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When our Concerns Differ From God's

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TEXT: Mark 8:27-38 (NIV)

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

The monks at a remote monastery deep in the woods followed a rigid vow of silence. Their vow could only be broken once a year on Christmas, by one monk. That monk could speak only one sentence. One Christmas, Brother Thomas had his turn to speak and said, "I love the delightful mashed potatoes we have every year with the Christmas roast." Then he sat down. Silence ensued for another 365 days. The next Christmas, Brother Michael got his turn and said, "I think the mashed potatoes are lumpy and I truly despise them." Once again, silence

ensued for 365 days. The following Christmas, Brother Paul rose and said, "I am fed up with this constant bickering." You never know what kind of tensions are going to arise in our lives. Have you ever had a time in life when your concerns and what you cared about differed drastically from those around you? Sometimes we all find ourselves concerned about different things than those around us are concerned about, and we don't always agree on what's of most importance. My wife Kris and I find ourselves in this situation. We have frequently over the years, because we're wired so differently and made so uniquely different by God and look at life so differently. One just simple example would be when we're having guests over for dinner and she is preparing the meal and she's wanting to get the house ready and I'm taking care of a few things outside and I'll come in, and her value on having the home in a certain way is much higher than my value. And my concern oftentimes is, "Are we going to be just calm and relaxed when the guests arrive and enjoy our interaction with them?" And sometimes this creates some tension between us because we're concerned about different things.

One of the things we love about the Scripture and the Bible is it doesn't soft-coat these realities of life and the tensions that can arise between individuals as we're walking through life. And that's the very context of our gospel reading today. The context is this: Jesus has called the disciples to himself. He's growing in popularity among the Jewish people and in the world. He's done some miracles. Now he's fed the 5,000. He's walked on water before them. He's healed a deaf man and a mute man and healed a blind man. He's even cast out evil demons from people. He's growing a movement. And people are excited about what's happening around the Christ. And the disciples are excited about this movement. They've been called by Him to follow him, and they don't fully understand or comprehend it, but they're getting excited about the potential leadership that he's exerting in the world. They're excited about this being a great movement that they're a part of. And then Jesus tempers their understanding a little bit. He tries to bring some reality to them in this gospel text as they're traveling along. It says "He began to teach them that he, the son of man, must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed. And then after three days, rise again."

Perhaps you've heard of a definition of leadership being "disappointing people at a rate they can tolerate." Jesus has started a movement as a great leader in the world and people are following him. They're getting excited about him. They have a sense that this is the promised one from the prophecies of old who's going to bind up the broken hearted and set the captives free. He's the one who has been promised and they feel like he's going to be a great leader for

them. And Jesus now tempers all their enthusiasm. He's going to share with them some realistic truths about why he's here. He said to them he had come to die. He's going to die. He's going to be killed. He's teaching them this. And the scripture says he spoke plainly about this to them.

You know, if we disappoint people at a rate they can tolerate, they may murmur and grumble against us. But if we get ahead of them too much and disappoint them at a rate they can't tolerate, then then there might be some tension. That's what happens here. Buster Benson writes,

Anxiety sparks when a perspective we value bumps into another perspective that challenges it in some way. If we find this new perspective to be unacceptable, that's when our "someone has done something wrong" emotion comes up in us. This impulse leaps into action. When this anxiety sparks – poof – it's like a little anxious dragon is born in our minds and we're ready to light things on fire. It's the first sign that a disagreement is on the way.

And that's exactly what happens here. Peter, who's been following Christ, he's cast off his fishing profession, and he's all in with Jesus. He reacts to this teaching about Jesus' death in this way. It says, "Peter took him aside. 'Jesus, come on over here.' And he began to rebuke him." Now, what is a rebuke? It's an expression of sharp disapproval or criticism. It's criticizing someone's actions or their words. I don't know what this interaction would have looked like as Peter pulled Jesus aside and rebuked him, showed him strong disapproval for what he was saying. "This shouldn't be Jesus. You shouldn't be allowed to be arrested by these people, rejected by them. Look at who you are. Look at all you've done. You're talking about dying. And we need you to live. We need you to set up your kingdom." He's rebuking him. The Scripture says, "When Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he then rebuked Peter in this way, he said, 'Get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'"

The tension was there because Peter and Jesus were concerned about different things. We might understand the differing concerns as we look at the whole context of Scripture. I want to suggest to you today that Peter was more concerned about the worldly movement that Jesus was leading, about the potential of a government that would set them free from the oppression of Rome. This ultimately would be a political movement that would change their circumstances in life, their current, temporary circumstances, and would improve their worldly influence and give them a greater position in the world. As a matter of fact, the

disciples will begin arguing not long after this about who is going to be the greatest in this new kingdom. Peter is concerned about the circumstances, the temporary ones of life. But Jesus here is not concerned so much about the current circumstances of people's lives, but the condition of their hearts and their souls and their spirit. We understand this because of what Jesus went on to say after this. Mark's gospel continues in verse 34. He says,

He called the crowd to him along with his disciples, and he said this: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me and for the Gospel will save it."

And then he asked this question: "What good is it for someone if they gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"

There's no question that the Bible assures us God does care about our circumstances in life, and He is about setting captives free and releasing the oppressed and all of these things. But more importantly to him than temporary circumstances is the eternal destiny and the shape and molding of our souls and our spirits. God is concerned right here about the souls of people. What if this political movement is afoot and there's great accomplishment in the world and great power is exercised through Christ and His disciples in the world, and they gain the whole world, yet they lose their souls for eternity. What can a person give in exchange for their souls? The Bible assures us that we are ever living, never dying individuals. Our soul and our spirit live on after we step out of this body. And all that we sense in this life, all that we taste in this life that is good and rich and meaningful or just foretaste of what God has in store for those who love him and are called according to His purpose. Jesus came among us to go to the cross to pay the penalty for our sin so our souls could be released from captivity to sin and be made right before God in our souls could be redeemed and purchased by Him and brought into His presence forever and ever.

And sometimes it is through great pain and suffering that we come to an awareness of this truth and these realities. Peter and Jesus find themselves concerned about different things, and Peter begins by rebuking Jesus. He doesn't like what he's concerned about and what he's saying is going to happen. But Jesus then rebukes Peter and tells Peter that his focus is wrong. His perception of what's happening is wrong.

How should we handle it when our concerns differ from God's? The Scripture is very clear that when our concerns differ from God's, it's not God who needs to adjust, but it's us. A great example of this is found in the recorded story of Job found for us in the Old Testament. Job's

entire life was wiped out by the Evil one. He was tested and tried by Satan and his family, his property, his children, his livestock, all his wealth was taken from him. And in Job 1, it says Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head and he fell to the ground in worship and said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart." All that he cared about, all his concerns were gone. But he responded with submission to the Lord. "And the Lord has given and the Lord has taken away." He said, "May the name of the Lord be praised." And in all this Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. But as his life continued from there forward and his concerns about what had happened to him continued to fester in his heart, Job's attitude began to change, and by Job 23, we read him saying, "Even today my complaint is bitter, my hand is listless because of my groaning. Oh, that I know where I might find him, that I might come to his seat, that I would present my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments." And Job 30, he said to God, "I cry out to you, but you do not answer me. The things I was concerned about in life you've taken away and you won't respond to me about it," Job is saying. And Job 31, he said, "Oh, that the Almighty would answer me."

Now there is the concerns of Job, and then there is the concern in the heart of God, in Heaven, in Job's situation. I mean, he has been dealt a lethal blow here in life, and the evil one is having great victory in his life. And Job went from responding with submission to God to shaking his fist at God because of his disagreement. He's, in a sense, doing what Peter did to Jesus. He's rebuking God and he's asking God to come out and show himself, and eventually God does exactly that. In Job 38, we read that the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, the storm, and he said this:

Who is this that darkens my counsel and speaks empty words without knowledge?
Now prepare yourself like a man. I will question you and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding, Job. Who determined its measurement? Surely you know. Or who stretched the line upon it to where were its foundations fashioned, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

And on and on and on. God asks Job questions that he has no capacity to even come close to answering.

What are we to do when our concerns different from God's and our ambitions and plans differ from God's? Well Job eventually relented and he covered his mouth and he spoke no more as he surrendered to God's will and to God's purposes for his life. Now God restored Job in many ways far better than what he had before. But he has not promised to do that for us. His great

promise for us is that he's promised to open up a way for us to be in fellowship with him no matter what happens. And God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. And when our concerns differ from God's concerns in life, it's we who need to adjust, not him. He allows many challenges to come in our lives, to shape us, in, mold us. Paul said it this way "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters about the troubles we experience in life. These things happen to teach us so that we might learn to rely not on ourselves, but on God. This great God who has the power to even raise the dead to life."

I don't know where this message is finding you today, but maybe you've been at odds with God in your heart. Maybe you've been fighting against him and the circumstances he's allowed in your life. Can I encourage you today, as a friend and as a minister, to come humbly before the Lord, to surrender yourself to him, to open your heart to Him and apologize to Him for fighting and straining against him and ask him to come to you and help you find rest in his arms and be renewed in your strength. Be encouraged by his spirit. When I was having a particularly challenging time in my life in college, I went to a worship service one Sunday morning. And as I was leaving the worship service, I talked with the minister at the door for a little bit and told him about the challenges I was having. And I'll never forget when he shook my hand and said, "Tim, I just need to tell you: it's much easier to work with God in your life than to fight against him." I'll never forget him illuminating for me the fact that in my spirit, in my soul, I can fight against the purposes and will of God in my life. At that moment, I surrendered deeply to God yet again and asked him to have his way in me, invited him to have his way in me. Peter fought against Jesus' plan of crucifixion almost the whole way, but he couldn't stop it. The purposes of God prevailed and Christ went to the cross and praise God He did, because it was upon that cross that he accomplished the great purpose of redemption for all who would be open to it.

Friends. You and I will never win in a fight against God. When our concerns differ from his, it's we who need to adjust, not him. Father, we thank you today for your great love and the assurance we have that all your purposes and all your plans, or for our good and for your glory. When we sense in our heart that we are disagreeing with what you're allowing in our personal lives and even in our world, help us to understand that you're still working a good plan, a plan that we can be surrendered to and we can walk in security with as we draw close to you. Give us the strength to do this in a way that only you can. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.