, amazing huh?"

God reveals in his own timing. We are to strive to know him, but the Kingdom isn't going to fold if someone doesn't grasp something right away.

Let's go **back** to **Mark 9**. So misunderstanding won't stop the kingdom. The second point will be quick because it's related.

## 2) Fear won't stop the Kingdom. Read 32

So this is related because it's all in the same context. But not only do they not understand, they're afraid. They're afraid to ask Jesus. Why? Why would they be afraid?

Well, if you remember when Jesus first mentioned his death and resurrection Peter rebuked him. "Jesus, absolutely not! You're not going to suffer and be flogged and die." Jesus's response was "Get behind me what?" Satan. In front of all the disciples.

And then he used Peter's foolishness as an opportunity to teach the whole crowd that the way we follow Jesus is to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus.

That was a pretty stinging rebuke. Peter in particular is probably not going to stick out his neck again. And since all the disciples saw what happened they're probably not going to ask either. In fact, the next time Jesus brings this up in **10:32-34** they still don't ask.

There's fear. And there shouldn't be fear.

Perfect love casts out what? Fear. **1 John 4:18** Fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

The Lord has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self control. (**2 Tim. 1:7**).

The disciples don't want to be punished for asking questions. They're actually afraid of Jesus who is here to deliver them from the fear of death.

Just like believers often struggle with understanding biblical truth, many times we are consumed by fear. Even fear of knowing more about something about the Lord.

It probably seems a little silly to us now, but I mean if Jesus were talking about being handed over to be killed and rising from the dead we'd probably think we'd ask a question.

But how many times have we not asked a question in Sunday School or Bible study or class for fear of sounding foolish, or ignorant? How many times do we do something or avoid something because of fear?

We know the verses:

**Psalms 56:11:** In God I trust, I shall not be afraid, what can man do to me?

**Hebrews 13:6:** The Lord is my helper, I shall not fear, what can man do to me?

Usually when we're afraid we're afraid of people. We're afraid of men. We know we should fear God - that's the beginning of wisdom. But our problem is usually that we're afraid of men.

Well guess what? The Kingdom isn't going to collapse because we struggle with fear of man. Should we put it off? Absolutely. Should we strive to walk in courage even when we're afraid? Of course. Should we be strong and very courageous because the Lord is with us? Yes.

But God's Kingdom is not going to collapse just because we're afraid. If you remember in **John 20:19-23** after Jesus had rose again he came to the disciples in a locked room. Why were they there? For fear of the Jews.

For fear of the Jews? What are the Jews going to do? They killed Jesus and it didn't work. He rose again. Does Jesus chide them? No. He blesses them with a greeting of peace. He showed them his hands and side. He breathes on them the Holy Spirit and commissions them to proclaim the forgiveness of sins.

You guys, Jesus is gracious to us even in our fear. He doesn't want us to be afraid. And sympathizes with us in our weakness and blesses us anyway.

Lack of understanding won't stop the kingdom. And neither will fear.

3) Pride also won't stop the Kingdom. Now, this part is rich. **Read 33-37**

So get this, the whole walk from the Mount of Transfiguration to Capernaum while Jesus was continually teaching about being delivered over and being killed and rising, there was actually another conversation going on.

This is the classic situation where the teacher is talking and realizes there's another discussion going on in the classroom. And the teacher is like "Care to tell us what's so important?"

Jesus says "I noticed you guys were chatting while I was teaching. What were you talking about?" And this has to be the most embarrassing situation they've been in yet. They were actually debating each other about who is the greatest in the Kingdom. They were comparing their personal resumes with one another.

Remember that Peter is probably the main source for Mark in writing this gospel. Most people think that Mark's gospel, to a large extent, are the memoirs of Peter about his time with Jesus. Can you imagine Peter sitting down with Mark to put together this together and Mark's like, "Alright, so you guys were confused about Jesus and his death and resurrection. What did you guys make of it while he was talking?"

And Peter's like, "Well, I gotta tell you we weren't really focused so much on Jesus dying and all. We were actually debating about which one of us were the greatest." "I'm sorry, what?"

"No really. Andrew was like 'Guys, I'm the one who found Jesus - you wouldn't even be here without me.'" And James was like "Dude, you're not even in the top 3. We're so tight with Jesus I can't even tell you the amazing thing that just happened on the mountain. I've been sworn to secrecy." "Thaddueaus is all like 'guys, let me tell you...' before John interrupts him and says "No even knows your name, man. People aren't even going to remember you as an apostle."

Obviously we don't know the substance of their conversation but that's the idea. Jesus is explaining the necessity of his own suffering death and resurrection and they're arguing about who is the greatest. And they're silent when Jesus calls them out on it.

Jesus wasn't just curious about what they were talking about. He knew. He knew they were arguing about who was greatest even without them telling him.

So what's Jesus do? He gives them a living, breathing illustration of what their true place needs to be. **Read 35-37**

You really want to be the greatest? Become like this little child. Children in the ancient world were on the lowest end of the social ladder. Even lower than slaves. Because slaves would often be used to educate and train children in the absence of their parents.

And what Jesus does is really quite gentle and kind. He brings this little child - we don't know how old but probably very young and takes him in his arms. Now the child is literally the closest to Jesus even in the midst of the disciples. Jesus cuddles this little guy, taking him in his arms, and says you need to become like this little guy.

You need to become the lowest on the social ladder. You want to be first? Then be last. Put everyone else in front of you. Put everyone else's needs ahead of yours.

And serve all the rest. The Kingdom of Jesus is not about getting served. No. The Kingdom of Jesus is all about serving other people.

Jesus is the greatest example of this. The Son of Man didn't come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

This is the Kingdom. The Kingdom is not about leveling up and being the greatest. It's actually about who is the biggest servant and who considers others more than themselves. This is a completely upside down Kingdom compared to the rest of the world's kingdoms. And even our own desires to be great.

How do you do this on a practical level? Jesus tells us with the child. **Read 37**

That's kind of a weird saying. What does it mean to receive a little child? It means we honor and protect and associate and treasure the lowest in society.

See if we're trying to build our own brand and Kingdom what we try to do is connect with those higher up. If you want to increase your status you have to rub shoulders with the big players in society. The movers and shakers.

Remember in the book of Esther when wicked Haman was boasting about having dinner with the queen and king? He was going places. That was a high honor.

Jesus says, "No, if you want to be first you'll receive the lowest. You'll receive the children of society - the lowest, the basest, the ugliest, the poorest. And if you receive them, you receive Jesus. And if you receive Jesus you receive the one who sent him. Who's that? The Father.

Think about the utter foolishness of trying to build our brand to impress God. "Look at me, God! I'm the greatest of all these little heaps of dust that you've created and breathed life into." That's ridiculous.

If we want to be like God we'll lower ourselves just like Jesus lowered himself, to help and love and cherish the lowest of the low. Because that's what Jesus did in coming to save us.

These guys are struggling with this. And, frankly, so do we. We struggle with pride and arrogance and wanting our way. We know the gospel calls us to deny ourselves but...do we really need to do that? Do we have to? The answer of course is yes.

We are called to put the sin of pride to death.

Just think of the patience of Jesus with these guys. And with us. Rather than rebuke them severely and chasten them, he patiently teaches them with one of the most memorable illustrations ever.

Be last and servant like this child is last and servant. And not only be like this child but receive him and all like him. Encourage and celebrate the lowly. Celebrate the tax collectors and prostitutes and sinners and losers coming into the kingdom. That's what God values.

So the Kingdom isn't stopped by ignorance or fear. It's not stopped by pride.

4) Finally, it's not stopped even when God's own people try to stop it. **Read 38-41**

I mentioned last week that this is pretty ridiculous. The disciples are literally walking away from a situation where they couldn't cast out a demon. They had failed. And now what they're doing is rebuking someone for doing what they couldn't do.

And it's not like these other exorcists are acting in someone else's name. They're not casting out demons in the name of Moloch or Dagon. They're casting out demons in the name of Jesus. And it appears to be working! So what do the disciples do? They're going to put an end to this nonsense. What?! Why? Because they didn't hang out with the disciples.

Jesus says what are you doing? **Read 39**

"If they're casting out demons in my name and it's working it's not like their going to turn around and start slandering me and undermining me. They're advancing the Kingdom!" Here's the principle. **Read 40-41**

With the Kingdom, people are either in or out. You're either for Jesus or against Jesus. Jesus puts it in the opposite here: if you're not against us you're for us, but it's the same idea.

And if they're for us, then everything they do is noted by God.

Listen, even the smallest gestures of kindness to fellow brothers and sisters in the Kingdom are noticed by God. Something as small as giving a brother in Christ a cup of water to refresh: God takes note.

He takes note of every sacrifice, every kindness, every gesture. And will reward it on the last day.

Isn't that amazing? He doesn't kick out those who are slow to believe and slow to understand and those who are filled with fear. He doesn't reject the ones who inadvertently try to hinder the Kingdom. No. He rewards us. Every deed of kindness. That's the mercy and grace of Jesus. **Pray**