

Jesus Is the Messiah

Lesson Text: Mark 8:27–9:1 **Background Scripture:** Mark 8:27–9:1

Devotional Reading: Philippians 2:7,8; 1 Peter 5:5

Mark 8:27-9:1

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” ²⁸ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. ³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life^[b] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

9:1 And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”

LESSON AIMS:

- **Facts:** to show that Jesus is the Messiah and that following Him often involves suffering.
- **Principle:** to know that Jesus is the Servant-Messiah sent from heaven.
- **Application:** to see that when we seek to follow the Messiah, it may be hard; but it will be worth it in the end.

INTRODUCTION

Crunch Time

Crunch time is a familiar phrase for athletes. For a basketball player, it is the final seconds in a close game. For the marathon runner, it is late in the race when he or she “hits the wall” and has to find the strength to continue. For the baseball player it is the final inning of the game with two out and the bases loaded; for both the pitcher and the batter, it is crunch time.

Many moments in our lives can qualify as crunch time. The minister’s question “Do you take this woman to be your bride?” creates that kind of time. When a woman is ready to deliver a child, it is that kind of time. When soldiers brace to defend their homeland, when firefighters race into a burning building, when parents have to confront a wayward teen, it is crunch time. Crunch time comes whenever we face an all-important moment of truth.

For Peter and the other disciples in this lesson, one crunch time came at Caesarea Philippi when Jesus challenged them to answer a question. It was time to make a decision, for someone to dare to answer. When Jesus asked His disciples, “But whom say you that I am?” Simon Peter rose to the occasion and spoke with conviction.

LESSON BACKGROUND

From the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry, it was clear that He had come to fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah. John the Baptist prepared the way for Him, just as Isaiah 40:3 had predicted (see Mark 1:2,3). Jesus announced His purpose at His home synagogue in Nazareth, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.” After quoting Isaiah 61:1, Jesus announced, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21).

Through the following years of His ministry, Jesus demonstrated time and again that He was sent from Heaven to fulfill everything Isaiah and the other prophets had said. As the Messiah, Jesus came to bring salvation and reassurance to God's people, the Jews. In addition, He came to bring light to the Gentiles and bring them into the community of God's people. The most difficult prophecy of Isaiah, however, was that the Messiah would be the suffering servant, who would give His life to bear the sins of all people (Isaiah 53, last week's lesson). Well into the third year of His ministry, Jesus was ready to test the disciples' understanding of His identity and His mission.

CHRIST REVEALED (Mark 8:27-30)

While there are few clues in the Gospels concerning the precise dating of the events of our text, many believe that they occurred about six months before the crucifixion (Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, Harper & Row). Shortly after these events, Jesus "*resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*" (Luke 9:51), thus anticipating His sacrificial death.

Making His way to what was one of the northernmost points of His itinerant ministry, Jesus "*and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi.*" Here Jesus can spend time preparing His disciples for what is to come. Philippi, a location nearly 30 miles north and slightly east of the Sea of Galilee, overlooking the northern end of the Jordan River valley.

In this era, many towns are named Caesarea, in honor of the emperor of Rome. A larger and more important Caesarea, for instance, is Caesarea Maritima ("Caesarea by the Sea"), which is on the Mediterranean coastline. The town in the area where Jesus and His disciples gather has the additional name Philippi, in honor of Philip II (also known as Philip the Tetrarch). Originally it was called Paneas in honor of the Greek god Pan; it was a Gentile area where many false gods were revered. Since these disciples would eventually be sent out into the larger world, where both the emperor and pagan deities were worshiped, this was an appropriate setting to ask some very pointed questions.

1. How did Caesarea Philippi get its name (Mark 8:27)?

Jesus first wanted to know what the people were saying about Him. Interestingly, the disciples did not share some of the less-than-flattering remarks made about their Lord (Mark 3:21-22; Luke 7:34; John 8:48; 9:16).

Some thought Jesus was John the Baptist. As relatives (Luke 1:36), Jesus and John may have resembled each other physically and could have been confused by some people. More to the point, Christ preached essentially the same message that John had been preaching especially early in His ministry (Matt. 3:1 - 2; 4:17). Herod Antipas even concluded that Jesus was John resurrected (Mark 6:14-17). Since some of the first followers of Christ had previously been disciples of John (John 1:35-37), the two movements might have been confused.

Others, however, thought that Jesus was Elias (Elijah), as his coming had been prophesied (Mal. 4:5). That prophecy, however, was fulfilled in John (Matt. 11:14; Luke 1:17). Other prophets, such as Jeremiah (Matt. 16:14), had also been suggested by the multitudes. There was certainly enough evidence to conclude that Jesus was more than a prophet, although He was the Prophet like unto Moses foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15 (cf. John 6:14; Acts 3:22).

Whom do men say that I am? "Who Jesus is" is a fundamental issue that everyone—especially the disciples themselves—must face. Where does Jesus come from? What is His purpose? The answer to these questions will determine what we do in response to Him.

2. What opinions were circulating about Jesus' identity (vs. 27,28)?

Now the question becomes pointed and personal: But whom say ye that I am? Have the disciples resolved in their own minds the issue of Jesus' identity? We are about to find out!

We can imagine the disciples hanging back, each waiting for someone else to take the lead in answering Jesus' question. Peter is the one who does so: ***You are the Christ.*** (The parallel account of Matthew 16:16 notes that Peter also says "the Son of the living God.") All the hopes of Israel, the destiny of humanity, and the eternal plan of God hang on this man Jesus.

Christ is a Greek word, and its Hebrew equivalent is Messiah. They both mean “the anointed one” (compare John 1:41; 4:25). Most of the first-century Jews think this person will be a political figure, a nationalistic king. They assume that He is to sit on the earthly throne of David and rule over an earthly empire. But Jesus will be a leader on God’s terms (compare John 6:15).

3. What did Jesus ask of the disciples (v. 29)?

What Do You Think?

What are some ways that people today answer Jesus’ question “Who do you say that I am?” Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Are the answers similar to the first-century responses?
- Answers that are different from the first-century responses
- John 12:34

Popular Opinion or...?

“Run it up the flagpole and see who salutes it” is an old adage familiar to many. The meaning is that you want to find out what people think about an issue before making a final decision. Politicians use opinion polls to find out “which way the wind is blowing” on an issue before taking a stand.

The church is not immune to this way of thinking. People naturally have opinions on how a church should carry out its mission. That is not necessarily bad in and of itself, and wise leaders are good listeners. But danger looms when popular opinions about the Bible are allowed to hold sway over the facts of the Bible.

People today hold many opinions about Jesus. He is regarded as a myth, a misguided fool, and everything in between. But opinions aren’t facts, and the church dare not present to the world the Jesus that the world wants or thinks Him to be. The fact is, Jesus is who He claimed to be: the Son of God. In a world filled with opinions about Jesus, it is imperative that Christians hold to the facts of who Jesus really is. —A. Eugene Andrews

Even though Peter has confessed a wonderful truth, Jesus commands the disciples to tell no one. Jesus has given similar prohibitions on several previous occasions (see Mark 1:44; 5:43; 8:26; 9:9). Likewise, the demons are forbidden to reveal Jesus’ identity (1:25; 3:12).

The need for secrecy seems to be connected with the expectations of the people. When they hear about Jesus’ miracles, they overwhelm Him with the sick, the crippled, and the blind (see Mark 1:45). They cannot see that His miracles are pointing beyond present physical needs; these miracles are His credentials as the one who has come from God. When they think about Jesus’ identity as possible Messiah, they clamor for Him to establish a kingdom independent from Rome (see John 6:15; Acts 1:6). There will be time later to proclaim to all the world that Jesus is the Christ, but that time is not yet.

4. Why did Jesus want His disciples to remain silent about His messiahship (v. 30)?

CHRIST REJECTED (Mark 8:31-33)

This verse marks ‘a turning point in the book. If there had existed hopes for an earthly kingdom established by Christ, they were now dismissed, because at this point “he began to teach them” of His suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection.

Once it was clear that the disciples understood that Jesus was the Christ, He began to unveil to the disciples what was to happen in the immediate future. Rather than being received by the national leaders, Jesus was going to “*suffer many things, and be rejected.*” Indeed, He had already been rejected by many, especially by the Pharisees.

Things were going to get worse, though, as they made the final journey to Jerusalem.

The reference to the elders, chief priests, and scribes was another way of saying the Sanhedrin, the highest court among the Jews. Although many of them already opposed Jesus, they had not condemned Him officially as an assembled body. That would happen during the last week of His life, when they finalized their plot against Him.

While the disciples knew that Jesus had enemies, they most likely did not anticipate that He would be killed. That He would be resurrected after three days was completely misunderstood by the disciples. Since He often spoke in parables, they may have assumed that this was a cryptic remark not to be taken literally. It is obvious that when the first reports of His resurrection were heard, they did not believe them.

5. What ominous prophecies did Jesus make concerning His future (v. 31)?

Jesus' announcement was made openly but Peter led Him aside to rebuke Him. The impulsive apostle cringed in unbelief at what he heard, and he quickly let it be known that he was unwilling to accept it. The other disciples likely share Peter's opposition to what Jesus has said. That's probably why Jesus turns and looks at them (v. 33).

Jesus rebukes Peter in front of them all. Knowing that Peter's way of thinking stands between Him and the cross, Jesus says, in effect, "Get out of my way! Don't think you can stop me!"

Shockingly, Jesus then addresses Peter as Satan. But this is an appropriate designation for at two reasons. First, the word *satan* refers to an enemy; where the Hebrew word is translated "adversary." If Peter stands in the way of Jesus completing His mission, then Peter is indeed an enemy. Second, Peter is repeating a temptation of the devil in the wilderness by suggesting that Jesus does not really need to allow himself to be harmed in order to carry out His mission (Matthew 4:5,6).

Although well-meaning, Peter's words revealed that his concern was worldly. Indeed, the popular concept of a political Messiah was shared by most of the people, including those closest to Jesus. In time, however, they would realize that Christ did not come to establish an earthly kingdom that would do battle with their Roman oppressors (John 18:36).

6. Why did Peter rebuke Christ (v. 32)?

CHRIST RECEIVED (Mark 8:34-37)

If the disciples were confused concerning Christ's mission, how much more were the multitudes? Hence, He "*called the crowd to him along with his disciples*" to clarify the nature of true discipleship.

To begin with, would-be followers of Christ must be willing to deny themselves to be His disciples. In short, the things of Christ must be first in the hearts of believers. Sadly, many deny themselves nothing and have no distinguishing marks to identify them as true believers. Self-denial means "saying no to selfish interests and earthly securities. Self-denial is not to deny one's personality, to die as a martyr, or to deny 'things' (as in asceticism). Rather, it is ...turning away from the idolatry of self-centeredness and every attempt to orient one's life by the dictates of self-interest" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Cook).

Taking up one's cross is not the same thing as bearing the common burdens of life endured by nearly everyone. To be sure, faithful Christians will bear burdens, but that is not what Jesus was talking about.

In the context of the first-century world, taking up the cross had to do with a willingness to die. A cross was not a shiny piece of jewelry or a carefully carved object adorning a place of worship. Rather, it was an instrument of death that was frequently seen by passersby throughout the Roman world. Crosses were where criminals and rebels ended up. No one wanted to have to carry a cross; yet Christ said that His followers might have to go to their deaths for Him. As subsequent history indicates, some early Christians did die on crosses. Others were tortured in a variety of ways (Acts 7:59; 12:1,2; 26:10).

While Jesus' words concerning saving and losing one's life may sound like double-talk, they are not, although they are paradoxical. "From the human point of view, we are losing ourselves, but from the divine perspective, we are finding ourselves" (Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Victor).

7. What did it mean to take up one's cross in those days? What does it mean today (v. 34,35)?

Imagine that someone could “*gain the whole world,*” win the whole game of life, and “die with the most toys” (as the saying goes). If a person believes that there is no after-life and judgment, it makes perfect sense to him to devote his life entirely to earthly pursuits. Conversely, if there is more to life than meets the eye and if we must give an account of our lives and choices before the Creator of the universe, it behooves us to think differently about the pursuit of worldly goals (Eccles. 12:13,14).

While "soul" can be used variously in the Bible, here in Mark 8:36 it refers to that part of the human being that survives death. To lose one's soul is to lose one's self for all eternity. Christ said, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

While there have been a number of political leaders in the history of mankind who have attempted to conquer the world, none of them have been successful in that pursuit. Even those who have had some measure of worldly success eventually have to relinquish all their earthly acquisitions (Ps. 39:6; Jer. 17:11).

On a smaller scale, there are many people who have sold out to the world, the flesh, and the devil. Some, in fact, sell out rather cheaply. Consider, for example, the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21), the prodigal son (15:11-13), or the rich man who went to hell (16:19-31). All of them sold out because of money.

8. Why did Jesus asks His followers to think clearly about this life in relation to the next (vs. 36,37)?

CHRIST RETURNING (Mark 8:38—9:1)

That Christ referred to the people of His day as an "*adulterous and sinful generation*" was characteristic of how the Hebrew prophets spoke. Since Israel was depicted as married to the Lord, any worship of false gods was seen as spiritual adultery (Jer. 3:6-10). Of course, there were people in Jesus' day who were involved in immorality, just as there are today (Heb. 13:4).

To be ashamed of Christ in the world in which we find ourselves is to put ourselves in a position where we will be denied by the Lord at His second coming (Matt. 10:32,33).

Since Christ had begun to speak openly about His death and resurrection (Mark 8:31), He also revealed that He would come again. While Christians may debate the details of the Second Coming, all true believers are confident that Christ will return (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:13—5:6; 2 Pet. 3:1-13; Rev. 19:11-16).

9. Why would Christ refer to His generation as "adulterous and sinful" (Mark 8:38)?

Some of those listening to Christ would "*not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power.*" Some—like Jesus and Judas—would taste of death before long. Perhaps in the multitude listening to Christ, some would also die in the near future. What, then, did the Lord mean when He spoke of the kingdom coming with power?

Many believe that this refers to the transfiguration, an event to be discussed in next week's lesson (Mark 9:2-13). Others believe it refers to the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost and the subsequent establishment of the church. Still others suggest that Christ was alluding to His resurrection, as the kingdom was certainly present in the King when He arose. A few even take this to mean the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70

10. What do you think seeing the kingdom of God coming with power meant (Mark 9:1)? Why?

CONCLUSION

What Kind of Messiah?

People in the first century can be criticized fairly for wanting a Messiah on their own terms. They were more interested in His miracles than in His message. They were eager for Him to overthrow Rome, but they did not necessarily want Him to rule in their hearts.

But what kind of Messiah do we expect Jesus to be? Do we expect that He provide health and wealth? Do we think He should be the “heavenly genie” that grants all our wishes? Let us learn from Peter’s experience that we do not dictate to Jesus. He is God’s Messiah, on God’s terms.

What Kind of Disciple?

A true disciple does not ask, “Am I happy with Jesus?” Instead, he or she asks, “Is my Lord happy with me?” True discipleship has its costs, but it also has unimaginable rewards. Therefore the true disciple will echo Peter, “You are the Christ—and You are my Lord.”

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Nothing is more vital than rightly identifying Jesus and submitting oneself to Him (Mark 8:27-30).
2. Jesus was not a victim but a willing sacrifice (v. 31).
3. Our own preconceived ideas can cause us to misunderstand God's plan and thereby give aid to the enemy (vs. 32,33).
4. True discipleship is a costly choice (vs. 34,35).
5. Every man must choose which is more important: the temporal or the eternal (vs. 36,37).
6. A man's spiritual choices have everlasting consequences (8:38-9:1).

PRAYER

Father, we thank You for sending Your own Son to be the Messiah who would give His life for us. Help us to be faithful disciples. May we never be ashamed to take our stand with Jesus and the truth of the gospel. We pray in His name, Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Take up your cross today.