

Mark 8:31-38

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Beyond Our Wildest Dreams
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Text: *"...the Son of Man...be killed, and after three days rise again."*

From the time of my youth to this day I have always loved westerns. So it was a thrill, as a young boy, to ride on a horse trail in the Rocky Mountains during the afternoon of one of our family vacations. I had my cowboy hat, suitable boots, and an imagination full of western day dreams as we got ready to ride the trail. We joined a large group of people also waiting to ride at a ranch and were given the choice of the easy one hour trail, the intermediate two hour trail, or the three hour rocky mountain advanced trail; complete with cliffs and dangerous stuff. We joined the majority of riders for the two hour intermediate trail not wanting to look like greenhorns from Wisconsin, but still smart enough to stay away from the cliffs.

The horse assigned to me was named Pinky. A rather unremarkable animal who knew his business. Just give the dumb kid a ride for two hours and then turn in for the evening. Nothing fancy about his job. Pinky merely followed the horse in front of him and stayed on the trail. All those instructions given us before we left on that great adventure about how to turn, stop, and control our horses was a bunch of horse fertilizer. Didn't Pinky know he had a real enthusiast on his back? I mean, I saw "True Grit" with John Wayne and "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence" with Jimmy Stewart. What more could a horse want? Simply understood, I had an agenda for Pinky of which Pinky wanted no part. It was my will or his and in the end, no matter how hard I tugged on the reins or slapped his rump, Pinky was going to do what Pinky wanted. Give the dumb kid a ride and get back to the barn.

Eventually, I gave in to Pinky's right to be all the horse he wanted to be and began enjoying the ride. After all, I was on a real horse in Colorado and had all the appearances of being a cowboy. The battle of the wills was over and horse and rider got along well. It is in that process of letting go we can find freedom. Freedom from dominating wills, freedom from anxious struggle, and freedom to just be are often what we strive for in our day to day search for inner peace. The problem often remains that we have a personal agenda we are too proud to release and therefore dwell in a narrow perspective of living, which usually means our perspective.

This is the problem the Apostle Peter had when he tried to rebuke Jesus for saying he would be killed and then be risen again in three days. Up to that point, Jesus had been the kind of Messiah every one of his followers expected him to be. He was commanding, he healed the sick, he cast out demons, he demonstrated his authority, and he gave heart to the lowly masses. Talk of death by the cross and being risen again in three days was not proper conversation for the Messiah. Peter needed to straighten Jesus out on this point. The biblical scholar William Barclay can give us a clear view of Peter's agenda for Jesus with these remarks.

"When Jesus connected Messiahship with suffering and death, He was making, what were to the disciples, statements which were both incredible and incomprehensible. All their lives they had thought of the Messiah in terms of irresistible conquest, and they were now being presented with an idea which staggered them. That is why Peter so violently protested. To him the whole thing was impossible."

Jesus did not need Peter's agenda forced on him and that is why Jesus turned and rebuked him saying, *"Get behind me Satan!"* In fact, to be a true follower of Christ would mean for Peter to come in line with God's agenda or bow to God's will. In time this would happen. But, for us, this story of Peter's confrontation with Christ ought to ring some bells and raise some flags. Do we seek our own course? Must we follow our own path? Have we got better answers to the woes of this world than God almighty? Peter's dreams for a Messiah were a mighty conqueror arrayed in glory and surrounded by his faithful. A warrior king who would rid them of the pagan Roman Empire and set Israel into the center of power for eternity and rule the people according to God's Law in complete and utter fairness and peace. This is why Peter needed to put Jesus back into his place and remind him of what being a Messiah is all about. After all, he should be made aware of the political realities.

This is why, for centuries, and even in our day, world leaders claim to have God on their side of an argument or even a war. This is why certain televangelists and powerful preachers feel the need to shape and mold God's image so their listeners will see a very defined god. It is a god with a club who will beat sinners and reward followers with the obvious signs of material gain. If we don't have a big house, expensive cars, and a swimming pool yet, then we must not be doing something right for this god. And we too, many times, have tried to stuff God into a box or a place where we can define and shape the almighty's existence to suit our liking. It is much easier to cope with a sinful or failing existence when our god approves of it. How much easier this world would be if God and children and horses would follow our worthy agendas.

What Peter did not realize and what we do not readily understand is how limited our plans for our world order may be. Certainly, we could dream of the perfect universe void of disease, hardship, and suffering. Most definitely, we can aspire to total harmony, peace, and prosperity. In all likelihood we have a plan to insure our futures and make the "dream" better for our children. But where Peter failed and where we fail is in letting go and finding the freedom to exist in God's will. Why on earth should we trust enough to do this? Because, the glories God has planned for us, the security God is building for each individual, the peace God gives which passes all understanding, and the Kingdom God is building daily measures far, far beyond our wildest dreams. If you question this, then compare Peter's plan for an earthly Kingdom to the glorious reality of Jesus' resurrection into eternal life. Now that is what I call a Kingdom dream.

The challenge now is for us to learn how to surrender to God's will. We need only to turn back to the scripture passage for today and be reminded of Jesus' call to us, *"If anyone would come after me, let them take up their cross and follow*

me. For whoever would save their life will lose it; and whoever loses their life for my sake will save it." Our lives are made up of our plans, our wills, and our pride. By giving these up for the sake of God's Kingdom we take on the will of God. Jesus warns us this change in life will probably not be easy. He mentions a cross we have to bear, but upon bearing it we let go of our limited dreams and enter into God's more glorious reality. Halford E. Luccock notes, *"Jesus never asked people to go on a picnic. Suffering, the cross, death, were in plain view. He was not to be the Messiah of popular expectation. His way was to be a way of suffering."*

The way of suffering and giving ourselves to God can be extremely frightening. It is like entering the unknown. We know the way of God is good, but can we survive the experience. I am reminded of a story I heard told from some members of our youth group at last summer's camp about an American nurse and a Vietnamese boy at the time of the Vietnam War. It so happened that a bomb had destroyed a home for children and one little girl was injured and bleeding. The nurse needed a blood donor quickly and using sign language asked for a volunteer. Finally, one boy nervously stepped forward and offered himself. The nurse laid him down next to the girl, strapped his arm with a rubber band, found a vein, swabbed the area with alcohol, and inserted the needle. All through this procedure, the boy quietly sobbed. As time went on this emotion did not cease; in fact it became worse. Finally, a person who could speak both English and Vietnamese arrived on the scene and the nurse asked the interpreter to find out if the boy was in pain and why he was crying. The answer came back to her that this boy thought that by giving the little girl his blood and, hence, saving her life, he would be giving up his own. In his tears he was preparing to die for her.

With that boy's example of determined courage we are expected to join God in the endeavors of his Kingdom. Florence Nightingale at age thirty wrote in her diary, *"I am thirty years of age, the age at which Christ began His mission. Now no more childish things, no more vain things. Now, lord, let me think only of Thy will."* Near the end of her illustrious career in nursing she was asked for her life's secret, and she replied, *"Well, I can only give one explanation. That is, I have kept nothing back from God."* Keeping nothing back from God is what surrendering to God's will is all about. Keeping nothing back, including our very lives.

Anytime soon is time for us to enter into the Kingdom dream which lies beyond our wildest dreams. All we need do is put our lives in the hands of our Maker and we will be transported there. We will have to bear our crosses. We will have to feel the pain of being reshaped and reformed in God's image. And then we shall become sons and daughters of God, servants of the Kingdom, visionaries of the dream, and people transplanted from the earth of our own lot to the rich soil of God's destiny. I close with this poem written by an author who remains in anonymity.

*"To the potters' house I went down one day,
And watched Him while moulding vessels of clay,*

*And many a wonderful lesson I drew,
As I noted the process the clay went thro.'
Trampled and broken, down trodden and rolled,
To render more plastic and fit for the mould.*

*How like the clay that is human, I thought,
When in Heavenly hands to perfection brought,
For self must be cast as the dust at his feet,
Before it is ready for service made meet.*

*For pride must be broken, and selfwill lost -
All laid on the altar, whatever the cost.
But lo! by and by, a delicate vase
Of wonderful beauty and exquisite grace.*

*Was it once the vile clay? Ah yes; yet how strange,
The Potter has wrought so marvelous a change!
Not a trace of the earth, nor mark of the clay,
The fires of the furnace have burned them away.*

*Wondrous skill of the potter - the praise is his due,
In whose hands to perfection and beauty it grew;
Thus with souls lying still, content in God's hand,
That do not His power of working withstand.*

*They are moulded and fitted, a treasure to hold;
Vile clay now transformed into purest of gold.
Amen.*