

Jesus: A Different Kind of Messiah

Rich Nathan
December 8 & 9, 2018
Four Part Harmony
Mark

The news of this past week was dominated, of course, by the funeral of George Herbert Walker Bush, the 41st President of the United States. Many have commented on President Bush's civility, his humility, what used to be called "courtliness" – manners befitting a King's court. If you listened to some of the stories of President Bush, it seemed like stories from the distant past, like we were hearing something from the 19th century. Almost quaint in our tweeting, screaming, angry, braggadocios look-at-me culture.

President Bush spent 40 years in what used to be called public service. He was, of course, a war hero. As a 20 year old, he flew combat missions in the Pacific. He was shot down and had to be rescued by a submarine. He was a two-term Congressman, UN Ambassador, unofficial Ambassador to China, the head of the CIA, the Vice President for eight years under President Reagan, and then President of the United States for one term – presiding over the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, the reunification of Germany, the rapid defeat of Iraq in the first Gulf War, and the signer of the Americans with Disabilities Act the most important piece of legislation in our nation's history for Americans with disabilities.

As I read a long biographical piece on the late president, what struck me was not his resume, but the values his mother instilled in him when he was a child. His mother would regularly admonish him to avoid self-promotion.

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Nobody likes the big "I Am", George! Don't be talking about yourself!

As a child, Mr. Bush once boasted to his mother that he scored three goals in a soccer match. His mother responded and said, "That's nice, George. But the question is how did your team do?" There aren't many parents that teach those values to kids anymore.

Back in 2010, a new term joined the English lexicon. You know what a humblebrag is

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Humblebrag = statement that is really a boast or a brag, but is disguised by a complaint or a humble apology.

The majority of Twitter posts are really humblebrags. Let me share with you some Twitter posts by celebrities.

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Man this is SO unfair! Why did the Lambo dealership not tell me that I'd get pulled over at least once a week in this car? Time for a Corolla LOL!

How about this?

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I just did something very selfless. But more importantly, it was genuine & I know it meant a lot to the person in the long run. #soworthit

Here's a celebrity who tweeted:

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Totally walked down the wrong escalator at the airport from the flashes of the cameras... go me!

Here's one from a super model:

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I AM featured in People's "Most Beautiful" (what can I say, they all make mistakes) BUT did the shoot w no makeup and I have to say... SCARY!

From another celebrity:

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Setting up your own charity event is no joke. Would have thought it to be easier... this is hard.

And, finally, from a pastor:

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I'm truly humbled you follow my tweets. I pray they enrich your life & strengthen your ministry. God bless all 200,000 of you!

Does anyone doubt that we live in the age of self-promotion?

Last week, I began a series for Advent, that time on the Christian calendar in which Christians around the world prepare themselves for the coming of Jesus the Messiah at Christmas. Advent, in most church traditions, is celebrated on the four Sundays before Christmas.

This year, we're going to take the four Sundays before Christmas to look at the distinctive portraits that each of the four gospel writers paints of Jesus. Last week, we looked at Matthew in a message titled "Jesus: the Fulfiller of God's Promises". This week, we are looking at the gospel writer Mark's portrait of Jesus in a message that I've titled "Jesus: A Different kind of Messiah". Let's pray.

Let me give you some background to the gospel of Mark. When you read the gospel of Mark, it is a different kind of gospel.

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A different kind of gospel

Most scholars believe now that Mark was the earliest written gospel that we have. And most scholars assign the authorship of this gospel to a man named Mark who recorded the stories in his gospel based upon what he heard from the Apostle Peter. This is according to a very early church father, a man named Papias.

The center of Mark's gospel is

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Mark 8:22-10:52

This center is framed by two stories of the healing of the blind. Mark is concerned in his gospel to carefully define for us what kind of Messiah Jesus came to be. He is also concerned to define for us what kind of disciple that Jesus calls to follow him. What kind of Messiah was Jesus? What kind of follower is Jesus looking for?

So the center of Mark's gospel is framed by two stories of the healing of the blind. The first is a very unusual story. It's told only here in Mark 8:22-26.

Slide Mark 8:22-26

²²They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. ²³He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"

²⁴He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

²⁵Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village."

So we have here a story of a blind man who had to be prayed for by Jesus two times for him to be healed. Now, what Vineyard theology has taught us over the last few decades is that here is a model for us to persist in prayer. Jesus needed to pray more than once

to heal a person. He's giving us a model to not give up. Just because someone is not completely healed when we pray for them, continue to pray. Lean in. They may be healed the second time or the third or the fourth. All of that is true. I have heard testimony after testimony in this church of individuals who have been prayed for and nothing happened or maybe they had a little bit of improvement or they continued to get prayer and at some point, God healed them.

I've personally experienced that in my own life. I had two bulging discs in my back, went to a chiropractor for relief, I got injections in my back, but I was still in incredible pain. I received prayer, but nothing seemed to be relieving the great pain I was in, so I saw an orthopedic surgeon and was scheduled to go in for back surgery. Just a few weeks before the surgery, I received prayer again and realized that all the pain went away. In fact, I was so completely pain free, I canceled the surgery and have never had pain again.

So, this story does communicate to us to be persistent in prayer, whether it's for someone's salvation or someone's healing or a blessing that you're seeking from God – persist.

But I think there's a deeper reason beyond encouraging us to persist in prayer that Mark records this unusual story for us and then places this story at this point in his gospel. While the healing of this blind man literally took place, it is also, I believe, an acted parable. There is a deeper meaning here. This blind man, after Jesus prayed for him once, only partially sees. Here's what we read in Mark 8:24

Slide Mark 8:24

²⁴ He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

I think Mark is trying to say that this man is like the disciples. The followers of Jesus are not completely blind anymore. They see, but they don't fully grasp who Jesus is – what kind of King he came to be and what it means to follow him. The story immediately preceding this one, Jesus feeds 4,000 people. The disciples are amazed. Jesus is a miracle worker. But they still don't grasp what kind of Messianic King Jesus came to be. They are not completely blind, but neither do they see clearly yet.

Of course, we know this in our own lives, don't we? Some of you are married and have thought this about your spouse on occasion. "Yes, I know they love me, but my spouse is still so frustrating! Despite me trying to explain myself over and over again, they still don't understand how I feel or what I'm saying." Have you ever felt that way with another person who is close to you? You know me, but only in part. You don't really understand what motivates me or who I am or what I need.

Immediately after the healing of this blind man at Bethsaida, we read this account of Peter's confession:

Slide Mark 8:27-30

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

²⁸ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

²⁹ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Peter has this flash of insight and says, "I have finally found what I'm looking for. It's you, Jesus! Everything that my ancestors have hoped for, everything that thousands of Jews have prayed millions of prayers to see, I'm getting to see you, Jesus, the Messiah. You're the one who is going to heal our broken world." Peter was saying, "I was blind, but now I see. My eyes have been opened to who you are." But like the blind man at Bethsaida, Peter can only partially see.

So let's read on:

Slide Mark 8:31-33

³¹ He [Jesus] 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. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ 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."

Jesus is saying to Peter, "You need a second touch to fully grasp the kind of Messiah I came to be or what my mission in this world is. You're like the man who sees, but you see men as trees walking. Everything is still really foggy for you. You don't get it." Jesus came to be...

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A different kind of Messiah

What was Peter's misunderstanding? It's the same misunderstanding that we all labor under. To be a Messiah, to be a King to be a leader is to be a winner! Not a loser. To be a king or a leader is to be served, not to serve. To be first, to be up front, in the center of the picture when all the cameras go off, that's what leadership is, right? Being recognized as the most important, being acknowledged and fawned over and applauded

and have the biggest crowds, isn't that what leadership is? Jesus says, "If that's what you think, you're still half blind."

Let me read again Mark 8:31

Slide Mark 8:31

³¹ 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.

If you have a Bible, I'd like you to underline one little word. This word "must" is key to understanding the kind of Messiah Jesus came to be in his first coming. This "must" is key to understanding the mission of Jesus – that there's a "mustness" to his suffering and death. He was under divine compulsion. He **had** to suffer and die according to the will of God. There's no other way around it. There's no other possibility. Jesus said he must die.

We read this over and over in so many places in the New Testament.

Slide Mark 9:12

¹² Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?

Right before Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, Jesus said to his disciples:

Slide Matthew 26:53-54

⁵³ Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

Why must Messiah suffer? Jesus says, "I am the Messiah, I am the King. You get that much. I am a leader, but I'm not like any king or leader you have ever known. I am a King who suffers and serves."

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Why must Messiah suffer?

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So our sin could be paid for

An old theologian said that sin essentially is stealing from God because God is our Creator and Maker. We owe God worship. We owe God gratitude. We owe God honor. We owe God obedience and loyalty and trust. But instead of giving God what we owe

him – worship, thanks, honor and obedience – we rob God all the time. Instead of giving God credit, we steal credit for ourselves. “I’m a self-made man! I did this. I deserve recognition. I deserve honor.” Instead of giving God thanks, we complain. “Why did you let this happen? Why isn’t my life better than it is? You owe me!” Instead of giving God obedience, we give him disobedience. Sin is stealing from God what we owe him.

Simple justice requires that we pay back in restitution what we stole. You steal my car and smash it up, it’s not enough to say, “My bad. Oops. Sorry, man.” If you steal someone’s wallet, it’s not enough to say, “Yeah, I did it but you have plenty of money and you shouldn’t have left your purse out.” Paying back what you owe is the definition of justice.

We steal from God honor and credit and gratitude and obedience. We owe God a debt. Here’s our problem – our debt is impossibly large. We’ve been stealing from God our whole lives. We’ve run up a debt that is infinitely large that we could never pay back. Why must the Messiah suffer and die? Because we need an infinitely large sacrifice to pay our infinitely large debt.

Why must the Messiah suffer and die?

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So we could understand the enormity of our sin

The Bible uses a lot of different metaphors to try to communicate the truth to us that Holy God cannot live peacefully with sin. One of my favorite Christian books, *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott, points out that God uses several different metaphors to describe God’s absolute opposition to our sin. The Bible uses the metaphor of distance.

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A picture of distance

God said to Moses at the burning bush, “Don’t come any closer to me.” He said to the Israelites by Mount Sinai, “Put a fence around the mountain because when I come down, if anyone touches the mountain they will be instantly killed.” He said to the Israelites as they were going to cross the Jordan with the Ark of the Covenant, “Keep a distance of 1,000 yards. Don’t go near the Ark where I am.”

But the Bible uses other metaphors to communicate with us that God cannot dwell peacefully with sin.

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A picture of fire

Here's what we read:

Slide Hebrews 10:27, 31

²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

³¹ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Probably the strongest picture of God's reaction to human sin that we find in scripture is

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A picture of vomiting

Here's what we read:

Slide Leviticus 18:24-25, 28

²⁴ "Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. ²⁵ Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. ²⁸ And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

What an incredibly vivid picture. God cannot tolerate, God cannot digest our sin. Sin causes a violent reaction in Holy God.

Why must the Messiah suffer and die?

Slide

- So our sin could be paid for
- So we could understand the enormity of our sin

Slide

So our pride could be destroyed

Why was it necessary for Messiah to die? Because only such a death can melt my pride and your pride. See, the death of Jesus on the cross is a frontal attack on human pride. Why is that? Because we all want to believe that we can earn our way in with God. All of the religions of the world cater to human pride. There is something that I can do to win God's favor and get God's notice. "Look at me, God. I'm crawling on my knees. Look at me, God, I'm making a pilgrimage to some far off city. Look at me, God. Did you see how much money I gave? Look at me, God, I'm praying five times a day. Did you notice how long I took in prayer this morning? How many Bible verses I've memorized?"

It was necessary for Messiah to suffer and die because only such a bloody death on the cross melts our pride and destroys our efforts at self-help and self-salvation. Only staring at the bloody death of Jesus can stop our humblebragging, our self-promotion. It's only when you and I are brought to our knees, it's only when we take the attitude of that tax collector in Jesus' story who couldn't even look up, but just began to pound his chest and say, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." It's only when you and I come to God with empty hands that we receive God's grace and forgiveness. If we come with full hands, hands full of what we've done, there's no room for God's forgiveness. We must let all our self-help and self-salvation go in order to find grace for ourselves.

Why must Messiah suffer and die?

Slide

- So our sin could be paid for
- So we could understand the enormity of our sin
- So our pride could be destroyed

Slide

So we could experience God's love

How do you know that God loves you when you don't feel it? How do you know that God loves you when things in your life are falling apart and you look around and you don't see any sign of God? No answer to prayer. Not yet. No healing – at least not yet. No breakthrough. No salvation for a loved one. How do you know that God loves you when every sign in your life is pointing in the opposite direction?

The Apostle Paul answers this way:

Slide Romans 5:8

⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Sometimes in really bad preaching, Jesus is almost portrayed as a whipping boy for God. God's got a stick in his hand and he's about to beat people, but Jesus the Son jumps in the way and says, "No, God! Don't beat them, beat me instead." So God beats the Son in what some people call a cosmic form of child abuse.

But, you know, when you look at the cross, you should never separate the death of Christ from the love of the Father. It says God was in Christ, reconciling the world to themselves. I mentioned this before, but there is a wonderful painting in an Italian church which shows in very graphic detail the bloody death of Jesus on the cross. There he is hanging with his nail-pierced hands and a spear run through his side. But in the painting, behind Jesus, there is a shadowy figure. As you look closely, what you see

behind the figure of Jesus is God the Father. The nails that run through the hands of Jesus are pounded into the hands of the Father. The spear that runs through the side of Jesus is run through the side of God the Father. God didn't create another being to be our sacrifice. God himself was our sacrifice. The cross is the demonstration of the self-sacrifice of God. How do I know God loves me? Because he died for me.

But the disciples only half see. They knew Jesus was the Messiah, but they don't get what kind of Messiah he's going to be. That's what the whole gospel of Mark is about – that Jesus came to be a different kind of Messiah.

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A different kind of discipleship

Here's what we read:

Slide Mark 8:34-37

³⁴ 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. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"

Even Christians who have the Bible and read the gospel of Mark and Jesus' words to his followers, even we Christians who have the Bible and can read these words, remain like the man who was still half blind after receiving just one touch from Jesus. You could go online and read sermon after sermon about how being a Christian is to be a winner.

If by being a winner you're talking about being a winner in the ultimate sense – having God in your life, not lying about yourself anymore, not lying about the world anymore. If being a winner is telling the truth then, yes, follower of Jesus, you're a winner. If being a winner is serving a purpose greater than yourself then, yes, follower of Jesus, you are winners. If being a winner is being freed up from all the things that destroy life – addictions, self-centeredness, rage, envy, jealousy – if being a winner is being freed up from all the things which destroy life then, yes, follower of Jesus, you are a winner.

But if being a winner means that you sign up for Jesus and with him you get everything you ever wanted in this world, you get all the applause that you've ever wanted, all the world's approval, all the career success and all the money you want – Jesus says "I came to bring about a different kind of discipleship, a different kind of Christianity, a different kind of followership."

Jesus says,

Slide Mark 8:34b

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Jesus says, there's no true Messiah without a cross and there is no true discipleship without a cross. If you want Christianity without a cross, you are still half-blind. What is the cross that we're to pick up? If you are a Christian, it's not enough to survey the wonderful cross, we must embrace the cross for ourselves. The cross is not the tribulations or problems or difficulties we encounter in life. The cross is not your failing eyesight or your aching back. I heard Rose Kennedy, the mother of John and Bobby Kennedy, once referred to her husband's infidelities as "the cross she had to bear". My boss is my cross. My spouse is my cross. My disability is my cross.

God can use all of our pains and all of our difficulties. That's not what Jesus is referring to when he says, "Pick up the cross." The cross is the place where you and I get crossed out. It's not enough that Jesus died on the cross. To be followers of Jesus means you and I have to die along with him. Our ego, our demands, our rights. The thing that keeps screaming inside of us, "My will be done!" must die. To pick up a cross means we entirely surrender ourselves to God.

When we shake our fists at the sky and we're angry with God because of something that life has dealt us, picking up our cross means that we say to God, "I didn't want this. I didn't ask for this. But you are God and I am not!" The cross means "Not my will, but your will be done, Almighty God."

Ladies, not being able to have a child is not your cross. It's painful. It's heartbreaking. But that's not your cross. Your cross is giving up your demand that having a child is the only way for you to be happy in this world.

Singles, your cross is not being single or alone, no matter how hard that is for you. Your cross is you giving up your demand that God must find you a spouse in order for you to fully surrender your life to him.

Your cross, my cross is not the terrible things that have happened to us – our grief, our losses, our experience of hurts. Our cross, my cross and your cross, what must be put to death is our angry demand that God must explain to us why this terrible thing happened before we will trust him with our whole heart.

What does Mark's gospel tell us? It tells us that God sent Jesus to be a different kind of Messiah. And Jesus calls you and me to be a different kind of disciple. Let's pray.

Jesus: A Different Kind of Messiah

Rich Nathan
December 8 & 9, 2018
Four Part Harmony
The Gospel of Mark
#FourPartHarmonyVC

I. A different kind of Gospel

II. A different kind of Messiah

Why must the Messiah suffer?

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