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## Passion, Prediction & Production

### Mark 8:27–38; Romans 5:1–11

<sup>27</sup> And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" <sup>28</sup> And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." <sup>29</sup> And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." <sup>30</sup> And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

<sup>31</sup> And 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. <sup>32</sup> And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

<sup>33</sup> But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

<sup>34</sup> And he called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? <sup>37</sup> For what can a man give in return for his life? <sup>38</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

One of the themes of Lent is the commemoration of our Lord's Passion. Does that word – "passion" – jump out at you a little bit? It should. Most often, when we use the word "passion," we're talking about a strong sense of feeling. "The artist went about his work with great passion, painting through the night," we might say, or "The young woman was overcome with passion and fell head over heels in love." In our culture, "passion," is usually associated with zeal or romance.

But, when using the term "passion" in connection with Christ, we're talking about something else; we're referring, rather, to His suffering, especially the suffering He endured during Holy Week, when He was betrayed, arrested, beaten, whipped, crucified, and killed. So, in this context, "passion" means "suffering."

Today's Gospel contains, among other things, the first prediction of Christ's Passion in Mark's narrative. Immediately following Peter's great confession that Jesus is the Christ, He tells them what this will entail. Much to their surprise and consternation, He explains that the Christ must suffer. As Mark puts it, "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." Let's spend a few moments looking a little



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***Sermon for Lent 2***

*February 25, 2024*

more closely at this first "Passion Prediction," in which Jesus tells His disciple – and us – what will happen to Him, and then we'll take a few minutes to consider what this means for our lives.

First, the Passion Prediction. "The Son of Man must suffer many things," Jesus says. "The Son of Man" is the title that Jesus most often uses for Himself. It's a curious choice, because it's not the usual title that Jews used for the coming Messiah, the Christ. Now, it did have support from the Old Testament. In the Book of Daniel, for instance, there's a vision of "one like a son of man" who comes with the clouds of heaven, and to him is given "dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Without a doubt, this vision was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and He will come again with glory, on the clouds of heaven, at the Last Day. But how He gets there is what's so puzzling. This "Son of Man," the Messiah, the Christ, comes to His glory through suffering. *That* is what's so odd about how Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man. It throws *Peter* off, that's for sure. He doesn't want to hear about a suffering Christ. But his efforts to dissuade Jesus from suffering earns him a stern rebuke: "You're not setting your mind on the things of God, but the things of man," Jesus tells him.

According to Jesus, the "things of God" include the Christ suffering "many things," such as being rejected by the very religious leaders who ought to have been hailing him – elders, chief priest, scribes, and so on. But instead of praising Him, they would be the ones hauling Him before the Roman governor and convincing Pilate that this "false" Christ should be crucified and killed, which, of course, is exactly what would happen. And it would happen to Jesus, the Son of Man. It would be His Passion.

So . . . So what? What is the purpose of all this? What is God accomplishing by Christ's suffering? I'll tell you: It's something that affects every one of us in the most wonderful way. We see it in our Epistle today from Romans 5, for here St. Paul tells us the outcome, the result, of Christ's suffering, in terms of what it produces for us.

To do this, he uses all the rich, gospel-filled words in his vocabulary – words like "justified," "saved," "reconciled." Beautiful, wonderful words of life for us! Let's unpack these words a little.

"Since we have been justified by faith," he writes, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Later in the epistle he says, "We have now been justified by his blood." "Justified" is the big term here. It means to be put right with God, to be declared righteous in God's court of justice. Think of a courtroom, where you are the one on trial. God's Law is brought out to charge you with your offenses: Have you kept the commandments of God, to love God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself? The evidence from your life is brought forward as exhibits for the prosecution: Many, many acts of selfishness, of ignoring God, of failure to be kind and to help your fellow human beings. Impure thoughts, hateful words, dishonest deeds. No use mentioning the good you've done. There's no plea-bargaining in the court of the Almighty.



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***Sermon for Lent 2***

*February 25, 2024*

The verdict is: Guilty as charged. You're an ungodly sinner, an enemy of God. And the punishment decreed according to the wrath of God is death and eternal damnation. Devastating!

Oh, but wait! Now your Advocate comes forward. He is Jesus Christ, the Righteous. He has kept all the laws in the book, perfectly. The only man who ever has. And He offers to take your place. He will suffer the just penalty for all your sins. He offers His holy, precious blood – the blood of God's only Son! – for you on the cross, in payment for your sins. God's justice is satisfied. The death penalty is paid in full. Now God can be a righteous judge, even when He declares you "not guilty" because your penalty is paid. That is justification, beloved, it's what it means to be "justified"! It's what Christ's Passion has produced for you!

"Saved" is another term Paul uses to describe what Christ's Passion has produced. Think now of dangerous situation. Your boat has capsized out in the middle of the ocean. You're drifting along, helpless, clinging to the wood that separates you from drowning and from the sharks. But you have no food or water. You're exposed to the elements. You can't last much longer. Who will rescue you from your desperate situation? Now, all of a sudden, here comes the Coast Guard! They pull you out of the water, give you food and drink and warm dry clothing, and take you to safety. That is a picture of what it is to be "saved." The rescue and the resulting state of safety.

Paul says that you and I have been saved. We've been rescued from God's wrath, His hot anger against sinners. Christ took that wrath, that hot anger, on Himself. Now we are saved for eternal life. Salvation – being saved – is another way to talk about what Christ's Passion has produced for us.

Now one more. "Reconciled." "While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son," Paul says. "More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." Think now of two parties who are "at odds" with one another. In fact, one is the declared enemy of the other. But somehow, these two are brought together. Peace is made, reconciliation is achieved.

This too is a picture of what Christ's Passion has done for us. It has reconciled us to God, brought us back into a state of peace with God. We were God's enemies, estranged from Him, rebels, however you want to express it. But now, through Christ's peace-making death on the cross, we have been brought near to God. The hostilities are ended. "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Justified, saved, reconciled: These are all ways to picture and describe the great and glorious work that God has done for you in Christ, through His suffering and death. The "what" of Christ's suffering has a great big "so what" in your life and for your eternal life. Christ's Passion Prediction leads to the most wonderful Passion Production: justification, salvation, and reconciliation. All these "big words" stand for "big realities" that are yours in Christ.

But there's one more "passion prediction" in our readings today – I don't know if you noticed it. It's a prediction of your own passion, your own suffering. Stuff is going to happen to you. You will suffer for being a follower of Jesus. He predicts it, saying "If



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anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." To take up your cross means that you will suffer. Following Jesus, being His disciple, will mean suffering for you in this life. The world will be against you, as it was against Him. You will be persecuted. The devil will attack you, trying to destroy your faith. Your own sinful flesh will mislead you. You will need to put that Old Adam to death, daily dying to sin, dying to self. That is part of taking up your cross.

Yes, your own suffering, your own passion, is predicted here. But this too will produce good things. No, not your justification, salvation, or reconciliation with God. Only Christ's Passion can produce those divine gifts. But, now that you *have* those gifts, and you know it by faith, you can endure the sufferings in your life, and those sufferings will even produce good results.

Paul puts it like this: "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." Because of the peace we have with God through Christ, we are now able to rejoice even in the midst of sufferings. We know there's something more than the afflictions we suffer in this fallen world. Our joy is greater than our afflictions! And so the suffering will produce endurance, perseverance – the ability to bear up, over the long haul. This is not a product we can muster up by keeping our chin up, so to speak. No, this is not mere human endurance. It's a bearing up borne through the gospel, brought about by the Spirit. "Suffering produces endurance."

"And endurance produces character." Character, the tested quality of a metal that has been tried under fire and found to be genuine. Being put through the fire – many times, even, over the years – this will actually purify and strengthen your faith, burning away the dross. That is the character of a well-tested faith. But that only comes through enduring affliction. The fire is not pleasant at the time. But God is doing something, doing a good work in you through it.

"Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." That's what you are left with: hope, the hope of the glory to come. When all other supports fall away, when there's nothing left in this life to lift your spirits, you still have this to hold on to: hope. Hope is knowing what's in store for you because of Christ. You can't see it – not yet, anyway – but you know it's true. The Holy Spirit has poured God's love into your heart, and you know it.

And when the sufferings of this life finally come to an end, this hope that you have will not disappoint you. What you've been hoping for all these years will not put you to shame. For the outcome, the final result of your hope, will be just as God always said it would be – unending days of blessedness and joy, in glory, with Christ and all His saints – all that, and more!

What a hope this is, dear friends! What a blessed hope we have! And it all comes back to our dear Lord Jesus and His Passion, which He Himself predicted and entered into willingly, for you. Yes, His Passion has produced marvelous results in our lives and for our everlasting life. Thanks be to God! In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen