

King's Cross, 8 The Turn

Mark 8: 27 - 38

We have arrived at the end of our summer series, which has been based on the book King's Cross by Timothy Keller. Since we did part *two* of the book during the season of Lent, we have actually now come to the *middle* of the book, as we end this series. The first half addresses *who Jesus is*, and the second half *what Jesus did*.

The entire book is based on the Gospel of Mark, and in the Gospel of Mark we find a turning point in Chapter 8 - which just 'happens' to be the middle of this book of 16 chapters. The turning point comes with Jesus asking his disciples a question... so, let's read our Scripture for today.

** Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

** He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

** Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "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. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

** In these verses from Mark 8 Jesus says two very important things: (1) *I'm a King, (but not the kind of King you expect) I'm a King who is going to a cross;* and (2) *If you want to follow me, you've got to come with me to the cross.*

This is obviously a turning point in Mark's Gospel. Jesus has just determined that his rag-tag bunch of chosen followers finally get it - and it is Peter who puts it 'out there' for them

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all. When Jesus asks, "Who do you (all of you) say I am?" Peter is the one who answers: "You are the Christ (the Messiah)!"

** But after he hears this, Jesus immediately begins to teach them

"The Son of Man must suffer..."

Of course, we read this from the perspective of 2,000 years of familiarity with the story of Jesus. Unless we are theological historians we would not likely know that this is, in fact, the first time in Israel's history that *anyone* connected suffering with the Messiah. There are prophetic texts (like Isaiah 53 - which, again, we understand as a reference to Jesus, but that understanding comes 'after the fact') - but no one connected these passages with the Messiah until this moment in time.

Keller rightly points out that the key word that Jesus uses here is *must*. This word qualifies everything else in this passage. And, in fact, the word is used *twice* for emphasis:

** [The Son of Man *must* suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he *must* be killed and after three days rise again.]

... all these 'musts'... Jesus is saying, "Yes, you get it. I am the Messiah sent from God. But here's how it really is... the Son of Man *must* suffer... he *must* be rejected by the elders and chief priests... he *must* be killed... and after three days, he *must* rise again."

No sooner had those words left his mouth that things change among that small group. Peter - the very one who had this stroke of spiritual insight, the one to whom Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew, in this same context:

** *"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in Heaven."*

That's the passage, too, where Jesus goes on,

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** *"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell will not overpower it."*

High praise, right? But we read here in Mark 8 'the rest of the story.' Peter gets it right, but just moments later, Jesus says to him

** *"Get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."*

What in the world happened? Clearly, when Peter says, "You are the Messiah" he had his own agenda, his own idea of what the Messiah was. And all this sudden insistence upon the *need* to suffer, to be rejected... to *die*. Well, we can say that this didn't fit Peter's plan, and it didn't, but it didn't fit Peter's *universe*.

See, the Messiah's 'job' (as not just Peter, but pretty much everybody in Israel previously understood it) was to defeat evil, to triumph over injustice - especially injustice against the nation of Israel. Did you notice that Jesus here refers to himself as the 'Son of Man'? - this is the first time he does that.

We usually understand those words to be a reference as to his being 'one of us', he is 'a son of man', i.e., a *human being* (and that is sometimes the way that term is used in the Scripture.) But in the context of talking about the Messiah, which they were here, there's no doubt that Peter (and all the rest of them) in hearing that term went in their minds to the Prophecy of Daniel 7:

** *"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a **son of man**, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (Daniel 7: 13 - 14)*

Read those words, and think about these disciples. They're thinking, "The hope of Israel is here!" Daniel's Son of Man! All that waiting, coming to pass in *my lifetime!* This was a

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picture of power, of eternal dominion, a picture of one who would bring justice; the coming of the Messiah would 'make everything right.'

And the first thing Jesus says after acknowledging that he truly *is* that one... is that they have it all wrong! He is '*that one*', *the Son of Man*, but he is not coming to conquer, he is not coming to dethrone kings and emperors, he is coming to be *defeated, humiliated ... to lose*. And *that's* how he was going to defeat evil? Can you blame Peter for saying, "Not on my watch!"

But the key word here is 'must'. Jesus couldn't have made it any more clear: 'the world cannot be renewed, and neither can your life, unless I die and rise.'" This is the heart of the Gospel, friends. This is the Eternal Plan, the mind of God itself being opened up and revealed to us.

Chapter nine of Keller's book is basically a sharing of his understanding of why it was necessary for Jesus to die. He gets into some deep descriptions of how there is a **** Personal Necessity, A Legal Necessity** and a **Cosmic Necessity** for all this to happen. By the way, this is a *heavy duty* chapter, and an important one, and I can't possibly share all of it with you in this one message (because unlike Tim Keller, I don't preach for 45 minutes!)... so, let me again encourage you to read the book for yourself if you possibly can! It is worth the effort.

Part of what Keller talks about here is the difference between *real* love, true love, and a *fake, or false* love. We can all distinguish one from the other, even if we have a hard time defining the difference. But it's pretty simple, really.

In false love, people use each other. The point of giving your love (if it's false love) is to *fulfill your own happiness*. So this false love is conditional - you only give it when the object of your love is affirming you and meeting *your* needs. You give it because of what you can *get back* from it. So false love is conditional, and it is also 'non-vulnerable'. (It is 'safe' - or, tries to be.) Because false love holds back, we only reveal ourselves and give

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what we *have to* in order to get a 'return', and we are always ready to cut our losses if it all doesn't go as planned. (I.e., 'bail out'.)

True love, though, is just the opposite of all that - true love gives everything, and doesn't hold back. True love does not use the *other* for yourself, but it uses *yourself for* the other. Your greatest joy is that person's joy. And it is then, absolutely *unconditional* - you give true love *regardless* of whether or not that loved one is giving you anything in return, whether or not they are meeting your needs. And it is obviously then, tremendously vulnerable, because you are freely spending everything, you are holding nothing back, you are giving it all away, and doing it gladly - regardless of the response of the loved one.

** Now, Keller says that surprisingly ... our real problem as human beings is that *nobody* is actually fully capable of giving love like this. We desperately *want* it, (we want to be loved like that) but we can't *give* it. He's not saying that we can't give *any* kind of real love at all, (obviously, to varying degrees, we can) but he is saying that nobody is *fully capable* of true love.

Why? We need love so badly - like we need air and water - that there's "a certain mercenary quality to all our relationships." That means simply, that we're very careful to choose where we 'invest' our love. We only want those relationships where we're somewhat sure of a good return on our investment.

So here we are, human beings, desperately running around this earth looking for a kind of love that we are simply unable to not only *find* in a relationship with other people, but we can't *give* it, either (and they're looking for it, too). So we're caught in this cycle, where we are the center of everything, looking for others to fill us, and they're looking for us to fill *them* ... and we are constantly disappointed in each other. (Is this starting to sound familiar? Remember, this is where we came in on this series - back in the beginning of July!)

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We talked about 'the Dance'... the relationship that existed within the persons of the Trinity from all time - this eternal ... dance... of glorifying the other, of exalting, of submitting to the others, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, living in *perfect community*. *Because of that 'Dance', remember, we said, God then, is perfectly happy. God is completely fulfilled in his own triune self, in this eternally perfect community.* He did not then, create us out of any *need*. God *needs* nothing. The only logical reason for the creation then, is not that God *needed* something from us (the created) but rather that God wanted to *give something*, to give this *love* away; (put it this way) God desired to invite people into the Dance. To experience God's community, too

** And if you remember, back in that first message of this series, we asked this question, "What happens in a community where *everybody* is saying, "I'm not here for you...you're here for me! You orbit around *me!*" *And others are responding, "No, you orbit around me!"* We said, "Picture ten people, a hundred, five hundred people on a stage and every one of them wants to be the center. So they all just stand there and say, "Come on, move around *me!*" Nobody gets anywhere, and the dance (of life and love) is impossible." Maybe even dangerous.

The only way out of that chaos - the chaos of our human condition - is to find a new way to focus our lives... to enter the *dance* of our God and move the center away from ourselves. That cycle of false love, of self-oriented love can be broken by being loved by someone who does not *need us*. Someone who loves us simply because we are ... us. Something that we can't find that on this earth...

There's only one place to find *that* kind of love - it comes from God.

Keller writes: "[We desperately need] Someone who loves us radically, unconditionally, vulnerably. Someone who loves us just for our sake. If we received that kind of love, that would so assure us of our value, it would so fill us up, that maybe we could start to *give* love like that, too...

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** True love, love without neediness, is *generative*; *it is the only kind of love that makes more of itself as it goes along.*"

So why did God create us, and later redeem us at great cost even though he doesn't need us? He did it because he loves us. Loves us with a perfect love, a radically vulnerable love. And when we begin to get that love, when we begin to experience it, the fakery and manipulateness of our own love starts to wash away, and we find that we are radically different people... able to receive the patience and security that we need to reach out and start giving a truer kind of love to other people.

What would that look like? Well, when we love with a false love (a self-seeking love) then it is very important to us that people respond in certain ways to the 'love' we offer to them. So we pay a lot of attention to those responses - and we can easily then, become people pleasers, and manipulators because we're constantly looking for affirmation and approval. We want people to respond to us in certain ways. We feed on that, and it gives us our sense of value and self-worth.

So we might put people on 'lists' (i.e., they are 'for me' and she's 'against me'.) We measure people's responses to things we do and get offended easily if it is not what we expect or feel we deserve. It's all about *us*.

But what happens when we love from the perspective of 'the eternal Dance'? What happens if at the center of our being is not this gaping neediness, what if it is the self-giving love of an eternal God, One who is constantly filling us, one that is constantly calling us to go out and love each other in this same, non-needy way that we are now experiencing love?

Well, it is liberating. Keller asks, "Do you see how the security of Jesus's love enables [us] to *need* less, and to love more?"

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Another indicator of true love is that real forgiveness becomes possible only in *this* context - I really like Keller's simple, earthy illustrations. Like the lamp... real love (this kind of selfless love) is the only kind of love that allows us to truly forgive others.

** He says, imagine that someone comes over to your home, and while they're there they break a lamp. What do you do? Well, you can say, "Ok ... dude, that's going to cost you \$100. I'll take a check. And then we'll be even." That's one response, but more likely, you will say, "Look, don't worry about it. I got it covered."

Now, the thing is, that act is going to cost you... something. you're either going to have to make do with \$100 less light in your house, or you're going to reach in your own pocket and fork over the price of a new lamp. Either way, it is going to cost you to forgive that person. And, forgiveness is *always* like that, it *always* costs something. Somebody has to pay. (Which is why ultimate forgiveness cost the *ultimate* price - Jesus died for our sins.)

** There is no forgiveness without suffering - someone has to pay the cost.

Why would anyone *want* to do that for someone else? Well, they wouldn't... unless their perspective in love had shifted from *me* trying to love (selfishly, for myself) to God loving through me... the perspective of the Dance.

** (blank) ...Now, as you think about this, we can begin to see too, why Jesus *has* to end this conversation with this troubling invitation... it makes perfect sense. If we're still convinced that 'we're in charge' of our lives, we cannot love with genuine love. It's still about us, it's still *fake love*. I need to get out of the way and allow that center to shift ... and Jesus ** makes that very point powerfully - **"My love will send me to the Cross. For you to love the same way... you need to follow me there."**

Can you hear what Jesus is telling us? "This kind of self giving love will drive me to the Cross. It's the only way to make things right. But for you to love like this, well, you need to go to the Cross with me." And there, as we lay down our lives... we find this amazing, surprising, revelation... LIFE!

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Life as it was meant to be. The invitation is there (come)... the Challenge is there (die)..
the reward is there... (live!) Do you trust him?