

Second Sunday in Lent

TWO WAYS TO LOSE

Mark 8:31-38

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Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

31Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise. 32He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

34He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

DIAGNOSIS: Losing, Period

Step 1: The Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Living to*

Assure We're Winners

Peter has just correctly identified Jesus as the Messiah (v. 29), and he's convinced he's found a real winner. How good is that? He'll be a winner too, because Jesus' status should naturally rub off onto him, faithful disciple that he is. It's no surprise then that he is shocked by Jesus' description of what all his messiahship will entail: suffering, rejection, and death (v. 31). Impossible! Those things happen to losers, not winners, especially not messiahs! So confused Peter takes Jesus aside and corrects him: Jesus, you have turned things upside down, he says. Winners don't suffer and die. Losers do. Take the glory road and be our glory-savior. This, of course, harks back to the exact same temptation Jesus endured earlier in the wilderness, and Mark tells us who was behind that (1:12-13).

Are we modern Jesus-followers any different? Don't we too expect glory and blessings to shower on us on account of our association with King Jesus? Don't we expect that we'll "win" big not only in the arena with God, but also down here on earth (as in being abundantly prosperous)?

Step 2: The Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Winning the Wrong Way*

Jesus makes the connection: Peter is repeating Satan's temptations. So he harshly rebukes Peter saying, "Get behind me, Satan" (v. 33). Jesus' accusation cuts to the core: Peter has switched sides, has set "his mind not on divine things but on human things" (v. 34). Indeed, Peter is so gripped by the glory-road mentality, he cannot imagine God acting any differently. He simply has no clue what God is up to. All of which means that deep down, Peter is actually "ashamed" of a suffering Jesus (v. 38).

Step 3: The Final Diagnosis (The Eternal Problem) : *Losing, Period*

God's rebuke is more severe still: those who are ashamed of his Beloved Son will receive reciprocal treatment. "Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (v. 38). "Winning" Peter's way, Jesus says, is a dead-end, literally. It is losing out with God—losing life itself: "For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life" (v. 36)? That's losing, period.

PROGNOSIS: Losing, Comma—and Thus, Winning

Step 4: The Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *A Loser for Losers*

But now, God's amazing strategy of "winning" the world's losers by losing everything himself begins to unfold. As Mark's gospel continues, and just as Jesus predicted, he does "undergo great suffering," He is "rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes," and he is "killed" (v. 31). He loses everything. Worse yet, he is abandoned by God (15:34), making him the biggest loser of all times. Marvelously, God morphs this big loser into a cosmic "winner" when, after three days in the grave he raises him, also as predicted (v. 31).

Step 5: The Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): *We Cross to Jesus*

It took the Resurrection to put Peter's mind right, that is, for him to catch on to and incorporate "divine things" (v. 33). From then on, he con-fides in (that is, he puts his confidence in, rather than being ashamed of) the Big-Loser-turned-Winner. All the world's losers are given the same opportunity—to trust this Loser-turned-Winner as the only way to "gain" life back.

Step 6: The Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Winning by Losing*

With his new mindset, Peter actually follows Jesus on the same

road he took—not the glory-road, but the way of the cross. He—and we subsequent Jesus-trusters—join Jesus in giving away (losing) our lives for the sake of others. Sounds like a losing proposition, but he/we have Jesus' promise: "Those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel" (v. 38) will end up getting their life back when the Son "comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (v. 38). Thus, this kind of losing is "losing, comma," and that punctuation makes all the difference!