

Series: Chiseled
Today's Focus: Loving Intent

“See Your Crosses Clearly”

- 1. In light of Christ's identity**
- 2. In light of Christ's mission**
- 3. In light of Christ's call**

Today we're continuing this series called *Chiseled*. It's about learning how to deal with the reality of suffering in our lives and reconciling it with the presence of an all-powerful and enormously loving God. It's about learning to see God's purpose in the pain and suffering he allows us to experience in this world, even as we'll see today sometimes especially because we are his people. And I don't mean to just casually say that this is easy to do. It's not. But what if our pain and suffering isn't ever wasted in this broken world but in the hands of God it's intended to actually bring us wonderful blessings? How would we know? How would we ever see this?



Well let me ask you, what do you see here? {pic 1} It's a huge block of ice, right? And if you look closely there's a woman in the background holding a chainsaw. Looks dangerous, doesn't it? It's a powerful tool. A chainsaw can cut things to pieces. But in the right hands it can also be used to begin carving something special like this {pic 2}, something like a T-rex.



Or what do you see here? {pic 3} It's a block of marble. Very heavy. Rough. But with chisels and the right power tools in the hand of a master sculptor it could end up looking something like this. {pic 4}



Now one more picture to look at. This one's going to be a little different, but what do you see here?



{pic 5} Well "Of course it's a cross" you say. But think about the cross. 2,000 years ago Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross. With bloody furrows in his back because of the flogging he had already received, Jesus carried the part of the way up a hill outside Jerusalem {pic 6}. When he got there, large spikes were driven through his hands and feet pinning him onto those beams of wood. He was then lifted up into the air, a crown of thorns pressed onto his head. As he hung there he suffered physical torment. He suffocated, bled, and died. And



back cross head. And

this describes only the physical pain he endured, and that only in part. So what is the cross? On the one hand it's something undeniably horrible and yet in some other light could it also somehow be something wonderful? On the one hand it is something unbearably painful yet in some other light could it somehow be something ultimately beneficial?

Friends, what we're going to talk about today is at the very heart of our Christian faith—the cross. It's vital that we see the cross of Jesus Christ clearly. But in that context of a right understanding of Christ's cross, it's also vital that we see the crosses that we have to carry clearly too if we are to be his followers. So the message today is this: **See your crosses clearly. 1) In light of Christ's identity. 2) In light of Christ's mission. 3) In light of Christ's call.**

Jesus Heals a Blind Man at Bethsaida

²² *They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.*

²³ *He 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?"*

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

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

Last week in Mark chapter 7 we heard how Jesus healed a man who not only couldn't hear but couldn't talk. In our story today from Mark chapter 8 we hear how Jesus healed a man who couldn't see. And with this man, just like with the man last week who was deaf and mute, we see that Jesus has his own way of doing things. Jesus again here personally takes this man aside away from the crowds and he heals him. The whole scene is remarkably similar to the one we saw last week except this blind man here doesn't get healed all at once. No, last week the deaf and mute man could immediately hear and speak plainly when Jesus healed him in an instant, but this man who couldn't see... at first he only sees a little bit. It's like he sees but he doesn't see. He sees but he doesn't see clearly. His vision is a bit fuzzy. It's almost funny. The people look like trees walking around at first.

What's God teaching us here? Well certainly that Jesus has the power to heal. Every miracle of Jesus reveals the earth-shattering truth that Jesus is no mere mortal man. He is the all-powerful God in the flesh. As such he is qualified to be our Savior. He knows what he is doing. He shows also that he is loving.

But aren't we sometimes like that blind man in this story...like we're able to see but we're not quite seeing things clearly yet? Isn't this especially the case when we look at what happens in the world, or when we look at the seasons of suffering, pain, or struggle we go through in our lives? Especially when it comes to the crosses that you have to carry in life doesn't it happens sometimes where you're tempted to shake your fist at God and question, "If I have to carry this cross, does this mean, God, that you don't care?" That's why we need to **see our crosses clearly in light of Jesus' identity, his mission, and his call.**

Peter Declares That Jesus Is the Messiah

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.*

Remember that blind man. He could see but didn't see clearly at first. Well that's what's going on here too. The vast majority of people in Jesus' day didn't see Jesus clearly in terms of his identity. Who is Jesus? There were all sorts of different opinions. Many people held that Jesus was a prophet, a wise teacher. So you might say they had high opinions of him, but not high enough. It's just like today many people have high opinions of Jesus. But they're not always high enough! Friends, no one can be a true Christian without understanding who Jesus really is. No one can rightly understand how suffering can be used for our good either without a right understanding of who Jesus is. He is not just some good man who lived a long time ago. He is not just some wise spiritual guru. He is not just some admirable person who shows us how we should be willing to die for what we believe in. Jesus Christ is God wrapped in human flesh and blood. If you don't believe this you may be seeing, but not seeing clearly.

Now to his credit, when Jesus asked the disciples directly, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” Peter was quick to reply, “You are the Messiah.” And he was right. Peter correctly identified that Jesus was the Messiah who had come in fulfillment of all God's ancient promises of a Savior. What a beautiful answer it was. And yet what does Jesus do? It says, *Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him*. So here it is again. It's just like we talked about last week. It's as if Peter sees Jesus...(he gets Jesus' identity mostly right...he knows that Jesus is the Messiah)...and yet Peter doesn't really see clearly just what it means that Jesus is the Messiah. And the reason he didn't see this clearly is because he didn't yet see Jesus' mission clearly.

Jesus Predicts His Death

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.* 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.”*

This gets pretty intense here, doesn't it? You see in Peter's mind it didn't make any sense why his Messiah would end up being murdered. In his mind it made more sense if his Messiah steered clear of trouble, avoided all pain and suffering, and chose a path of popularity instead. I mean what

politician goes into an election season with the pledge that he's going to lose, right? So Peter actually began to rebuke Jesus. Can you imagine? Peter thought he knew better than Jesus so he rebuked him.

Now before you're tempted to come down too hard on Peter, if you're like me, don't you see yourself here? Can't you see yourself saying, "No Jesus, the easy path through the life, that's the better path. Choose the road that's free from pain. Choose the path where everyone likes you, where no one picks on you, where everything goes your way all the time." But instead Jesus chose to turn around and rebuke Peter. He calls Peter out, because for Jesus this temptation to avoid the cross was really a temptation to serve only himself. It was a temptation to abort his mission to be the Savior that we really need.

Satan wants us too to think only about our lives here and now as if God owes us a life of ease and leisure, a life free from all problems or pain here on this earth. But what we really need is a Savior sent by God not to set us free from all earthly suffering here and now but a Savior to rescue us from the eternal suffering in hell that we have earned forever and ever. We need a Savior God who was willing to deny himself in order take our sin and pain upon himself so that one day we can live with him in Paradise.

Friends, "*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners*" (1 Tim. 1:15). And again Scripture says, "*The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work*" (1 John 3:8). There was no other way to do this except through the cross. Only at the cross could our perfect Savior offer his perfect life as a complete sacrifice for our sins.

So Christ's cross is vital, friends, because it means our forgiveness. You and I won't have to die for our sins! Our guilt is forever gone. He endured the separation of hell so that by trusting in him we would experience the unending bliss of heaven. The surest proof that God is loving is seen clearly at the cross of Christ so that here there can be no doubt how God feels about us. He loves us. He must love us so. But finally, to see your crosses clearly, you need to see them also in light of Christ's call.

The Way of the Cross

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? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."*

This is the part you won't hear some TV preachers like Joel Osteen talk about and some mega churches won't mention. Jesus says, *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*. What does this mean? Friends, taking up one's cross means denying oneself like Jesus did for us. It means refusing to make ourselves the center of our lives but instead

making God and his will the center our lives. Doing this will always involve putting the needs of others over our own. It will always involve putting to death our own selfish, self-centered desires. It will always involve avoiding those temptations and things that might come between us and our God. It means even being ready to suffer ridicule, insults, and death in order to remain faithful to him who loves us and his given us his word in the Bible. It means we won't retaliate when insulted, we will be kind when cursed at, we will stubbornly take people's words and actions in the kindest possible way. We will patiently seek to bear the cross of suffering for the sake of Christ.

And of course here's the thing about a cross. It's something that always seems excruciatingly painful at the time. Jesus knows this too. But in the hands of a loving God even the most painful cross that we bear for his sake becomes something he intends to ultimately be beneficial for ours. Jesus doesn't tell us to deny ourselves and carry our crosses in life because he hates us, but actually because he loves us. He loves us so much in fact that he promises that he will use everything in our lives, even the crosses that we have to carry, for our ultimate good to reach the ultimate goal of bringing us safely home to heaven.

Jesus today is especially talking about the crosses we bear as Christians. In other words if you are a true follower of Jesus living out your faith in the world...you will catch flak from the world. If you hold on to Jesus' words, believing that they are truth...you will catch flak. If you try and share your faith with others...you will catch flak. In other words it will not be easier in this life to be a Christian. It will often be harder. But in the end it will be worth it. After all that's why Jesus went to cross for you and me. It was the only path to the glory of Easter. And there of course in the light of the empty tomb we see how Jesus turns loss into gain, defeat into victory, and suffering into blessing. So friends, **see your crosses clearly. In light of Christ's identity. In light of Christ's mission. In light of Christ's call.** In this light even the cross that seems most painful now will one day look most beautiful. Amen.

My Next Steps

Question to Ponder: Why is it important to understand Jesus' identity and mission clearly?

Treasure to Share: *"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work"* (1 John 3:8).

Challenge to Accept: Jesus talks about the importance of not being ashamed either of him or his words. How well do you know Jesus' words? To learn more about Jesus and his words consider coming to Bible study before church next week at 8:09 or taking part of Pastor Ben's next Bible 101 class starting this Tuesday evening. See page 13 for details. Contact Pastor Ben to register or if you have any questions. benkuerth@gmail.com / 414.403.3275