

But you...who do you say I AM?

Read Mark 8.27 - 9.1

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS & SETTING THE CONTEXT

1/ We have now come to the mid-point / turning-point in Mark's account of the Gospel ministry of Jesus Christ. Up to this point, Mark has been giving us accounts or 'short stories' [I have been calling them 'vignettes'] of occasions and incidents as Jesus has been declaring and demonstrating His Kingdom authority. Mark opened up his Gospel account with **"The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."** And then Jesus Himself went about throughout Galilee, Judea, and even the surrounding predominantly Gentile regions **"...proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.'"** [ch 1.14-15]

2/ Jesus' primary mission in all that He proclaimed and performed was not only to reveal the Gospel and the now-come Kingdom of God to the lost peoples of the world, but especially to His disciples – the apostles. Because they will be the ones He has chosen to continue carrying the Gospel into all the world from the time of His ascension until He comes again to bring in the fullness of the Kingdom of God with power and Glory.

3/ So now the time has come: Jesus must begin with earnest to reveal to His disciples the fullness of His Messianic identity, His mission, and His plan for that time and the ages to come. The key verse to this purpose of this conversation is **v 31: And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.** We will deal with this when we come to it...

4/ They still, even after all this time they have been with Him, and after all they have heard from Him and seen Him do – they still do not fully comprehend the specifics of His Messianic identity and mission ... and that is, to be crucified, to die for the sins of His people, to be resurrected from death, and then to ascend back to Heaven until He comes again. Again, this incompleteness of understanding – and even gross misunderstanding – is expressed by Peter's objections to Jesus' own stated mission in **v 32**. That, too, we will address when we come to it.

I / v 27a / And Jesus went on with His disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi...

1/ It is so significant that Jesus chose this particular site to make this full disclosure of His Scriptural Messiahship and His impending death. Caesarea Philippi was a city and region about 25 miles north of Capernaum. You can tell by the very name of the place that it is a Gentile region. The family of the Herods had named the city in honor of Caesar Augustus and also after one of them, Philip, the brother of Herod Antipas [see **Luke 3.1**].

2/ But it was also much more than just a Gentile enclave – it was also the site of much pagan and debauched pagan worship. I want to explain it with this lengthy quote from Ray Vander Laan [relate this quote also to **Matthew 16.13-20**] [<https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/gates-of-hell-article>]:

Caesarea Philippi, which stood in a lush area near the foot of Mount Hermon, was a city dominated by immoral activities and pagan worship. [It] stood only twenty-five miles from the religious communities of Galilee. But the city's religious practices were vastly different from those of the nearby Jewish towns. In Old Testament times, the northeastern area of Israel became a center for Baal worship. In the nearby city of Dan, Israelite king Jeroboam built the high place that angered God and eventually led the Israelites to worship false gods. Eventually, worship of the baals was replaced with worship of Greek fertility gods ... [eventually it] became the religious center for worship of the Greek god, Pan. The Greeks named the city Pnias in his honor. Years later, when Romans conquered the territory, Herod Philip rebuilt the city and named it after himself. But Caesarea Philippi continued to focus on worship of Greek gods. In the cliff that stood above the city, local people built shrines and temples to Pan. Interestingly, Jesus chose to deliver a sort of

"graduation speech" to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi. In that pagan setting, he encouraged his disciples to build a church that would overcome the worst evils. **The Gates of Hell** To the pagan mind, the cave at Caesarea Philippi created a gate to the underworld, where fertility gods lived during the winter. They committed detestable acts to worship these false gods. Caesarea Philippi's location was especially unique because it stood at the base of a cliff where spring water flowed. At one time, the water ran directly from the mouth of a cave set in the bottom of the cliff. The pagans of Jesus' day commonly believed that their fertility gods lived in the underworld during the winter and returned to earth each spring. They saw water as a symbol of the underworld and thought that their gods traveled to and from that world through caves. To the pagan mind, then, the cave and spring water at Caesarea Philippi created a gate to the underworld. They believed that their city was literally at the gates of the underworld – the gates of hell. In order to entice the return of their god, Pan, each year, the people of Caesarea Philippi engaged in horrible deeds, including prostitution and sexual interaction between humans and goats. When Jesus brought his disciples to the area, they must have been shocked. Caesarea Philippi was like a red-light district in their world and devout Jews would have avoided any contact with the despicable acts committed there. It was a city of people eagerly knocking on the doors of hell.

II / vv 27b-28 / And on the way He asked His disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”

1/ We have seen these speculations numerous times before. The Pharisees [and other religious leaders] had asked John the Baptist the same questions when he first appeared [see **John 1.18-22**]. These questions were hot-button issues because of the intense expectations that the Jewish nation had for their Messiah.

2/ **John the Baptist.** But now, with Jesus, even John the Baptist himself is thrown into the speculations about who Jesus is. This is because John the Baptist had just recently been executed by Herod Antipas [**for this story, go back and review ch 6.14-29**].

3/ **Elijah.** We need to keep in mind throughout every exchange in this passage: when Jesus began to conduct His ministry throughout their cities, it inflamed their expectations they had held since the prophecies of **Malachi 4.5-6** that Elijah would appear before Messiah Himself appeared. So they kept wondering [and hoping] that Elijah had indeed come to announce the soon arrival of their long-expected Messiah. **See how Jesus interpreted the prophecies of the coming Elijah in ch 9.11-13.**

4/ However, as we shall see, all of their Messianic expectations were ill-founded upon their distorted, misinterpreted, and misguided perceptions of what kind of Messiah He would be when He did appear and what He would do when He appeared. Their convinced expectation was that their Messiah would be a political, militaristic King-warrior who would come in the likeness of King David to fulfill the covenant Yahweh made with David in **2 Samuel 7.4-17**. Except that, in their context, they were expecting their Messiah to overthrow the occupying Romans, deliver Israel from their subservient status, and restore them to the sovereign ‘head’ over all the other nations of the world. Their expectations were summed up in Zechariah’s prophecy at the birth of John the Baptist: **...that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. [Luke 1.74-75]** All of those promises were given by Yahweh and were [and are] true. But the ‘enemies’ they expected to be delivered from and the ‘salvation’ they were looking for were radically different from those which Jesus came to fulfill.

5/ Because of these intense expectations for a political, militaristic Messiah, the whole social and civic culture of the Jewish society was always tense and volatile. All it took was a leader in whom they thought they could invest their trust, and they were ready for a revolution. Some of the more recent false ‘Messiahs’ were brought up in **Acts 5.33-39**. It also explains **John 6.15** and why Jesus would have no part in these expectations. As Jesus told Pilate in **John 18.36: Jesus answered, ‘My Kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my Kingdom is not from this world.’**

III / v 29 / And He asked them, 'But who do you say that I AM?'

1/ So then, this is the question that Jesus pointedly asked His disciples [and which each of us must answer also]. Jesus did not ask to be informed. He knew. He asked them to test them. He wanted them to hear their own answer because He's going to begin teaching them to a fuller, truer understanding of who He is. They needed to know and to learn.

2/ Peter answers for the others: **You are the Christ**. The word 'Christ' is not Jesus' surname or a second name. 'Christ' is His title. It means 'Anointed.' The same word in the Hebrew language [maw-shee'-akh] is the very word we get our English 'Messiah' from. In the Old Testament, anointing signified a special and particular calling and inauguration into an office and ministry for Yahweh. Kings, priests, and prophets were 'anointed' to show that they were serving Yahweh. All throughout the Old Testament, the Messiah / Anointed / Christ would come from Yahweh to fulfill His will, bring in His Kingdom, and restore the creation purposes and order back to what Yahweh had ordained in the beginning.

3/ **Matthew 16.16** adds that Peter also confessed **You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God**. Which is true. And Peter and the other disciples did believe this about Jesus. This was their true confession of their faith in Christ. And Jesus acknowledges their faith in Him in His response to Peter: **And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven**. However, even though Peter's confession of faith is true and a true expression of their Divinely-bestowed recognition and belief in Jesus, it was still incomplete and ill-informed by his buy-in to the traditional expectations of who Messiah would be which were held by the populace. He will prove his lack of a full and Scripturally-informed understanding of who Messiah would be and what Messiah would do when he would begin to rebuke Jesus and take measures to correct Him. **[coming up...]**

IV / v 30 / Then He strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ

1/ This is not the first time we have heard Jesus charge or command those who confessed His Deity and Messiahship not to publish, broadcast, or tell it around **[see, for example, chs 4.44; 5.43; 7.36]**. He will do so again twice on this occasion **[chs 8.30; 9.9]**. So, the question is: Why would Jesus tell anyone, and especially His disciples here, NOT to tell others what they had seen in Him? Didn't He want everyone to know that He is the Messiah of God? Of course He did – **but Jesus insisted on revealing His true identity as Messiah, Son of Man, and Son of God on His terms and in His own time**. Jesus knew that THEIR Messianic expectations were distorted, mis-informed, and mis-guided. They wanted Messiah to be who THEY wanted and expected Him to be. Jesus was NOT that Messiah.

2/ This has come to be known as 'The Messianic Secret.' Not that Jesus wanted His Messiahship to be a secret or that He was trying to keep it a secret. But He would not allow misguided teachers or 'believers' to interpret His Messiahship for Him on their terms. His Messiahship must be kept secret from their misinterpretations until He could reveal it according to God's prophetic plan.

3/ That brings us then to what God's prophetic secret [or 'mystery'] for His Messiah is – and always has been in the Scriptures...

V / v 31 / And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things...

1/ So NOW, Jesus **began to teach them**. This means that it is now time for Jesus' full disclosure of who He really is. YES! He is the Christ. YES! He is the Son of God. BUT, the disciples are going to have to first 'unlearn' much of what they thought they knew and believed about the true identity and mission of Jesus as their Christ/Messiah. They did believe that Jesus is their Christ – they just didn't know what all 'Christ' means according to the Scriptures. Their faith in Christ is real and genuine. It was God-given and true. But their understanding was badly and sadly incomplete. So what Jesus begins to do is inform them of what will really happen to their Messiah. He will reign! But He will reign after He has suffered and died. He will subdue all His enemies. But first He will be killed by those same enemies.

2/ I should also add here just as a side-note that this is only the first of three separate intense teaching sessions Jesus will conduct with His disciples here in **Mark: 8.30; 9.30-32; 10.32-34**

3/ **And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.** You really should read this statement in the words of all three Gospels: **Mark 8.31; Matthew 16.21; Luke 9.22.**

4/ **‘And He said this plainly...’** [v 32a] meaning: no nuance, point-blank, no ambiguity, no hedging or beating around the bush, no room for misunderstanding. He wants them to hear this so that they will not be surprised or caught off-guard when it comes to pass. But they won’t ‘hear’ it in the sense of accepting it [again, as we shall see...].

5/ Jesus foretells these events:

- He must go to Jerusalem [but not to lead a revolt or provoke a Roman government overthrow]
- He must suffer many things
- He must be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes [expert teachers of the Law]
- He must be killed
- He must be raised again

6/ We must always bear in mind—every time we read **“Son of Man”**—that this is not just an allusion to Jesus’ humanity. “Son of Man” is always Jesus’ personal identification with the Messianic promise in **Daniel 7.13-14**, when **‘there came one like a son of man’** who was presented to **The Ancient of Days** to receive from Him an everlasting Kingdom and dominion **which shall not pass away...that shall not be destroyed.**

7/ But this **Son of Man** shall acquire and obtain that Kingdom as **the Suffering Servant** that is prophesied in **Isaiah 53**. These promises: **Royal Son of David, Reigning Son of Man, and Redeeming Suffering Servant** are all-inclusive in Messiah and His mission. **THIS** is what the disciples must understand!

VI / v 32 / And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him

1/ Peter will learn better later – even after he had denied Jesus when all this actually was fulfilled and took place. And even in the subsequent like teaching sessions, the disciples were at least not comprehending how their Messiah could or should suffer such ignominy and abuse as Jesus is describing to them. **ch 9.32: But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask Him.**

2/ But here, **Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.** As if to correct Jesus, straighten Him out about His role and mission as their Messiah. **Matthew 16.22: And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’** Maybe this also explains how perhaps Peter carried this Messianic misperception all the way to Gethsemane when he drew out his dagger to ‘protect’ and deliver Jesus from the arresting party that came to get Him. Like he, Peter, was going to ‘save’ the ‘Savior/Messiah’ from allowing His enemies to thwart His Messianic mission! [?] The sum of what Peter is saying...to the Messiah...is: *What you are describing is NOT our Messiah’s mission. We are all in with you, and we will not allow what you have just foretold to happen to you!*

VII / v 33 / Get behind me, Satan!

1/ Jesus could not and did not allow Peter’s well-intentioned objections stand. As He and Peter are having their little off-to-the-side exchange, Jesus knows this has to be addressed before them all. **But turning and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’**

2/ Again, we have seen numerous instances when Satan had confronted Jesus in his attempts to defile, detour, distract, derail, and destroy Jesus’ power and mission. Now, Peter, one of His own inner-circle disciples was playing ‘Devil’s advocate’ for him.

3/ What Jesus has just described to His disciples is The Gospel. It is The Gospel Jesus has come to proclaim and fulfill. It is The Gospel we must believe to be saved. It is The Gospel that will finally usher in **the time for restoring all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets long ago [Acts 3.21].**

Repent and believe in The Gospel!