Are you ready for the future?

Text: Mark 9:30-32

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Isaiah 53:6-12; Mark 9:30-32

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] Behold our God, 467, 169, Behold the Lamb, 432, 290, 184, 116, 531

**Series:** The Gospel of Mark (#29)

**Occasion:** Lord’s Supper

**Theme:**  As Jesus passed through Galilee on His way to Jerusalem, He told His disciples of His certain execution and resurrection a second time, but they did not understand Him and were afraid to ask Him for insight.

**Proposition:**  Jesus knew what was certainly going to happen to Him so He pressed forward to fulfil His mission; to save His people. As a result we, brothers and sisters, can fulfil our mission.

**Introduction**

Many people were not prepared for the ferocity of the flooding which resulted from the huge rainfall caused by Cyclone Gabrielle as it crossed New Zealand from 12th-14th February 2023. If homeowners, farmers, orchardists and others had known what would happen to them, their loved ones, their property and their communities, then they would have sought the safety of higher ground earlier. Weather forecasts can be helpful, but are seldom completely accurate and do not inform individual people of exactly what they will actually experience.

Imagine what your life would be like if you could know your own future precisely. Imagine how you would feel if you could know exactly when and how you will die. Imagine if you knew for certain that your death will be a painful, shameful murder plotted by people who hate you. Jesus is God the Son. In His humanity he has the divine ‘super-power’ of being able to know what ‘ordinary’ humans like us cannot know. For example, as John writes ‘*he himself knew what was in man*’ (2:24).

Yet, in His humanity His knowledge was not exhaustive. He did not know everything. Jesus said of the timing of His return at the end of this age “*But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father*” (Mark 13:32). He had laid aside many of the privileges of divinity (Phil 2:6) In our text this morning, Mark records the second of three occasions on which Jesus spoke of His own future, saying that ‘*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*’. Our three points for this sermon are:

1. Pressing on to Jerusalem
2. Certain execution and resurrection
3. Understanding and confidence
4. **Pressing on to Jerusalem (v30)**

Imagine that you know for certain that your death will be a painful, shameful, lonely murder plotted by people who hate you, but that you could prevent this happening if you wanted to. What would you do? Change the course of your life so that the outcome would be different? I certainly would, I think that you would too, but Jesus didn’t.

He had already predicted His coming death at Caesarea Philippi, as Mark records in chapter 8 (v31). It was then that Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him to which Christ responded saying “*Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man*” (Mark 8:33). Caesarea Philippi is located at the foot of Mount Hermon, in the upper Jordan valley north of Galilee. It was a capital city founded by Philip the Tetrarch, a son of Herod the Great. Today you can travel from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem by bus or train, a 250 km journey that can take as little as four hours. It would have been a much slower journey for Jesus and His disciples almost 2,000 years ago.

Mark records that Jesus went on from where He had healed the boy with the unclean spirit ‘*and passed through Galilee*’ (v30). Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem to die. Luke records the turning point in His ministry writing: ‘*When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem*’ (Luke 9:51). These words speak of the resolve, commitment, and determination that Jesus had as He journeyed south moving ever closer to Jerusalem and His own execution. We know from this gospel that Jesus was increasingly under pressure from the crowds who ‘*were coming to him from every quarter*’ (1:45).

At times there was a risk that the people who flocked to Jesus would crush Him (3:10). He had faced opposition in His own home town of Nazareth (6:3) and increasingly from the Jewish religious authorities (e.g. 8:11). Then He had gone away from the Jewish area to the south into the Gentile territory of Tyre and Sidon to get a break. Mark records that Jesus ‘*did not want anyone to know*’ that he was back in Galilee where He had earlier been ministering. Why do you think that Jesus wanted to keep such a low public profile as He headed for Jerusalem?

There are two reasons that we can see revealed in Mark’s gospel:

* Jesus was now giving higher priority to teaching his disciples (v31). He wanted to prepare them for what was going to most certainly happen to Him in the City of David.
* He did not want to be delayed in filling His mission to be in Jerusalem in time to celebrate the Passover.

Do you ever procrastinate when faced with a difficult unpleasant task? Putting it off as long as you can. None of the tasks that you and I are faced with are anywhere near as difficult or as unpleasant, as painful, or as lonely as that which Jesus resolutely set His face towards. Each step of His journey southwards took Him closer to the betrayal of Judas, to the unjust courts of the chief priests and scribes and of Pontius Pilate. Each step closer to a crown of thorns, mockery, humiliation, agony, separation from God and man, and then death.

Today, as we remember the death of Jesus in the sacrament of Lord’s Supper, we remember that He did not procrastinate, He did not turn aside from His mission, instead He pressed on with firm resolve to Jerusalem. Just as He persevered in His now completed work of saving us, brothers and sisters, so He calls us to live persevering lives of gratitude for what He has done for us.

The writer to the Hebrews makes this connection between the endurance of Christ and the call to persevere in these words: “*let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God*” (Heb 12:1b-2). {Note also Jam 1:2-4, Phil 3:13-14; Prov 4:25-26}. Jesus pressed on to Jerusalem, teaching His disciples about what awaited Him there, which brings us to our second point.

1. **Certain execution and resurrection (v31)**

Preachers and teachers repeat information at times to aid their listeners both to understand and to remember what they have said. Too much repetition in a sermon or a lesson can be annoying, but saying important truths multiple times is helpful and at times, necessary. This is what Jesus wisely does with His disciples. We do not know how many times Jesus repeated His prediction of His coming execution and resurrection, but Mark records three separate occasions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). As we’ve already heard (this is repetition!) our text is the second one.

Jesus said ‘*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*’ (v31). Just as He did at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus spoke ‘plainly’ (8:32). He did not employ a parable or a metaphor. By using the name ‘Son of Man’ Jesus both emphasised His humanity and associated Himself with the heavenly ‘Son of Man’ in Daniel chapter 7.

In that Old Testament prophesy, the eternal God, the enthroned Ancient of Days, gives to the Son of Man an everlasting global kingdom. The way the original language is written Jesus says literally ‘the Son of Man is being delivered/ betrayed’. He is identifying Himself as being the One to whom God the Father will give an everlasting kingdom. The events that will lead to Him being handed over to be executed were already in motion. In fact they were part of God’s plan to save His people. A plan that was first revealed in Genesis 3:15 and prophesied in various ways at various times throughout the Old Testament. Scripture reveals both the unalterable sovereign plan of God and the responsibility of people, in this case like Judas Iscariot as Jesus said: “*For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!*” (Luke 22:22).

Notice that Jesus is passive in the hands of those who will kill Him. He does not act to take His own life, nor does He resist those who do. He will be, in words of Isaiah 53:7 “*like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent*”. Passive as He is killed, but not unwilling to die. Remember also that Jesus said “*I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again”* (John 10:17-18). The Greek word here translated ‘kill’ implies a violent death. It is an intensified form of the verb ‘to slay’.

Jesus predicts His coming savage death at the hands of other human beings, but He also prophesies His resurrection after three days. The Greek word translated ‘rise’ literally means to ‘get up, stand up’. It is used frequently in the New Testament (30x) to refer to rising up from being dead to live again. Jesus gave His disciples both bad news: He was going to be killed and good news: He would not remain dead. He spoke the gospel – a message which includes the bad news of death and the good news of eternal life. At the heart of the gospel is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His death was on behalf of others, sinful people like you and me, and His resurrection was to be the ‘firstfruits’ (1 Cor 15:20) of the eternal life that would be granted to many when He returns.

At the Lord’s Supper Table we ‘*proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes*’ (1 Cor 11:26). In order to benefit from both the death and the resurrection of Jesus, you and I need to accept both the bad news of our own death and the good news of our own eternal life. The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 2:1-5: “*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins….carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved*”.

Do you believe that you were once spiritually dead, but that having turned to Christ in repentance and faith you are now eternally alive? If so, praise God!; if not, you, like the disciples walking with Jesus towards Jerusalem, lack understanding and confidence in the future, which brings us to our third point:

1. **Understanding and confidence (v32)**

As you read through Mark’s gospel the disciples are consistently revealed as lacking in perception and understanding and having hard hearts (e.g. Mark 8:17). The idea that the disciples schemed together after the death of Jesus and invented the idea of the resurrection doesn’t fit with the gospel accounts which present them as being quite stupid, even ridiculous. The gospels were not written to put the disciples in a good light; they were written to reveal the truth. Mark records that after Jesus predicted His death and resurrection a second time, the disciples ‘*did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him*’ (v32). The Greek word translated ‘understand’ here means ‘*to direct one’s mind to something, to grasp or comprehend something having thought it through carefully*’.

It was not that the disciples did not know what the individual words Jesus said meant. Although it has been suggested by some scholars that *“Jesus may have used an ambiguous Aramaic expression (for the word ‘rise’) which can mean exaltation or crucifixion”*. So it is possible that there was some confusion over what He meant. Yet the fact that they were afraid to ask Him so that they would no longer be confused, does seem to indicate that they understood His words plainly enough.

Some people, when receiving information from their doctor about a diagnosis of a terminal illness are reluctant to ask for more details. This can, understandably, be for fear of what the process of dying may involve. We don’t know why the disciples didn’t ask Jesus to explain what He meant, beyond what Mark records; that they were afraid. As a result they lacked both understanding and confidence in the future.

We know this because when Jesus was brought before the Jewish Council (Mark 14:53-65) Peter was below in the courtyard and he denied Jesus three times, just as Christ had predicted that he would (14:66-72). Matthew records that ‘*all the disciples left him and fled*’ (Matt 26:56). They understood neither the necessity of His death, nor the sure promise of His coming resurrection.

As we celebrate the sacrament of Lord’s Supper we are reminded of both Christ’s death and His resurrection for we ‘*proclaim His death until He comes*’ (1 Cor 11:26). We are obviously not at the same point in history as the twelve disciples were when they walked with Jesus towards Jerusalem and heard Him predict His death and resurrection a second time. Yet, like them, people like us can lack understanding and be afraid to ask the Lord for help so that we can comprehend more fully what He says.

You might be afraid to ask the Lord to show you your sin, to reveal where you have, and where you do continue to rebel against Him. You might be afraid to admit to the Lord that your faith is weak, shaky, perhaps even that you struggle to believe at all. You might be afraid because you don’t think that you are actually saved, that when you die you worry that you will not be raised to life eternal, but that you will be separated from life forever. You might be afraid to come to God in repentance because you don’t think that He will forgive you for what you have done.

You might be afraid to admit that you have been wrong about who Jesus is and about your need for Him. You might have had a hard heart until today, but now, today is the day to believe, to understand to trust and to have confidence for your future in Christ. You might understand the gospel, believe savingly in Christ, but you are still worried about the immediate future; how you will live, how you will suffer as you get older, how you will die.

Whatever your situation today, come to Jesus and seek to understand the gospel; the necessity of His death and resurrection and believe that He has saved you from eternal death and raised you to new life as you turn to Him in repentance and faith.

When faced with an uncertain future, anxiety is understandable. Jesus, knows this, He is fully a human being like us (apart from sin) as well as being fully divine. He said “*do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*” (Matt 6:34). Jesus did die, as He predicted. He was raised to life after three days, just as He prophesied. He is most certainly coming back to this earth in glory.

We can have full confidence in this coming event and be ready for the future with Christ Jesus in the New Heavens and New Earth. We can live this life without fear of what may happen to us on this earth, trusting by faith that Jesus will take us home to be with Him, just as He said: “*Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also*” (John 14:1-3).

AMEN.