

Follow the Leader!  
Mark 8: 31-38

The Scripture passage we just heard graphically illustrates at least two things that will get us into trouble with God. It is not often that Jesus refers to one of His closest followers as Satan, perhaps the only one recorded in the Scriptures. This is one of those many passages that should have us pause to consider what God is teaching us. Today, calling someone out as Satan would be almost unthinkable. In this post-modern, politically correct, cancel culture in which we live, in a season of empty pews, the typical pastor will emphasize grace and promise health, wealth, and happiness rather than inform people they are an agent of the devil. It seems that Jesus went to a different seminary. In the Scriptures we find that throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus was never afraid to confront and call out sin when He encountered it; to ignore it would be a violation of His nature, a violation of His holiness. Jesus was not one to tiptoe or beat around the burning bush, especially when disaster was imminent.

Before we learn from Peter's mistakes it will be helpful for us to remember who he was. He was a fisherman by trade, and without question he was the most outspoken of Jesus's 12 disciples. He was an action figure, a man's man, one of those people not afraid to speak his mind or take a risk. You might remember that he was the one who got out of the boat during a raging storm and tried to walk on water to meet Jesus. He was the first disciple Jesus chose, and he was also part of Jesus's inner circle. Along with James and John, they were the closest to Jesus and saw things the other nine did not. They were the only ones allowed to be with Jesus when he raised Jairus's daughter from the dead. They were invited to be on the mountain with Moses and Elijah when Jesus was transfigured before their eyes. They were with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane when Judas betrayed him with a kiss. Peter was the one who drew his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the High priest who had come to help arrest Jesus. Peter was not just a casual acquaintance of Jesus but someone who had the opportunity, the privilege, and the honor to know Jesus better than perhaps anyone else in his day. Don't you find it quite troubling to find that Jesus once referred to him as Satan?

If we are troubled, consider the reaction of the other disciples that day in Caesarea Philippi. Not only did Jesus rebuke Peter, He made an example out of him. That word rebuke means to correct or to straighten. It is a strong word, and it is used many times in the NT, particularly on those occasions where Jesus was confronting evil.

And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour.

When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: “Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!”

And as he was still coming, the demon threw him down and convulsed *him*. Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father.

So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them.

But the repentant thief rebuked the other saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?”

You get the idea. **Powerful forces require powerful actions.** So exactly what did Peter do that earned him one of the strongest rebukes in all the gospels? The answer is found in verse 32. Jesus had just plainly described His upcoming crucifixion, death, and resurrection. It was more than Peter could handle, and he took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him. He intended to correct the only One who needed no correction. He was going to straighten out the only One who was, is and always will be perfectly straight. Although he most certainly was concerned that Jesus would suffer great agony, Peter was mainly considering how it would affect Peter. He was thinking about Christ's death and suffering in selfish terms.

If Jesus were crucified, Peter would lose his best friend. Crucifixion was a punishment reserved for the worst of criminals, and it would be embarrassing to say the least to be associated with such a person. And even more importantly, Jesus was the best hope for the Jews to finally escape the oppression and poverty and injustice of Roman rule. Peter believed Jesus was the one who would finally make things right and instead it looked like He was destined to become another victim of Caesar. He just couldn't bear to think such thoughts. Say it isn't true! This can't happen. We watched you raise Jairus's daughter from the dead, but you can't find a way around this?

Peter didn't realize it at the time, but he was committing the most grievous of sins. Yes, he was thinking about his needs rather than the needs of others but even worse **he was challenging the authority of Jesus**. As a result, Jesus called him out on it and referred to him as Satan. So, does that mean Peter was an evil person? Was he possessed like the man we heard about a few weeks ago? The answer to both questions is no. Peter was one of Jesus' closest disciples, and Jesus does not need help from Satan to do anything. Peter was not the devil incarnate. He was surrendering to the devil's influence. We can believe that to be true because just moments earlier that day, God had used Peter as His divine spokesman. Look at verse 29. Jesus had just asked His disciples the most important question they would ever have to answer. "Who do you say that I am?" Can you imagine them looking at one another in silence, afraid to answer for fear of getting it wrong? Kind of like when someone asks you to pray- out loud- in front of a bunch of people- without advance notice.

Jesus asks the question; God reveals the answer and Peter blurts it out almost without thinking. "You are the Christ". Peter was certainly receptive to God's revelation, but he said those words without completely realizing their implications. Saying that Jesus is Lord and believing it to be true are two very different things. Just a few verses later we learn that Peter is trying to tell Jesus, the Christ, the co-creator of the universe, how to do His job. Peter didn't grasp the importance and necessity of Jesus' mission and for that matter perhaps even his own. He fell prey to Satan's influence instead. **He was not following Jesus, but his worldly way of thinking and human emotion**. Peter was following Peter and the ways of the world. That is what got him into trouble that day, and I suggest to you it will get us into trouble as well whenever we attempt to do the same. The devil is relentless and is always at work trying to separate us from God.

Can you imagine what Peter's arguments were? Come on Jesus, the Messiah is supposed to be strong, not weak. The Messiah will defeat his enemies, not submit to them. How can you stand down and let this Roman injustice continue? You need to wipe them off the face of the earth and take over. Come on Jesus, those people aren't worth losing your life over. Or maybe he was thinking to himself, what will my friends think if I choose to follow this guy to the cross and I wind up there alongside of him? What if He doesn't come back in three days?

Don't be too hard on Peter as we might use similar arguments. Come on Jesus, I know you can answer my prayer. Just to be clear, here is the answer I want. Just say the word and everything will be OK. Like Peter, we may not even realize it but when we pray like that we are saying "Jesus, I will be your follower, as long as I can lead the way". **Leaders lead and followers follow, and when those two roles are reversed disaster usually results.** Those that don't know Jesus might ask how can you say you are the only way to heaven, or why can't I choose my sexual identity, or what are you going to do about those who never heard the gospel? If we aren't following the Jesus of the Scriptures, we are following someone else. Unless we change direction, it will eventually lead us to a place we won't want to be. Thankfully, in grace Jesus calls us back to Him, sometimes in a very striking or even unusual way. We will need to listen for His voice.

It is important for us to understand why Jesus said what He said to Peter. Peter was being used by Satan. He was on the wrong path and he would not have known it unless Jesus pointed it out to him in no uncertain terms. It is a stark example of the divine alliance of grace and truth. This was literally a matter of life and death, for God would soon reveal His glory and bring life to His creation through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. What Peter saw as reprehensible and unthinkable in the humiliation and crucifixion of Jesus, God saw as grace, love, and mercy to His creation. Peter would not and could not be permitted to stand in the way.

The Scriptures are true. Jesus is in heaven sitting at the right hand of the Father and He is calling us to join Him there on His throne of glory. **Revelation 3:21** The only way to get there is to follow Him. **Vs 34-37.** The way to heaven is through the narrow gate of the cross. It is both a graphic reminder of the ugliness of sin and a beautiful symbol of God's grace, forgiveness and promise of eternal life. To those who suggest there is a different way, we must politely and boldly say no. The Scriptures say there is no other way, but Jesus and Jesus crucified. When it comes to confronting sin and receiving grace we must say no to political correctness, say no to heresy, and say no to those who shade the truth of Gospel. **Vs 38:** Heaven is for those who admit their sinfulness, and trust and believe that Jesus died for those sins His way, which was the way of the Father. We are all sinners in need of a Savior, and it is our faith and only our faith that the shed blood of Jesus washes away those sins and secures our place with Him in eternity. So, get thee behind us Satan. Lead us Jesus, lead us. Teach us to be your followers. Amen