

September 22, 2019: Believe in Jesus and follow Him! [Mk. 10: 32-34]

Dear Listeners,

What does it mean, believing in Jesus? What does it entail, believing in Jesus? People have all sorts of opinions about this. They answer these questions, setting their own standards. People were unsure about that already in Jesus' days. In fact, even Jesus' own disciples had a hard time knowing what it meant to believe in Jesus and to follow him. It took them a long time to fully understand what is entailed in believing in Jesus, knowing him, trusting him, and following him wherever he leads them! That showed clearly when the Lord Jesus went on his way to Jerusalem and he told them what all was going to happen there. That's what you can see when you continue reading in the gospel according to Mark, chapter 8 and following.

After what we have heard and seen previously, dear listeners, you can imagine that the fact that Jesus' being on his way to Jerusalem would not be without risks for him and anxiety with his disciples. In Jerusalem those leaders that had come to Jesus to test him, tackle him, and trip him up so as to charge him and kill him, they will be out to carry out their resolve! Does Jesus go there to seek these problems, to challenge these leaders? That's not really how it is though. But he does go there because he knows what will happen to him and that these things have to happen. At least, that's how he speaks about it to his twelve disciples. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. You can imagine the disciples, hearing this, reacting, "What are you saying now? No way!"

Still, dear listeners, this is how the Lord Jesus prepared his disciples, indicating that he knows what will be awaiting him in Jerusalem. He repeats this prediction when he says again, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." This sure changes the disciples' anticipation of their future with Jesus! So far we have seen them impressed and growing in the certainty about his power and might; their Rabbi whom they were willing to follow. However, when he is speaking about this kind of expectation, what do they have to think of that?! The Lord Jesus is sure about it though, and he repeats it a third time even. "See we're going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

It's remarkable, dear listeners, how Jesus announces his suffering and death and resurrection! Accurately, you could say in retrospect! Yet, for the disciples this changes the situation they have been in so far drastically! They'd seen his power over sin, over demons, over sickness, wind and water, yes even over death! He showed them the power of God! What he is talking about now however sure is a different tone and prospect! It's all suffering and death! Why is that? How can that establish the kingdom of God in which they hope to have a pivotal place? And what does it mean that he will rise after

three days; what is that supposed to mean? It's all been very confusing for these disciples; and understandably so. Yet, the Lord Jesus continues on his way. He doesn't depend on the faith of his disciples; he continues nonetheless. He does not depend on their understanding, their faith, or their approval; he continues on his way through suffering to glory! It's on that way that they will have to follow him eventually; yes, once they understand and believe they will have to go the same way: through suffering to glory! That's why Jesus went forward, that they will believe and able to follow!

When the Lord Jesus describes this way of suffering to glory, dear listeners, he speaks to his disciples about the fact that the leaders will condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles. That's a very special way of saying that God will condemn him and will bring his judgment on him. Delivering him to the Gentiles is an OT expression for God's judgment over his people because of their sin, their rejection of God, and the subsequent wrath of God over them. When the Lord Jesus uses this expression, therefore, his disciples will understand that in the way things will unfold they will see the wrath and judgment of God being poured out over him! That's what Jesus had come for, for what will be happening in Jerusalem! The Son of God is on his way to Jerusalem in order to let the judgment of God come over him! Yes, that will be so, and this will happen to him in the place of God's people, and also in the place of everyone who believes in him! That's the way Jesus has to go, for us and without us!

The Lord Jesus, dear listeners, did so in order to instill faith in his followers. Indeed, for faith is very important for Jesus. Yes, he wants them and us to follow him in faith! That's also clear from the way he dealt with his disciples at those times when he announced this course of events. The first time he spoke about it, Peter had responded angrily and said, "That will never happen!" Then Jesus had shown in reaction to this that Peter was an obstacle of Satan in his way! "If you want to follow me," the Lord Jesus had said, "then you will have to deny yourself and take up your cross as well!" At the time of the second announcement the disciples had been arguing about the question who was the greatest in God's kingdom. Of all things, Jesus was talking about suffering and death and they argued about being the greatest. Then Jesus had shown them that they should become as small and insignificant as a child! At the time of the third announcement James and John had claimed the seats on either side of his throne in the kingdom. Then the Lord Jesus taught them that in his kingdom it would be a matter of service! In his kingdom the first must be last; the Son of Man came to serve!

This is how the Lord Jesus prepared his disciples, dear listeners, and they understood, eventually, and followed him accordingly! The only way they could though was by faith in him. By faith they learned to trust in him and follow him; come what may! Then you have to know him, know who he is and what he has done for us and in our place! That may not happen overnight or without effort, self-denial, and sacrifice. It starts by realizing that what we have in Jesus is God's grace, God's love: Jesus loved us and loved God so much that he gave himself even unto death! Jesus did so in order that we may be restored to God, saved and delivered from the wrath and judgment of God! When you realize how great that is, you will love him more than anything else, by faith! That's why Jesus went ahead of you too, with this message, that you would follow!