

Sermon outline and notes:

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Mark 8:22-38 “Following Jesus”

Intro. So far in my series of messages from Mark, we have covered the first three years of the ministry of Jesus Christ. We come now to a passage relating an event that occurred about 6 months before the death of Jesus on the cross. Once again, Jesus withdrew from the crowds to be alone with His disciples. They went to the region of Caesarea Philippi, which was about 25 miles north of Galilee. It contained a marble temple dedicated to Caesar Augustus. It was a place dedicated to the glory of Rome, and that glory is now gone, but the glory of Jesus Christ remains and will go on eternally. This was largely Gentile territory. There Jesus could prepare His disciples for the chain of events which were going to take place during the next 6 months, culminating in His death upon the cross. So these verses mark a turning point in Mark’s gospel. Perhaps learning the truths found here will be a turning point in your life as well.

Prior to going to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus performed a very unique miracle. It is recorded only in Mark’s gospel. They begged Jesus to heal a blind man. Well He took him away from the crowd & spit in his eyes. Then He touched his eyes & asked if he could see anything. At first he could see, but not correctly. People looked tall & thin like trees. Then Jesus put His hands on his eyes again, and this time he could see well. One thing unusual about this miracle is that here, Jesus healed someone gradually. You might think that the first attempt failed, & it took two attempts to get it right. But I don’t believe that at all. I believe Jesus was providing an illustration to His disciples of their own distorted viewpoints. He had recently rebuked the disciples for their slowness to understand, & their spiritual blindness (vv.17-18). Yet we see from this miracle that for us, spiritual insight is not something that is gained all at once. The Lord has to keep working on us to help us see. So I am glad that God is patient with us. He not only gives us the first touch, but He keeps touching us, gradually leading us into Christian maturity & understanding.

I hope the Lord will touch our eyes this morning, and open our eyes to the truths that He has for us from our text of Scripture. Now let’s see first of all:

I. THE LORD’S PERSON

I believe that Jesus Christ is the most significant person who has ever walked on this earth. He made more of an impact than anyone else. So you need to know who Jesus is. This is a question that you must settle in your own heart and mind. If you ignore Jesus, you do so to the peril of your own soul.

Jesus has been teaching His disciples, and showing them who He is for 3 years. Now it is examination time for His disciples. He was about to ask them who they believed He was. Will they give the right answer? But first, will they be too influenced by popular opinion? That does tend to sway our own opinions. However, if you are going to follow Christ like you should, you can’t allow yourself to be swayed by popular opinion. You must be willing to take a stand with Jesus, regardless of what others think. So notice that Jesus asked first of all in the last of v.27, “Who do men say that I am?” Well let’s answer that question by considering:

A. What Others Say - This question wasn't hard to answer. On every side men were saying things about Jesus. He was the topic of every conversation. They did not even give the opinion of the religious leaders. Most of them refused to acknowledge that Jesus was even a prophet, and certainly not that He was the Messiah. In v.11 of this chapter, we see the religious leaders asking Jesus for a sign from heaven to prove Himself. But the power of His miracles and the authority of His teaching were convincing proofs that Jesus was at least a great prophet.

So what were the people saying about Jesus? Notice the examples given in our text, & we will see why each answer was given:

1. John the Baptist – Only those who had not personally seen both Jesus & John the Baptist would have said this. Yet based on what they heard of John the Baptist, Jesus seemed a whole lot like him. One similarity to John the Baptist was that both were great open-air preachers. Herod Antipas felt that John the Baptist was so great a figure that it might well be that he had come back from the dead.

2. Elijah – The reason they thought that was because Elijah was to be the forerunner of the Messiah. God also worked great miracles through Elijah. Likewise, Jesus worked even greater miracles. Also, like Elijah, Jesus was a man of prayer. Sometimes He spent all night in prayer. Many of the people were willing to say this about Jesus, but they were not willing to confess Him as the Messiah Himself.

3. One of the Prophets – One in particular that comes to mind was Jeremiah. He was “the weeping prophet,” and Jesus was a Man of sorrows; so there was a definite parallel. Jeremiah called the people to true repentance from the heart, and so did Jesus. Both condemned the false religious leaders and the hypocritical worship in the temple, and both were persecuted by those in authority. According to legend, Jeremiah hid the golden altar and Ark of the Covenant before the temple was destroyed. They may have hoped that Jesus was Jeremiah coming back to restore true worship in the temple, especially after Jesus cleansed the temple early in His ministry.

These answers illustrate the kind of answers people give in regard to Jesus today. There are just as many different opinions as they were almost 2000 years ago. Most say He was a good man. They say He was a great teacher, the founder of a great religion. Even those in the Islamic world say that Jesus was a great prophet. But too many refuse to acknowledge anything beyond that, for to do so would mean they would have to obey Him.

Next, Jesus asked for a personal confession. He asked in v.29, “But who do *you* say that I am?” So let's see:

B. What the Apostle Say - Jesus was not content with the high but inadequate recognition of the people. Christ claimed to be something and someone unprecedented, unparalleled, unrivaled, and unique. He asked this question even though on a previous occasion the disciples had already exclaimed, “You are indeed God's Son.” This could have been a momentary reaction to a mighty miracle, which passed with time. Was this a settled conviction? Had the truth that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the very Son of God, become permanently lodged in their hearts and minds?

Well Simon Peter, with God's help, reached the height of his spiritual walk, and declared in the last of v.29, “You are the Christ.” Don't you like Peter? He is either great or he is bad. There is no middle ground with Peter. Peter's confession was bold and uncompromising, just as ours should be. When we compare the gospel of Matthew, Peter confessed 2 truths about Jesus:

1. Jesus Is the Messiah - The word “Christ” is a transliteration of a Greek word meaning “anointed one.” That's what the Hebrew word “Messiah” means. In other words, Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to His people to send to them a Messiah, a Savior. But most of

the people would not confess this about Jesus, because Jesus was not the type of Messiah the people were hoping for. But Jesus is the only hope to solve the curse of sin.

2. Jesus Is the Son of God - Jesus is the Son of God in a unique sense, unlike any mere mortal. Jesus is, was, and always will be the Son of God who is the only source of eternal life for all that live. John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Amazingly, God took upon Himself humanity, and actually became the God-man in the person of Jesus Christ.

Now in Matthew's account Jesus affirmed that Peter's answer was correct. He said his answer was revealed to him by God the Father.

So what do *you* say about Jesus? This passage teaches us that our discovery of Jesus Christ must be a personal discovery. Do you believe that Jesus is God, who became flesh? Do you believe that He is the Messiah, the Savior that God promised to send? Have you, like Peter, openly confessed your faith in Jesus as Savior, the Son of God? We too must be ready to confess Christ, even as Peter did, regardless of public opinion. Rom. 10:9 says that we are to confess Jesus with our mouths if we are to be saved. Your confession of faith concerning Jesus Christ is a matter of life or death. Jesus said in John 8:24, "...if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." (Cf. also I John 2:22-23; 4:2-3). The citizens of Caesarea Philippi would say, "Caesar is lord!" The only confession that saves us is "Jesus is Lord!" (I Cor. 12:1-3) when that confession comes from a heart that truly believes in Him (Rom. 10:9-10). You cannot be neutral about the person of Jesus. You are driven to about 4 alternatives about the person of Jesus: He was either a 1) Legend; 2) Liar; 3) Lunatic; or 4) Lord. He could not be just a good man, or a great prophet. So what do you believe about Jesus?

So I hope you have settled in your heart regarding the Lord's person. Next, let's consider together:

II. THE LORD'S PASSION

Having taught His disciples who He is, He now begins to teach them what He had come to do. Notice in v.31, "He began to teach them...." Having taught them lesson #1 and having passed the test, Jesus now moves on to the important lesson of His suffering & sacrificial death. He had alluded to His death before, but now, for the first time, He plainly declares what He had come to do.

A. The Necessity of His Suffering & Death - Jesus said in v.31 that He "must" suffer. He is talking about the plan of God here, & what was necessary to accomplish our salvation. God's righteousness demands death for sin. Romans 6:23 says, "the wages of sin is death." How can a holy God deal with sin, and yet how can He grant forgiveness to sinners? The wisdom of God came up with a solution to the apparent conflict between the holiness of God and the love of God. God solved His own dilemma. Therefore, Christ knew that He must die if He were to save us from our sin. He knew that only a sinless substitute could die for the sins of others. He was our only hope. He knew that without shedding His blood, there could be no remission.

An English soldier was converted to Christ in the trenches during the First World War and wrote home to his mother, "This war had to occur that I might be saved." The mother showed the letter to her minister, remarking that her boy was unduly magnifying the importance of his salvation. The minister agreed with the boy. "Madam," he said, "not only this war, but Calvary had

to occur to save your boy.” God used the wrath which raged both at Calvary and through that awful war experience to bring the young man to his Savior.¹

So Christ had to die, not as a victim, but because that was the only way we could be saved & forgiven. Aren’t you glad He was willing to accept such a necessary mission?

B. The Misery of His Suffering & Death – Notice in v.31 that Jesus said He “must suffer many things.” Who knows all the things Jesus suffered? But this much we do know. He suffered *physically*. Jesus was beaten, bruised, cut, and slashed almost beyond recognition. Then the word “killed” (*apokteino*) refers to a violent death. The cross was one of the cruelest ways of killing someone devised by man. Often a crucified man would suffer on the cross for several days. Yet Jesus refused a solution of vinegar & wine which would help deaden the pain. He suffered *emotionally*. V.31 says He suffered the pain of rejection. He was rejected by the leaders of His nation, & handed over to the despised Romans. He was betrayed by one of His disciples. He was forsaken by His disciples. He suffered *spiritually*, suffering the wrath of God against sin. The sufferings of Christ show us the depths of how bad our sin is. But Jesus was willing to suffer such misery because He loved us. Love is what held Jesus to the cross, not the nails.

Oh, what great love Jesus has for us. Don’t you love Him for what He did for you?

C. The Victory of His Suffering & Death – Jesus said in the last of v.31, “and after three days rise again.” He always added that He would rise from the dead after 3 days. But they were so upset about His death; I doubt that they even heard His final statement that He would rise again! It was as if He said nothing about His resurrection. And they continued to not hear it or believe it. Otherwise, they would have remained close to the tomb, anticipating the resurrection. Instead, all they could see was the suffering and death of Jesus.

As a result, Peter rebuked Jesus for making such a statement! What he was hearing just didn’t fit his expectations. Now Peter had a lot of nerve to rebuke Jesus! After all, according to Matthew’s gospel, Peter called Jesus the Son of God. He was rebuking Deity! Have you ever done that? You probably have! “Lord, why did you let that happen to me? You must not really love me.” Or, “Lord, I don’t think you should have put that command in the Bible.” What Jesus said just didn’t fit into Peter’s ideas & expectations about the Messiah. Likewise, we rebuke God when He does or says something that doesn’t fit into our preconceived ideas. It is not up to us to squeeze God into our mold. We are to let Him mold & change us!

Then, very vividly, Jesus turned His back on Simon Peter and faced His disciples and said, “Get behind Me, Satan!....” Jesus recognized another voice in the voice of Simon Peter. It was the same voice that He had heard in the wilderness temptations, when Satan tried to get Jesus to accept the kingdom without the cross.

He will say the same thing to you. Satan is always saying, “Avoid the cross. Go for instant gratification!” None are more formidable instruments of temptation than well-meaning friends, who care more for our comfort than for our character.

So we have seen the Lord’s Person, the Lord’s Passion, and now let’s us reflect on:

III. THE LORD’S PROPOSAL

Jesus summoned the people and taught them what He taught His own disciples. He gives a proposition or invitation. Would you like to follow Jesus? He says “whosoever” may follow Him.

¹ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*: #5350 (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979).

But notice what is involved in following Jesus. Anyone can follow Jesus, but in order to follow Jesus, there are certain conditions. First of all, you need to understand that:

A. It Is a Sacrificial Decision – He warned that there is a price to pay for true discipleship. He knew that the crowds were following Him only because of the miracles, and that most of the people were unwilling to pay the price to become true disciples. So notice the 3 requirements that Jesus lays down for His followers in the last of v.34:

1. We Must Deny Self – This is what Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. Humanly speaking, it was not His will to go to the cross. But He denied self, & accepted once again His mission to go to the cross.

Now this self-denial is not just giving up a few things during Lent (“Lord, I’m going to give up ice cream for a week”). To deny self is to renounce your right to run your life. The self is the will of the person. It doesn’t mean that you will no longer enjoy the things of life, for God is good, and He is happy to bless our lives with good things. If God appoints for us the blue waters of the lake and all the sunshine of the summer, then let us rejoice and be thankful, and not vex our souls because at the present we know no suffering and pain. But it does mean that we accept whatever God wills for our lives, both the good and the difficult. We say “Yes, Lord” to both pleasure and pain.

But we are still living in a “Me” generation. People are accustomed to instant gratification. We change channels until we find a quick laugh. People get a quick high from a pill or bottle of alcohol. Our generation seeks a quick, sexual thrill without the long-term commitment of marriage.

But Christ says that we must renounce all claims to self. We must no longer live a self-centered life, but a Christ-centered life.

2. We Must Take Up Our Cross – What does this mean? Some think that taking up your cross means that you endure some difficult circumstance. Do you have noisy neighbors? If so, you may bear with it and claim that you are bearing your cross. Or you may say that bearing with your mother-in-law is the same as bearing your cross. No, that’s not what Christ had in mind. Nor is taking up your cross a matter of wearing a cross as a piece of jewelry. That can be a good witness, but that does not fulfill this requirement. So what is a cross? It is a means of execution. To take up your cross means that you not only deny self, but that you take it a step further & die to self. The image of taking up the cross says it as well as any image Christ could give.

Unlike the word “follow,” the first two commands are not stated in the present tense. The decision to “take up your cross” should be a decisive moment in your life. There should be no turning back, but a total break with the past and a complete commitment to Jesus Christ. When a man took up a cross and went off with a little band of Roman soldiers, he was on a one-way journey. He’d not be back. These are hard sayings, but they cannot be evaded. Heavy as that cross may seem, Jesus will give us grace to bear it.

3. We Must Follow Christ – This is what Christ demands in the last of v.34. That is a present tense. Day by day we’re to keep following Him and obey Him, 7 days/week, 24 hours/day. We should always ask, “What would Jesus do in this situation?”

Are you following Jesus with the kind of self-denial described here? Many people will follow Jesus as long as it doesn’t interfere too much with what they want to do anyway. They will

follow Jesus to church as long as we don't have something better to do. They will follow Jesus in obedience, unless our friends want to do something else.²

Even though this is a sacrificial decision, remember:

B. It Is an Essential Decision – In v.35 Jesus says there are two alternatives in life with 2 results. You can choose self and lose your life. Yet if you die to self, and choose the cross, you will find your life. Real life is gained by denying self & following Jesus. Yet if you set out in life to gain all that you want, you will discover that you will not want what you have gained.

Walter Payton was seeking for the NFL rushing record. Later he commented, “While you have it in your mind, going for it, it means a lot... but once you have it, the shinning and glittery effect doesn't still hold. You chase records, but once you reach them, it doesn't live up to its expectations.” That's the way it is in all of life outside of Jesus Christ.

Then in v.36 Jesus asks, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” The possession of all the treasures that the world contains would not compensate for eternal ruin. So here we see that a soul, in God's account, is not only more highly valued than the world, but it is valued to the point that Jesus would suffer and die to save such a soul (cf. 1 Pet. 1:18-19). And yet we throw our soul away in exchange for sin; we lose it for pleasure, alcohol, and beastly pleasure of a night. We are worse than Esau, who traded his birthright for the momentary satisfaction of a mess of pottage! Of all unprofitable and foolish bargains, the worst is that of giving up the soul's salvation for the sake of this present world.

Then, in v.37 Jesus said, “Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” To exchange is to buy. If a man loses his soul, there is nothing that can be given in exchange for the soul that is lost. It is quite possible for a man to try to give his money to Christ and yet to withhold his life. It is still more possible for a man to give lip-service to Christ, and to withhold his life. If we fail to put our faith in Jesus and in His finished work on the cross, “there remains no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26).

Have you made that essential decision to deny self, take up your cross, and follow Jesus, regardless of what others do?

C. It Is a Very Significant Decision - We are all living life in relationship to eternity. So in the v.38 of this chapter, Jesus is saying, “Don't be ashamed of Me.” Young people, don't be ashamed of Jesus. This world may ridicule the faithful follower of Jesus, but secretly, they will usually admire you. And some day, if you faithfully follow Jesus, He will honor you, and others will be ashamed, not you. So let us all pray daily for faith and courage to acknowledge Christ before the world.

Conclusion: I am going to ask you today to openly confess Jesus as your Savior. Don't be ashamed of Jesus. Surely you can confess Jesus as Savior in a sympathetic audience. Do that as a first step, and then you will gain more strength to confess Christ out in the world. Following Jesus also means making a commitment to a local church. He established the church. He works through the church. Do you need to join our church today? Or perhaps you have not been following Jesus like you ought, and you want to make a rededication today, then you come & either pray at the prayer altar, or I will be happy to pray with you.

² In v.35 Jesus said we are to be willing to do all this “for My sake and the gospel's.” Personal devotion should lead to practical duty, the sharing of the Gospel with a lost world. “For My sake” could lead to selfish religious isolationism, so it must be balanced with “and the Gospel's.” Because we live for Him, we live for others.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: Matthew* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971); Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Vol. 4, (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1974); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, reprint, Christian Publishing Co.; A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. I: Matthew (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); James S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, no date), [23C.10]; Dr. Jerry Vines (Mark sermon tape of 11/27/83); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

Parallel passages: Matt. 16:13-26; Luke 9:18-26.