

READ Mark 8:22-26

We have been working through our studies of Mark from the perspective of Mark's thesis statement at the very opening of this Gospel account, *"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."* Mark establishes what he believes to be the truth and then spends the first nearly eight chapters building up evidence to prove his case for this belief being accurate. He began by showing John the Baptist as the prophesied forerunner to the coming Christ. He speaks of Jesus's baptism, temptations, and the beginning of His ministry. He includes the calling of His disciples, His driving out of unclean spirits, His miraculous healing, His preaching, and many more incredible feats that we would think would lead the honest person to a clear understanding of who He truly was.

However, we have seen time and time again that while there were people who did believe in His special nature, there were others who failed to recognize Him for who He truly was. The Jewish leadership establishment continually rejected Him. His own family downplayed His nature and work. Even His own Apostles, though they marveled, haven't shown themselves to have truly gotten it up to this point. At least not to the extent that we would expect for them to get it.

Yet, I believe Mark is structuring his Gospel account in such a way that he illustrates the evolution of the Apostles' faith through various deeds performed by Jesus. This instance of Jesus healing the blind man in stages sets the scene for the climax of the entire Gospel. Mark has been giving supporting evidence after supporting evidence for the Messiahship of Jesus, and here are the Apostles slowly, bit by bit seemingly putting the picture together that their rabbi, Jesus this incredible servant is actually the promised Messiah of God, the Christ.

How do they finally arrive at this point? What is their response to such an acknowledgement? What does such an acknowledgement demand of them? These are the questions our study this morning will address, and it is my hope we will come away with the understanding that recognizing Jesus as the Messiah is not enough, but it also demands an incredible response. Let's read the text together and dive into what Mark hopes for us to come to know about the Incredible Jesus, the Servant who is the Messiah.

A. The Great Confession (Mark 8:27-30)

1. Over the course of His ministry up to this point, Jesus had been leaving a trail of evidence that should have led the closest of His disciples to the understanding that He indeed was the Son of God. It seems as if it is now time to test as to whether or not His Apostles had put this evidence together in order to come to the proper conclusion. Jesus selects Caesarea Philippi as the location for this great test. This city which resided 25 miles north of Bethsaida and at the foot of Mount Hermon. It was named in honor of Augustus Caesar and Herod Philip, but the true glory of this town was about to be displayed in the great confession made by Peter.
2. Jesus begins by asking, *"Who do people say that I am?"* This was a question that has already been asked within in this Gospel account, and it was actually already asked by the Apostles during the episode when Jesus commanded the winds and the waves to be still in **4:35-41**. At that point the Apostles ask, *"Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey Him!"* It is important to recognize that this question was brought about because of the incredible feat Jesus had just accomplished. In this case in **Mark 8**, Jesus is wanting to know the conclusions that people had come to based upon what He had been doing. The responses varied from John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets of old.
3. These should not be new answers to us concerning this question because Mark has already noted that people believed these were the identifies of Jesus back in **Mark 6:14,15**. It is at that point that Herod himself believes Jesus to be John the Baptist, and he was fearful because he previously put John to death. It would make sense for people to assume Jesus to

be John because they certainly both preached a similar message of repentance for the kingdom of God was at hand. The thoughts of Elijah being the identity of Jesus also makes sense because Malachi prophesied, *"Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes."* (**Malachi 4:5**) Jesus certainly fit the mold of being a great prophet like Elijah or one of the other prophets based upon His bold speaking on behalf of God. I honestly can't blame anyone for believing Jesus to be one of these other figures based upon the little they had seen or heard about Him.

4. However...the Apostles had not just seen or heard a little about Jesus. No, they had been with Him throughout the near entirety of His ministry. They had seen things that others had not seen. They had been given insight into the teachings of Jesus that others had not been given. They had far more evidence than anyone else which is why Jesus wanted to know what they thought concerning who He was given what they had seen. Peter, the ever-outspoken Apostle, is the one who (while more than likely representing the group) gives the great confession of his understanding that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (Hebrew & Aramaic) or the Christ (Greek). To recognize Jesus as such meant they believed Him to be the promised and anointed one sent by God who would bring about the restoration of Israel. This was a massive statement by Peter, but what would he and the rest do in response to this recognition?

B. The Great Confusion (**Mark 8:31-33**)

1. Before we get to the Apostle's response, let's consider Jesus's response to this great confession. He first says in **8:30** that this confession of Peter needed to be kept under wraps, and we might come to understand why in the following verses as Jesus goes on to tell the Apostles what He would have to endure as the Messiah. While He has been hinting at His identity as the Messiah, it is at this point in Caesarea Philippi that Jesus begins to teach them openly concerning His future as the Messiah.
2. One would think He would begin to tell them of a valiant rise to power for the sake of Israel, but instead He begins to tell them, *"that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and rise after three days."* (**Mark 8:31**) Surely this first of three revelations within Mark of His future would have sent their heads spinning in confusion. Here they have Jesus affirming Himself as the Messiah of God who had come to restore Israel, and yet He here He is now speaking of His impending death...how would that have made any sense within their minds? What was their response?
3. Peter's specific response shows us that it did not make any sense within their minds. He hears what Jesus says concerning His need to suffer and die. He then takes Him aside as he begins to rebuke Him, and oh to be a fly on the wall to hear that conversation! *"Rabbi, you're the Messiah! You're the Christ! There is no way such a thing can or will happen to You! You're going to lead us all to glory!"* And yet, Jesus returns the rebuke with equal vigor and perhaps even more as He tells Peter, *"Get behind me, Satan! You are not thinking about God's concerns but human concerns."*
4. What a stinging rebuke offered up by Jesus! His referring to Peter as Satan is certainly harsh in our eyes, but it is actually quite simplistic in nature. He's not saying that Peter is himself the devil, but Jesus is saying that Peter was behaving like an enemy or an adversary to Jesus. He was actively speaking against what Jesus needed to do as the Messiah, and he was doing so because he was more concerned with his own desires than for what God had set in motion to take place. He was more concerned for his view of what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah, and he failed to consider what God Himself had said would be the role of His Anointed One.

C. The Great Cost (Mark 8:33-38)

1. With this surely uncomfortable moment having just occurred, Jesus isn't about to let this moment go by without using it to drive home what ought to be the proper response to a recognition of Jesus as the Anointed Messiah and Christ. Mark tells us that Jesus calls a crowd to Himself to join the disciples. He then speaks of the need for anyone who seeks to follow Him to make sure that he is ready to deny himself, that he is ready to take up his cross, and that he is ready to follow Jesus wherever He might lead. It is only right to assume that Peter feels like a scolded dog with his tail between his legs as Jesus speaks of the need for absolute humility, sacrifice, and submission to the will of the Messiah.
2. Those who wished to preserve their lives would end up losing them anyways, but the one who was willing to give up their lives for Jesus and the Gospel would actually save them. Here is Peter almost assuredly concerned about Jesus being the Messiah that he believed He needed to be now being told that he needed to put his desires and aspirations death in order to accept the plan God had ordained for the Messiah. But it wasn't just Peter who needed to undergo this radical transformation of personal death, but this was the prescription for every person who wanted to be a true follower of Jesus.
3. If someone was not willing to recognize the Messiahship of Jesus to the extent that they would be willing to make such sacrifice then the only logical explanation is they are ashamed of Him. If someone loved the present world so much that they weren't willing to give it up for Jesus then they could only say they are ashamed of Him. If this is the case then Jesus said the Son of Man (we know and the Apostles knew He was referring to Himself) would be ashamed of that person when He comes in the glory of the Father.
4. You see brothers and sisters, there is an incredible price that has to be paid if a person is truly going to recognize and accept Jesus as the Messiah and Lord of his or her life. That cost is the greatest cost...the cost of self. A fully denial of self in order to live according to the will of God. Not only was this an important general principle that needed to be taught by Jesus, but in context it was an extremely important thing for the Apostles to hear because their leader, who often represented the feelings of the group as a whole, just inserted his desires and concerns over the desires and concerns of the Messiah and His Father. Not only did the general public need to hear this message, but the Apostles needed it just as much. They saw and understood Jesus partly and to a degree, but they still had a ways to go. This is the application of Jesus's healing of the blind man in stages.

D. The Great Coming (Mark 9:1)

1. However, this is not the end of this section as we need to also include the first verse of chapter nine because of an unfortunate chapter break. It is quite frustrating for a statement that seems so clearly included in the previous discussion is put in the next chapter, but nonetheless...Jesus finishes by making this proclamation to those gathered. ***"Then he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God come in power.'"***
2. Why would Jesus finish this discussion with this statement? I can only believe He finishes with this statement because He wants those gathered before Him in this moment to know the Messiah will be coming in power in the very near future, even in the life time of some of the people who were standing right there before Him. They didn't have time to drag their feet concerning an examination of the evidence as to whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. They couldn't take time to mull over whether or not they were willing to make the proper sacrifices

in following after Jesus. They all had to consider the truth, count the cost, and decide whether they were willing to sacrifice this life in order to gain life through Jesus.

Application Questions

A. Do we recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah?

1. This whole episode began with Jesus asking the all-important question concerning the identity of Jesus. We've noted this was the intent of the entire Gospel account as seen in the first verse of Mark's Gospel, but it is now time for Jesus to see just how much His Apostles have put together the pieces of evidence that have been laid before them. Peter, at least, took the evidence presented and came to the appropriate conclusion.
2. Have we come to the same appropriate decision concerning Jesus being the Messiah of God? We are blessed to live when we do with all of the evidence before us in our completed Bibles concerning this question. We are able to look at all of the Old Testament Prophecies. We are able to look at all of the fulfillments within the Gospel Accounts. We are able to see all of the teachings of the Apostles and other inspired men who also take all of the evidence and come to the same conclusion of Jesus as the Messiah. Have we come to that same conclusion? Have we considered the evidence in a satisfactory way? The beginning point of faith is recognizing the true identity of Jesus, but the work isn't done at this point.

B. Do we recognize the cost of following Jesus as the Messiah?

1. Recognizing Jesus as the Messiah is not simply an academic exercise demanding research in order to come to the accurate factual conclusion. If it were the case then Jesus had no need to go on telling the disciples what it meant for Him to be the Messiah and what was demanded of them regarding that acknowledgement. The fact that He took time to detail His near future and the true cost of following Him tells me that so much more is demanded than simply getting the right answer on the test.
2. Recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, the anointed King of the Kingdom of heaven demands exactly what Jesus told the crowd and the Apostles it would demand. It demands the greatest forms of humility, sacrifice, and submission. If we recognize Jesus as the Christ then He is owed total loyalty. This total loyalty is completely dying to self in order to live according to the will of Christ. Coming to understand Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises of a coming Messiah is a good first step, but it only truly means something when we're willing to respond appropriately through total trust, faith, and humility.

C. Do we recognize the urgency in making a decision concerning Jesus as the Messiah?

1. Again, Jesus is clear with those who are before Him in causing them to recognize that following Him demanded great sacrifice and that they needed to really think about this seriously in a short time considering He would be coming in the power of His kingdom in the very near future...even in their lifetime! This was an urgent situation for them.
2. It continues to be an urgent situation for us, as well! Though the kingdom of heaven has already come in power with Jesus as its King, we still need to recognize that our failure to honor Christ in faithful discipleship will also bring about Christ being ashamed of us when He comes in judgment in the end. While I recognize the need for people to do their due diligence in investigating Jesus...they also do not need to drag their feet considering we do not know how much time we have left in this life to make that all important commitment to Him. The time to make that decision is now, and we would do well not to delay in making the proper acknowledgement and response to that acknowledgement.

Main Point/Conclusion: *A true recognition of Jesus as the Messiah demands a response of humility, sacrifice, and submission.*

This single section of Mark's Gospel is a true microcosm of the Gospel account as a whole, and it is the perfect illustration of the miracle Jesus has just performed prior. In Mark's Gospel we see all of the evidence and we see the urgency of considering who Jesus is and responding for the kingdom of heaven was at hand. We also see the Apostles showing great promise, but then following it up with confusion and uncertainty. Yet, Jesus continues to full steam ahead in continuing to teach and encourage them and others to recognize His true identity and response in the appropriate way. It is my hope that each of us also continue to do the same thing throughout these studies. May we also take careful consideration of the evidence presented in Mark's Gospel, recognize Jesus as the Messiah, respond appropriately in total faith and submission, and live here on out for the Lord looking forward to His glorious return.