

International Conversation Café

Hero Story: The Story Line of Jesus Takes a Different Direction

Right up until the end of Jesus's life, his disciples thought that he would somehow defeat the Romans and usher in his kingdom. They believed that Jesus would rule the world as king and that they would have important positions in that kingdom. It is true, that Jesus came as the Messiah, the King. In preparation for his kingdom, he taught people what life in the kingdom would be like, a place with love for God and one another. Jesus demonstrated his authority and ability by healing people physically and forgiving sins. But there was a part of the story his disciples were unwilling to embrace, even though Jesus warned them. They could not believe that Jesus must suffer and give his life before he would rule as king over all the world.

At one point, just after Jesus had fed 5,000 people by multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish, he asks his disciples about what people were saying about him.

Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist (a recent prophet); others say Elijah (a prophet from long ago); and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "God's Messiah (King)" (Luke 9:18-20).

Now comes the surprise when Jesus continues.

Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

Retell the story thus far.

Why do you think these words surprised the disciples?

So, Jesus warned his disciples of his coming death three times before he was crucified. At least on two occasions, the disciples argue among themselves about who is the greatest among them. They were seeking position and power in Jesus's kingdom. But Jesus warned them that just as he was going to suffer, his true followers will also suffer.

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

The cross was the Roman method of execution for the worst criminals. For Jesus to tell his disciples that they must take up their cross means that they must accept rejection from the world, just as Jesus was rejected by the powers of the world, both the civil government of Rome and the religious authority of the Jews.

*In light of this, what do you think his words about saving and losing your life mean?
What is the warning about rejecting the Son of Man, that is Jesus?*

In a great story, a hero goes through suffering to bring about a greater help to others. The prediction of the suffering of the Messiah is well documented in the Old Testament. Scriptures like Isaiah 53 make it clear that the Servant of the Lord will suffer and die so others will live.

He suffered the things we should have suffered.
He took on himself the pain that should have been ours...
But the servant was pierced because we had sinned.
He was crushed because we had done what was evil.
He was punished to make us whole again.
His wounds have healed us...
He was killed even though he hadn't harmed anyone.
And he had never lied to anyone (Isaiah 53)

In your own words and according to Isaiah 53, why did Jesus suffer? Did he deserve to suffer?

The Lord says, "It was my plan to crush him
and cause him to suffer.
I made his life an offering to pay for sin.
But he will see all his children after him.
In fact, he will continue to live.
My plan will be brought about through him.
¹¹ After he has suffered, he will see the light of
life.
And he will be satisfied.
My godly servant will make many people godly
because of what he will accomplish
(Isaiah 53).

*In your own words and according to Isaiah 53, what did
God want to accomplish through the suffering of Jesus?*

Is this story helpful to you? If so, in what way?



Rembrandt. The Descent from the Cross. C. 1650/52. 142 x 110.9 cm.
Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington. Widener Collection.