

Home Study

Mark's Epiphany



FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever messed up big time? If you're human, you have. But have you ever been publicly called out for your mistakes? Maybe you can pull up a "Most Embarrassing Moments Highlight Reel" and replay all the times your mistakes were pointed out by your teachers, bosses, parents, friends and spouses. Being rebuked almost always brings with it emotions of extreme embarrassment, guilt, and shame -- especially if the rebuke happens in public.

What are some memorable moments in your life when you were rebuked or when you rebuked someone else? What came of it? How did it feel in the moment? How did it feel later? Was the end result positive or negative?

Scripture reveals some amazing truths about rebuke. Psalm 141:5 says, "Let a righteous man strike me--it is a kindness; let him rebuke me--it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it." Proverbs 27:6 tells us, "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses."

As hard as receiving criticism can be for our ego, it proves to be incredibly valuable for our development of wisdom, humility, and integrity. How well do you receive criticism? Who do you have the hardest and easiest time receiving criticism from? How well do you give constructive feedback? Why?

In today's story, Peter receives a harsh, humbling rebuke from Jesus. As you read, consider how Peter probably felt in this moment, and why Jesus chose to use his words the way he did.

TODAY'S READING

In your Bible, read Mark 8:31-9:1.

The story today follows immediately after Peter's incredible declaration of Jesus being the Christ - the promised Messiah of the Old Testament prophecies. It seems like the disciples (with the help of the Holy Spirit) have finally started to figure it all out... or maybe not.

Jesus begins to describe to them the kind of rejection, suffering, and death that he needs to go through before being resurrected. Peter says "No way!" He pulls Jesus aside and tries to talk some sense into him. He, Peter, tries to rebuke Jesus!

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The Bible does not explicitly tell us what Peter said, but one possible explanation is that Peter desired for Jesus to ascend to earthly power and become the King of the Jews - driving out the evil Roman overlords. Peter may have expected to be a part of this rise to power, including a plush seat near the top, ruling with Jesus. This sort of view was held by many Jews about the Messiah during Jesus' time on earth. Read the question Jesus was asked by his followers, after his resurrection, in Acts 1:6. Jesus' plan was not for an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly one.

In today's reading, when Jesus begins to explain how he will be killed, Peter can't stand for it! It goes directly against *his* plans. What are some false views held about Jesus and his kingdom today? Are there still examples of people using Jesus' name to gain earthly power and privilege? What are some places in your life (be honest) where *your* plans don't line up with Jesus' plans for your life? Where do you seek that "*your* will be done, and *your* kingdom come," instead of seeking to understand God's will?

That's when the heart-piercing rebuke comes from the mouth of the Lord. Read verse 33 again.

Wow, can you imagine receiving that word from Jesus? It would be devastating. But it's important to remember that God disciplines those whom he loves. His purpose in rebuke isn't our destruction, but our correction and restoration into a right relationship with him. That doesn't mean that it won't hurt in the moment, but it will help us in the long run.

If God were to speak one statement of rebuke (Law) into your life today, what do you think it would be and why? What about if he were to speak one statement of comfort and restoration (Gospel)?

After this exchange, Jesus calls his followers together and imparts some profoundly powerful words that still challenge us as disciples today. Read again verses 34-38.

Once again Jesus reinforces the idea that Christian discipleship is not about seeking and gaining worldly comfort, power, pleasures, and treasures. Following Christ is about a radical life of seeking after God's heavenly comfort, power, pleasures, and treasures. Discipleship involves sacrifice, self-denial and suffering, but we can endure it and even find great joy through it when we fix our eyes on Jesus, "the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the *joy* set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:2-3).

What emotions and thoughts do these words of Christ in Mark 8:34-38 stir up inside you?

As good Lutherans, we sometimes overzealously sweep away "the cost of discipleship" in order to protect ourselves against slipping into a religion of "works righteousness" where we earn our salvation by our good works, instead of through faith in Christ. Obviously believing that we could be good enough to merit a spot in heaven is foolish, but it's equally foolish to ignore the implications of Jesus' call to lose our life for the sake of the gospel.

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a great Lutheran theologian, examined this problem at great length in his book, The Cost of Discipleship. He writes, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Bonhoeffer warns of the danger of subscribing to "cheap grace" rather than "costly grace." To summarize - grace is not cheap. It's offered freely to you, but that doesn't mean it costs nothing. It cost Jesus everything. The abuse of God's grace as a license to keep on sinning should be avoided at all costs. Instead, we should count the cost and see it as a cause worth spending our lives in discipleship -- not in order to earn our salvation, but because our salvation has already been won. Now we can joyfully lay down our lives, our selfish ambitions and vain deceits, and we can follow the king.

Are you guilty of assuming "cheap grace" - grace without discipleship? How and why? How can God's "costly grace" draw us into deeper discipleship?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for your sacrifice on the cross. You cancelled my/our debts and set me/us free. In light of your grace, lead me/us into deeper intimacy and discipleship. Let me/us not receive your grace in vain, but let it propel me/us forward into greater trust. You bid me/us to lay down my/our life and pick up my/our cross. Give me/us your Holy Spirit so that I/we can joyfully do so every day. Don't let my/our heart cling to the fleeting desires of this world, but draw me/us to the eternal treasure of your presence. Amen.

BONUS QUOTE (for the last day of our home studies)

"Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjacks' wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be if it were not cheap?..."

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.

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Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God."

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, [The Cost of Discipleship](#)