

Living for the King – Mark 8:31 – 9:1

1) Know the King

Jesus was a king but not the kind of king the disciples were expecting. In 8:29 Peter has just confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Messiah yet in 8:32 he is rebuking Jesus! The expectation for the Messiah was one who would rescue Israel from their oppressors (Roman Empire at the time); they'd seen Jesus perform many miracles, calm seas, raise the dead, cast out demons. To his disciples Jesus was a powerful, conquering King. When Jesus predicts his death they are taken aback, they couldn't comprehend it, so much so that Peter tried to stop it! Jesus' rebuke was in the harshest of terms, 'Get behind me Satan!'. Jesus knew what had to take place to rescue the world, not just Israel. Peter didn't understand, he acted impulsively and without realising he was echoing the Devil's temptation in the wilderness. Peter was not considering the things of God.

For us to live for the King we need to consider his ways, we need to trust that he knows best. When we don't understand what's going on around us, when we're confused, we need to rest in the promises of scripture and in the character of God.

Q. What is it about Jesus that most makes you want to worship him?

Q. Read Colossians 3:1-4. Discuss a time when you've had to consciously set your mind on 'things above', and share how it helped in that situation.

2) Follow the King.

In order to follow the King who died on a cross, we need to deny ourselves and take up our cross. These are 2 distinct things:

- Self-denial: Christ came to serve and died in this service, sacrificing his life for our eternal life. In the same way he tells us that to follow him we must die to ourselves, denying ourselves is more than just fleeing the pleasures of sin, it's refusing to follow any natural inclination, any desire, any agenda that doesn't glorify and honour God above all else (even if they are good things). Self-denial is about giving God consent to rule and reign in every area of our lives and being content/able to worship him, even if it is his will for us to be reduced to nothing!
- Take up our cross: Often this passage is abused and used out of context. To deny yourself something is not equal to taking up your cross; even though that denial may seem to be a heavy burden that you are bearing. The cross was the most shameful death ever conceived. Saint Augustine explained that to carry one's cross is to...*'Let him bear whatever trouble he has. For when he shall begin to follow [Christ] in conformity to His life and precepts, he will have many to contradict him, he will have many to hinder him, he will have many to dissuade him...'*. To take up our cross is to be willing to experience a measure of the scorn poured out on Jesus in his death.

Q. Why is self-denial and taking up our cross essential to following Jesus?

Q. Can you think of a time you've had to take up your cross in the context of enduring shame?

3) Live surrendered to the King.

God the Father sent Jesus to die so that we would not perish but receive eternal life (John 3:16). He came to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for those held captive, recovery of sight to blind, setting the oppressed free (Luke 4). Jesus came so that we would know joy (John 15:11). Jesus came so that we would have life and have it in abundance (John 10:10). How do we get it?

To find this abundant life we need to lose our life. This not only refers to the death of our old selves when we accept Christ as Lord, but it speaks of ongoing surrender. To experience abundant life, we need to fight against the urge to take control of our lives. As we surrender we'll find we'll be able to follow without knowing the final destination; wait for his timing without trying to rush ahead and make things happen, give room for God to provide, trust his purposes in every situation without understanding his circumstances.

Q. What is the area of your life that you are most tempted to try and maintain control of?

Q. What is the main reason you find it hard to surrender that area? Can you think of a Scripture to cling to, so you can set your mind on things above and come to a place of surrender? Pray for this.