

## Denying Self

Mark 8:27-9:1

### Introduction

In our text this morning, we come to the “halfway point” of the gospel of Mark. We have been looking at this gospel through the lenses of Jesus being a “Servant-King”. In the verses this morning, one of His disciples makes an incredible confession, but just a couple of verses later, makes an unwise decision. This leads Jesus into a teaching opportunity where He tells the disciples what will occur with Him, but also what is expected of them (and ultimately us) as followers of His. My prayer for us this morning is that we take to heart Jesus’ words and truly hear them. Let’s stand as we read Mark 8:27-33.

### (v.27-30)

Jesus and the disciples head toward Caesarea Philippi and are talking about religious things like normal. In the gospels, Jesus used each opportunity to teach His disciples about the things of God and the Kingdom and to get them to think. This is very much a Deuteronomy 6:4-9 approach: <sup>4</sup>“Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” <sup>5</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. <sup>7</sup> Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup> Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.” Obviously, the disciples weren’t Jesus’ *literal* children, but in a spiritual or teaching sense, they were. So, He uses each opportunity He has to talk with them about the things of God, because He knows His time with them is short. Parents, it is similar for

us because the time we have with our children in our homes is short, so let's take advantage of that time.

The question that Jesus asks them is a pretty straightforward question: "who do people say that I am?" This question has been debated in the gospel of Mark, even back a few chapters to when Herod had John the Baptist beheaded. Mark 6:14-15 detail Herod asking about Jesus and people saying, "John's been raised from the dead" and "He's Elijah" and "He's actually a prophet". That statement is basically repeated here in Mark 8 when the disciples say the same thing.

It's important to remember, I think, that Jesus isn't asking this question because He's worried. I've heard of people doing a Google or Facebook search of their name to see what (if anything) is being said about them. This is done because people might be worried what kind of image they are putting out there or any kind of negative press. Jesus was NOT posting on the first century "grapevine" a question to see what others are saying about Him.

The reason that He asks this question is to bridge to His next one. On Wednesday nights, we've been doing a series on evangelism and as part of that, we talked about "bridges" to the gospel; that's what Jesus is doing in this conversation. In Caesarea Philippi, it was a location of paganism and idolatry. So, maybe He and the disciples were around some kind of pagan temple or statue which brought the conversation to that point where He asked that question.

Look at verse 29, "But you..." Let's stop right there for a second. Jesus hears their response and then immediately changes the recipients of the question. It is almost like He said, "Ok great...now what about you?" This is the question He really wanted to get to. This is the reason that Jesus asked the first question. "Who do *you* say that I am?" I don't know if you like to write

in or mark up your bibles, but if you do, underline, circle, or box in that question: who do you say that I am?

Friends, this is a question that ALL people must confront at some point in their lives. There is a great responsibility that all people have and that is to determine their answer to the question: who do you say that Jesus is? It doesn't matter how other people view Jesus, it matters how you do. Each person who has ever lived will have to answer that question. We will either answer it here, or answer it in eternity.

Listen to these verses from Paul, first in Romans 14:12, "Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God." Then in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." Talk about eye-opening passages! I'm not exactly looking forward to standing before the Lord and having to answer for everything that I've ever done. But, I can rest assured that one thing I won't have to answer for is my sin debt because Jesus already paid that price.

And this will be a very personal time where we have to answer for ourselves. Many people will try and say they know who Jesus is because of the belief of someone they know. "My dad was a Pastor so I know who Jesus is" or "My grandmother always went to church and brought a meal to someone". There are people who will try and ride the coattails of someone else in the hopes that it will be enough. But it isn't! I've said for a long time that you cannot inherit someone's faith. Like how Jesus turned the tides of the conversation from "what do others think" to "what do you think", it doesn't really matter what other people think about Jesus when it

comes to our own faith. It has to be your choice and your responsibility to make that decision for or against Jesus.

And there is no in between, either. Jesus said as much in Matthew 12:30: “Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not gather with me scatters.” And it is only now that we have the opportunity to make sure we’re on the right side of that question. If we want to be with Jesus in the next life, we have to have the same answer as Peter in verse 29 where he proclaims Jesus as Messiah.

Don’t you just love Peter? He’s never afraid to speak up and tell you what he feels or thinks (as we will again see in a moment). And this is a major declaration that Peter makes. I think all of the disciples already believed this but this proclamation is a big event in the gospel of Mark. When we started the gospel of Mark together, I made the point that Mark’s thesis statement was found in verse 1 where He proclaims Jesus as the Son of God. Specifically, it says, “Jesus Christ, the Son of God”. Christ is not Jesus’ last name, it is His title. Christ is Greek, Messiah is Hebrew and Aramaic but they all mean anointed One. Jesus is THE One that the Prophets had all spoken of. He is THE One who was going to set up God’s Kingdom. He is THE One that was promised in Genesis 3:15 where God said that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. Donald English wrote, “It carries the sense of consecration by God for a particular task, and was used, for example, of kings and priests in the Old Testament (Ex. 29:7, 21; 1 Sa. 10:1)...More recently the title had increasingly been used of the one who would set the Jews free of their oppressors, and here the concept of the Son of David was widely used.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> English, D. (1992). [\*The message of Mark: the mystery of faith\*](#) (pp. 158–160). InterVarsity Press.

We do not see this in Mark, but in Matthew 16:17-18 Jesus responds with, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven.”<sup>18</sup> And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” Peter didn’t come to this on his own, but it was revealed to Him by God. And to Peter’s credit, he listened. Jesus warned them not to say anything, yet, maybe because they didn’t fully understand, yet. One of my study bibles said, “He would reveal Himself on His own terms when the time was right. Jesus’ purpose was not popularity and political insurrection but discipleship and ultimately the cross (Mk 10:43–45). This point is particularly central to Mk, so Mk includes several instances when Jesus ordered those whom He healed not to tell others about it.”<sup>2</sup>

It seems like the disciples have finally turned a corner. After some stumbles out of the gate recently, they finally have said something that makes sense. They finally seem to have “gotten it”. But as Lee Corso from College Gameday would say, “Not so fast my friends”.

### **(v.31-33)**

Jesus begins to teach the disciples some different things now. A lot of what He had been teaching them had revolved around the Kingdom of God and setting it up. Now, it is about what must happen to the Son of Man. The bible uses the word “necessary” here. That means it isn’t optional! There is no other alternative or other direction that this thing can go. Satan was trying to get Jesus to go around the suffering aspect of His mission. During His temptation in the wilderness, Satan tried to get Him to establish His kingdom without the suffering, and Jesus

---

<sup>2</sup> Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). [\*The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith\*](#) (p. 1470). Holman Bible Publishers.

refused, because He knew that it was \*necessary\*. This is the first of three predictions of His death.

Let me briefly mention the title “Son of Man” that Jesus uses to refer to Himself. Mark uses the definite article of “the” with Son of Man to make it clear who Jesus is. That title is famously tied to Daniel 7:13-14. Listen to what Daniel wrote: “<sup>13</sup> I continued watching in the night visions, and suddenly one like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him. <sup>14</sup> He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.” Daniel 7 speaks of the coming Son of Man being worshipped and being given a Kingdom and Jesus is applying that to Himself because that’s who Daniel was referring to! He may not have known His name would be Jesus, but He knew this Son of Man was coming and would receive all that was due Him.

Jesus makes clear that the Son of Man (Himself) MUST suffer, be rejected, die, and rise again. Again, there is no other choice or option in this, matter. This was prophesied hundreds of years prior to Jesus’ earthly life, too. Isaiah 53 is the chapter that mentions this. I want to read verses 3-7: <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn’t value him. <sup>4</sup> Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds. <sup>6</sup> We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the Lord has

punished him for the iniquity of us all.<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth.” The suffering that Jesus endured for us is one of the reasons why He is worthy of our worship and worthy of the title of the Son of Man. He is fully God and fully man. He knew what was coming and spoke about this openly with the disciples. Peter, however, didn’t take this news too well.

Peter pulls Jesus aside and *rebukes* Him. God bless him. He never was shy to tell others what he was thinking. The nature of his rebuke is that Jesus was wrong about this and that He shouldn’t be openly talking about how He would suffer and die. Maybe Peter thought it would scare of potential followers? More likely in my mind, is that Peter, even though he had made this great confession of who Jesus is, still hadn’t got it. Peter was like the blind man earlier, he had a partial understanding but not a full one of who Jesus is. Brooks wrote, “On the one hand, Peter’s confession went beyond that of the crowds. Jesus was the promised Messiah/Christ. On the other hand, the sequel shows that Peter and the other disciples did not understand what kind of Messiah Jesus was. No doubt Peter had a typical Jewish understanding of a military conqueror who would free the Jews from foreign domination. There is no evidence that any Jew in pre-Christian times thought in terms of a suffering Messiah.”<sup>3</sup>

Peter was also being selfish in his statement, only thinking of himself and his expectations of Jesus. He thought that Jesus was supposed to do things entirely differently than He was telling them here. I would caution us to not think that we don’t do this, too. We place expectations on Jesus and then get kind of annoyed or upset or confused when He doesn’t meet those

---

<sup>3</sup> Brooks, J. A. (1991). [Mark](#) (Vol. 23, p. 135). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

expectations that we placed on Him. We also can look silly in the process. How many times have you heard someone make a prediction on when Jesus is going to come back and then have to make something up like, “My math was wrong” when He doesn’t come? Don’t put your personal expectations on Jesus. Trust Him and follow Him. That’s what He is going to say in the final verses of chapter 8.

**(v.34-9:1)**

Jesus now moves from Peter’s private rebuke, to a public response to it. He is about to tell them something that is so contrary to what they have ever been taught or heard. You can almost call it a paradox because He says, “Whoever wants to save his life, will lose it. And whoever loses his life for me will save it.” Those things, to human ears, don’t really make much sense! How can I be truly living if I die?

Jesus is telling the disciples (and us) in these verses that following Him costs us our lives. Salvation is free but discipleship costs us everything. We have to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. This means that we are willingly laying aside our wants and desires and potentially even our lives, all for His sake. Him mentioning the cross here is a foreshadow of where His earthly life will end. Saying this would have immediately made the disciples aware of what He was talking about because the cross was a method of death!

And, isn’t it interesting that Jesus is saying to us that through the cross, a method of death, will lead us to life. Both His journey to the cross and us carrying our own. Just like in the song we sang this morning, “The wonderful cross bids me come and die to find that I may truly live!” How is this possible? It is only possible because Jesus did it first. Following Christ means we die to ourselves. Following Christ means we follow His example and give up everything.



Think about the shocking things He is telling the disciples and the crowd, here. It was one thing for Him to say that as the Messiah, He would be experiencing those things. It is completely different to hear that it is expected of us, too. And maybe this is the first time that you've heard this, I'm not sure. But following Christ is not an easy task. Self-denial is not something that is just so easy to do. It means we are constantly laying down our lives for the gospel's sake. It means that we are not thinking of ourselves and what makes sense for us and to us. Carrying our cross and losing our lives for the sake of Jesus are some of the most radical words in the bible.

Ask Christians in other countries about the cost of following Jesus. Ask them what believing in Jesus has done to their lives. There are real life stories of followers of Jesus being rejected by their families and kicked out of their homes at a young age. There are stories of followers of Jesus being tortured. There are stories of Jesus followers being put in prison for simply owning a bible. And of course there are stories of men and women, boys and girls, dying because of their commitment to following Jesus.

Our culture is different, though. We may not experience those same things. The ways we suffer for Jesus may be different. We may not literally give up our lives for His sake, but let me just say that we should be willing to. This goes back to the first part of the sermon: who is Jesus to you? IF He is truly the Lord of your life, you will be willing to give up your life for Him if He calls you to. A few months ago I went through the series "He not Me" in which I said repeatedly, "It's not about me." These verses personify that. Following Jesus cannot be about us.

The idea of self-denial goes against our very nature and everything that the world teaches, doesn't it? The world we live in is so "me centric". It is all about number 1! I think you could make a real argument that you can boil every sin down to some level of selfishness (or self-interest). It

is in our nature to only think of self. But Jesus shakes that to its core by telling us to deny ourselves. Not to even think “less of self-interest” but to completely deny ourselves. What does this look like?

Denying self means that we have a proper view on things like money. Our nature may lead us to finding ways to get that next dollar at all costs and to even hoard it. Self-denial says that we are content with what has been given to us and we even give it away for God to use. Denying self means that we look out for others before ourselves. It really isn’t about me! Denying self means that we have a proper view on sexual ethics. Culture tells people to pursue sexual pleasure in any form. But the bible calls us to deny those urges and that sex is designed for the confines of a biblical marriage; not before it, not outside of it, not with someone of the same sex, but with one man and one woman committed to one another until death. Denying self means understanding we aren’t the center of the universe! It means laying down our dreams and desires for those that Jesus wants for us. The spiritual disciple of self-denial is one that is extremely difficult because it goes against our nature.

Those who don’t deny self, may accumulate or accomplish a lot in this life, but at the end of their lives, they will lose it all. They can’t take anything with them. And I think Jesus had that in mind when He said, “What does it benefit someone to gain the whole world, but lose his soul?” I wonder how many people have gotten to the end of their life and looked back and regretted all the selfish things they did. Missing out on times with their kids because they pursued more and more. Marriages that failed because they were selfish. Or living a life apart from Jesus and wishing they had done something more meaningful. This is a reality for many people. They pursue the world at the expense of their soul.

## Conclusion

I said a little earlier that the cost of following Jesus is not easy. It is difficult. Don't get me wrong, here: I'm not saying it isn't rewarding or fulfilling because it absolutely is. But it sometimes takes a while for that rewarding and fulfilling feeling to happen. Following Jesus in the way that He describes here means that we follow His example and that may lead us to living through some difficult circumstances. It means that we will be uncomfortable at times.

And I want to ask you a difficult question that only you can answer: what is more important to you? Your comfort or your holiness? We sometimes take Jesus and make Him more "comfortable" to us. David Platt wrote, "A Jesus who doesn't mind materialism and would never call us to give up everything we have. A Jesus who is fine with nominal devotion that doesn't infringe on our comforts. A Jesus who wants us to be balanced, who wants us to avoid dangerous extremes, and who for that matter wants us to avoid danger all together."

I think we have developed a misunderstood view of what is expected of us as His disciples. Just as Peter makes a great declaration of faith and then turns around and rebukes Jesus for saying the things that He said, I think we are guilty of something similar. I think we are all guilty of saying, "Times are different now. That's what Jesus expected out of them, but not me." But if it was meant for Jesus to suffer, and if a student isn't better or greater than His master, then why would it be any different for us? The question we have to ask is are we going to be like Peter and the disciples in this moment and rebuke Jesus for getting it wrong, or are we going to listen to the words of Jesus and deny ourselves.

As our musicians come forward, let me challenge you to examine yourselves and see if you've been more focused on your comforts in life than your holiness. We make idols out of

everything, and an idol of comfort is at the top of the list. I think at the core of everything we've talked about this morning, comfort is the culprit. The disciples (and others) were more comfortable seeing Jesus as the conquering Messiah first instead of the suffering Messiah. And He addresses their comfort by telling them to deny self. For us, what is it that we need to examine in our hearts this morning? Ask the Lord to reveal to you areas that you need to repent of or reexamine.

Maybe you're here or watching online and have never given your life to Jesus and want to follow Him. Each week, I want to give you the opportunity to give your lives to Jesus. Or maybe you've been attending for a while and want to join our church or be baptized. I'd love to talk with you about that, as well. I'll be down front and would love to pray with you and for you in whatever way you need. Would you stand with me as we close in prayer?