**Mark 8:31-38 Self-Denial and Life in all its fullness - 2024**

Sermon Videolink: <https://youtu.be/upup6VIDgis>

Simon was having a good day, an excellent day, an awesome day. He had been hanging around with this crowd for a while now and he loved what their leader was doing. People listened to him. He had wisdom strength and power. Wow did he have power! This leader had even healed Simon’s mother when she was too sick to get out of bed. Simon was sure he had made the right move following this guy and hanging out with this crowd.

Even better, Simon was one of the favoured ones. One of the top twelve. The leader had picked him. Things couldn’t be better. Simon could see the future. The crowds following their leader were getting bigger. Soon they would head to the big city, soon they would get rid of the oppressors in their capital and their country, and the leader of their group would rule the country. Simon could see it clearly, first Jerusalem and then the world.

Things were great, especially today. Today Simon finally worked out who this guy was. The leader had asked the group who they thought he was, and Simon was the only one who knew. The stand-out disciple. He still remembered the words, hardly believing they had come out of his mouth, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matt: 16:16, NIV). And then the leader said, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” (Matt 16:18, NIV). The leader called him the Rock because his confession was rock solid. Wow did that make him feel good!

We can identify with Peter to some extent, can’t we? He was following Jesus, spending time with him, listening to what he said, watching the amazing things he did and seeing the crowds following him getting bigger each day. Somehow Jesus had called him, and Peter could see that he was on a winner. We who follow Jesus can identify with that, can’t we? That as followers of Jesus we are on the right side.

Like Peter, we too may have expectations that our lives will be better because we are disciples of Jesus. There are some preachers and whole congregations of people that follow what some call a prosperity gospel and believe that because of following Jesus their lives will be fantastic. They believe they will be healthier, happier, and wealthier if they follow Jesus and give their time, talents, and money to God.

The Rock, because that is what he was called now, the Rock or Peter in English, was having a great day. Have you noticed though how life can suddenly take an unexpected turn? One moment you are on top of the world, and you are feeling safe, secure, happy, and as solid as a rock. The very next moment your whole world is crumbling.

No sooner had the leader, Jesus, called Simon the Rock, and he started telling his disciples that he was going to suffer many things. Instead of being accepted as the Messiah, all the important and influential leaders in the country, the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law were going to reject him. Not only that but he would be killed. Then he mentioned some weird thing about rising after 3 days.

Peter couldn’t believe his ears. This is not what he had signed up for. This was not the future full of victory, power, and glory that the Rock would be a part of. Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him. That was when Peter’s day fell apart, Peter’s hopes and dreams were shattered and he had to reassess what following Jesus really meant. Jesus said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” (vs 33). Peter was ashamed of what Jesus was saying. It didn’t fit in with his idea of how things should be and as a result he was in danger of losing all that Jesus had to offer.

From that day forward Peter and all those who were following Jesus began to understand what it meant to follow Jesus. The life of a disciple is about self-denial something that was not popular with Peter or the disciples. Self-denial is still very unpopular in our society. For many people the idea of self-denial is offensive. Instead, we are supposed to put ourselves and our own needs first and then if there is something left over, we can help someone else. Self-denial is a burden. Jesus calls it a cross that we are to bear.

The paradox is that in self-denial is the seed of life in all its fullness.

What does self-denial look like for a disciple of Jesus?

It is the path of love, compassion, and mercy. It is being patient with people when they don’t do things the way we expect or would like. It is showing kindness even to the person we don’t like or agree with. It is showing respect to people who have different beliefs and lifestyles. It is acting with humility even when we think we are right and know better. It is putting aside the ledger in our head that keeps track of everything a person has done to upset us or offend us and instead always being ready to forgive.

It is the path of a love that does not delight in evil and stands up for justice, especially for those who are disadvantaged or lack the power or ability to defend themselves. It is protecting those who are defenceless or oppressed. It is putting the interests of others above ourselves.

This kind of life is not easy to live but it is this kind of life that honours our Lord Jesus. With this life comes fullness, a deep sense of completeness and joy. It is the kind of life that is good for our souls. This way of life does not come naturally to us. It flows out of a relationship based on trusting Jesus. It flows from hearts changed by God's Word and the Holy Spirit. It comes from experiencing the self-giving love of our Lord Jesus Christ and being led by that love into the full life God wants for all people. A life that brings a deep sense of peace to our hearts, minds and souls and leads to eternal life with Christ. Amen.

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