

### Introduction

An airline pilot flying over the southeastern United States called the local control tower and said, "We are passing over at 35,000--give us a time check." The tower said, "What airline are you?" "What difference does it make? I just want the time." replied the pilot. The tower responded, "Oh, it makes a lot of difference. If you are TWA or Pan Am, it is 1600hrs. If you are United or Delta, it is 4 o'clock. If you are Southern Airways, the little hand is on the 4 and the big hand is on the 12. If you are Skyway Airlines--it's Thursday."

Perspective is important (*use illustration with picture*)

Perspective is important. Where we are standing can make a big difference to how we understand a situation. In his sequel to Alice in Wonderland Lewis Carroll invented Looking glass Land where Alice went through the looking glass and found everything was back to front. In our gospel reading this morning we see Jesus trying to get his disciples to change their perspective, to look at things upside down and to lose the assumptions they held about life, the universe and everything and particularly about his mission.

Jesus has just asked his disciples who they think he is and Peter has replied with his memorable affirmation of faith, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God". This was a response which both pleased and surprised Jesus. He responds warmly to Peter telling him that that understanding of who he is didn't simply come from his own thoughts and experience but was a direct revelation from God. He goes on to tell him that he is the 'rock' the foundation on which he will build his

church. He has used the image of building on rock in one of his parables, the disciples would remember and realize that he was saying that the sort of faith showed by Peter was a strong foundation for an effective religious life.

Unfortunately for him Peter not only shows great insight and faith he also totally misses the point and earns a crushing rebuke from Jesus. Having prepared the ground by making it clear to the disciples that he is the promised Messiah Jesus goes on to make it clear what that means. They probably expected that the plan would be to march on Jerusalem, pick up supporters on the way, choose the right moment, say some prayers, fight a surprise battle, take over the Temple and install Jesus as King. Surely that would be how God's kingdom would come? Surely that would be how the Son of Man would be exalted?

**Romans 4:13-end**

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Imagine their confusion and horror when they heard Jesus tell them that actually the plan meant that although he would go to Jerusalem he was going to suffer and die and it would be the chief priests and Pharisees who would, in the first instance, be victorious. He told them that he would be raised to life but at this stage that meant little to them and they are appalled by the plan that Jesus puts before them.

True to character it is Peter who reacts and probably speaks for all of them when he says, "Never Lord, this shall never happen to you." It is incomprehensible to them how this could be the way to rescue Israel and establish God's kingdom. Jesus responds very strongly to Peter's words and his rebuke is fairly shocking. "Get

behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God but human concerns." Here we see it clearly stated. Peter's perspective is wrong. He is not looking at things from God's point of view but as a human being. He doesn't have the upside down way of looking at things – or maybe the right way up way of looking – and what he hears Jesus say seems very shocking.

The power of Jesus' rebuke comes across very clearly, and I guess that for most of us our first reaction would be to think that it is surely a bit strong to call one of his closest followers Satan, especially when he has just commended him for his insight and faith. But Satan means "the adversary" – the opposition if you like, and by telling Jesus that surely he shouldn't suffer and die Peter was raising a temptation that Jesus struggled with all his life: The temptation to take the easy way out, to not face his inevitable suffering and death.

The thing that always strikes me most strongly about Jesus and his love and commitment to us is that there was never a moment when he didn't know clearly what lay ahead of him. When he came to earth and was born in that stable in Bethlehem, he came knowing exactly what lay ahead of him. It was the result of a considered decision, and yet knowing how much it would cost him Jesus still came to live and die for us.

Through his life on earth Jesus struggled with that knowledge and there were times when he was sorely tempted not to go on with it. This surely is one of them. He says to Peter, "You are a stumbling block to me". Peter's attitude threatened to get in Jesus' way,

to distract him from his purpose and his mission. Jesus says to Peter, "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but human concerns." So where were Peter's attitudes and thinking misplaced? In what way were they worldly?

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Peter had said to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." He knew that Jesus was the promised and long awaited Messiah who was going to come and rescue God's people and more than that he knew that Jesus was not only someone sent by God but God himself "You are the Son of the living God." So Peter had a definite and real faith. He had insight into who Jesus was and Jesus recognized that it was God himself who had given Peter that insight. Peter's faith was not only real it was God given.

But the problem was he had no real understanding of what his profession of faith meant. He knew Jesus was the Messiah, he knew he was the Son of God but he interpreted that from a human perspective. He thought of salvation from a human point of view. By that I mean he had his own human ideas about how God would act. His expectation of what God would do was restricted, more than that it was so narrow that when he heard what God was planning to do it horrified him. It took him out of his comfort zone.

Peter could not grasp that such disaster as described by Jesus could really be within God's will and purpose. I think this is often something we have problems with. Because we are human beings, when we think about God and what he might do, we tend to think in human terms. Our understanding of how God might act is

limited by the idea or picture that we have of God. How often have you heard people say, "But my God isn't like that!!" We like to have our own image of God, we put him in a box and make him a 'pocket God' our own tame deity defined by what we want and expect from life. We have our own definite ideas about what God is like and how he thinks and acts and when he is seen to be different from those ideas we can have a real problem with it.

You may have heard of David Watson, a very gifted evangelist, who was the Rector of St Michael le Belfry church York, and who had a worldwide ministry of preaching and teaching. It would be hard to say how many people came to faith through his ministry, but he was somebody that God used enormously. All his life he was hampered by severe asthma and when he was still fairly young he died of cancer. This caused enormous confusion and upset for many Christians who had been praying for his healing because they couldn't see why God would allow a man he was using so effectively, and who might have had many more years of fruitful ministry to die. It is hard to understand, but David wrote a book in the last months of his life showing how his relationship with God had changed and deepened through his illness and in God's plans for David it was necessary for that to happen.

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Or again, in the nineteen fifties all the Christian missionaries had to leave China as the Communist regime took over there. It caused much heart searching and deep disappointment amongst the missionaries because they had been doing very effective work there and had to turn their backs and

leave young Christians without support and guidance. It was difficult to see how this could be in God's purposes and how he could allow such a set-back to happen. How could God's purposes for China be best served by all the missionaries leaving? Yet over the past thirty years or so we have seen that Christianity has grown unseen in China. Thousands and thousands of people have come to know Jesus in a very real and exciting way. They have found leaders amongst their own people who have led and supported them in a way that western missionaries could not have done. The western missionaries sowed the seed and were forced to leave, with much heartache, but God in his wisdom brought about the growth in his own way.

This is the difficulty we have when thinking about how God will act and this is why Peter was so horrified when he realized what it would entail to rescue mankind. He was thinking in limited terms, from his own viewpoint, whereas God was thinking in terms of eternity. Peter was thinking of what it would need to restore Israel to independence and freedom. God was thinking about what it would take to restore the whole of mankind to a close relationship with him and to gain their release from slavery and sin.

Peter had a real and definite faith in Jesus but he interpreted it in terms of human considerations and so limited what Jesus should do for him. If we are not careful we can do the same. God may want to work in our lives in a certain way, but he can only do that if we allow him to. Jesus tells us that God thinks differently from how we human beings think. God sees everything

the right way round whereas we tend to see things inside out or back to front.

Jesus call us to follow him and calls us to trust him to know how best to meet our needs. He calls us to give ourselves totally to him in the way he gave himself totally for us. He asks us to take up our cross and follow him. Following Jesus will cost everything and give everything. There are no half measures. It's a bit like learning to swim. If we keep our feet on the bottom of the pool we never work out how to do it. Jesus tells us we have to lose our life to find it. What is the point of keeping our feet on the

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bottom when the water gets too deep? We have the choice swim or drown. Apparent safety – walking on the bottom is no longer an option.

To those who followed him when he was here on earth Jesus made astonishing claims about what would happen. His death and resurrection vindicated those claims. For those of us who follow him today Jesus makes equally large promises and demands equal trust as he did from Peter and the other disciples. It is still true that to follow him we have to learn to think inside out, in looking glass fashion, and what the world considers great is foolishness and what the world considers foolish is true wisdom. Cling onto your life and your freedom and you will lose it; give everything you've got to following Jesus, including life itself and **we will win the greatest and richest reward.**

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, thank you for your complete and utter commitment to us. Thank you that you were prepared

to face untold suffering and death for our sakes. Help us to understand more and more what it means that you are "the Christ, the Son of God". Help us to allow you to be that in our lives and enable us to see with your perspective. Give us your thoughts and your understanding and give us the courage to follow you.

In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen**