

The Great Confusion

Ignorance and Insight: Part 10

Mark 8:27-34 (Mt.16:13-24, Lk.9:18-23) 5/4/2018

Why did Jesus call Peter Satan right after Peter made “The Great Confession”—You are the Christ? The question, “Who do you say I am” is important, but it’s not everything. Equally important is the question, “Who do your ears say I am?” What does the way you listen to the hard words of Christ say about who you really believe he is?

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Mark 8:27 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 Christ." **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, chief priests and 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 things of God, but the things of men."

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **35** For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. **36** What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? **37** Or what can a man give in exchange for his 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 him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Introduction

Imagine you're in seminary and you have agonized over your theology books for three years, and now it's time for oral exams. You do the section on Christology—who Jesus is, and you ace it—100%. You're so relieved, you're beaming with joy, the professor praises you for absolutely nailing it, and 90 seconds later announces to the class you are satanic and tells you to get out of his sight. If that happened to you, you'd have a little bit of an idea of what it was like to be Peter in Mark 8.

We come tonight to what's probably the most important passage in the gospel of Mark. When we tell a story, the climax is usually at the end. But the Jews would very often put the climax in the middle. And that's what Mark did. Mark is the easiest gospel to outline—just cut it in half. It has 16 chapters—the first 8 are part 1, the last 8 are part 2. And the middle, where we are right now, is the climax of both halves.¹ This section has been called the Continental Divide of the book of Mark. This is the peak where everything turns and starts flowing in a different direction. Everything in the first 8 chapters points forward to today's passage. Everything in the last 8 chapters points backward to this passage. If you get this passage; you get the book. Miss it, and you miss the whole gospel.

And more importantly, if you miss *half* of it—either half, you miss the whole gospel. That's the main point of the passage, and it's the part many people miss—including Peter. In v.29 Peter finally gets part 1 right, and it's Peter's greatest moment. It's known as the Great Confession: "**Who do you say I am? ... You are the Christ.**" Right on Peter—you nailed part 1; you know exactly who Jesus is. Then, 4 verses later, Peter gets Mark part 2 wrong and look at Jesus' response:

33 ... Jesus rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!"

Whoa! When Jesus Christ calls you Satan, that's not a C-. That's an F. a big time fail. Is that offset by the fact that he got an A on part 1 (**You are the Christ**)? No. What we see in this passage is even if you get an A+ on part 1 of Mark, still, if you miss part 2 you might as well be the devil. And that's a startling truth because there are millions who get part 1 right but not part 2.

Okay, so let's dig into this passage and see if we can get more than half of it right so we're not on the devil's team.

The Great Confession

Mark 8:27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi.

That's a pagan city at the far north end of Israel. This is the furthest Jesus ever gets from Jerusalem.²

Contrasting Answers: "a" vs. "THE"

27 ... On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

That is not a normal question. I have never in my lifetime heard anyone ask that question. Think about it. What if I asked you, "Who do people say I am?" "Um, Darrell? Who else would you be?" Put this question in anyone else's mouth and it makes no sense. But with Jesus, it was so obvious that he was a supernatural figure, everyone had a theory to explain his miraculous power.³

¹ This passage is the midpoint of the gospel, but it's way past the midpoint of Jesus ministry. Jesus only has a matter of months left in his life at this point. Those last few months take another 8 chapters because Mark slows the pace way down. Then he slows down even more in Jesus' last week. The closer we get to the cross, the more detail we get.

² As an adult, that is. His trip to Egypt as a child was farther.

There is a symbolic significance to this. Throughout the first half of the gospel, Jesus has been moving away from Jerusalem both geographically and spiritually. There has been one indication after another that Jesus would offer salvation not just to the Jews, but to Gentiles, and Gentiles would be more receptive. It's not coincidence that it is at the farthest point from Jerusalem, in the heart of pagan territory, where the first clear understanding of Jesus' identity occurs.

³ This is the second time we hear these three predominant theories. The first was in Mark 6:14-15, where it explicitly says the reason they had these theories was to explain how Jesus could have such miraculous power.

28 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

Those are the prevailing theories. Jesus gives no response to that answer. He just goes right to the next question: **But what about you? Who do you say I am?** You can tell he's expecting a different answer from them. And he gets one—**You are the Christ**. What Jesus is doing here is making a point about the difference between the way the world thinks about him and the way his followers think about him—he wants to draw that contrast. And it's a big difference—even though the world's view of Jesus is generally quite favorable. We know some people had negative views,⁴ but the disciples don't mention those. They just mention the positive ones, and they really are very positive. Elijah, the greatest Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist, the greatest man to live up to his time. When the people tried to answer the question of who Jesus was, their answer was the highest, most exalted answer they could come up with. And yet, Jesus expected a better answer from the disciples. The point Jesus is making is this: if you want to be one of his followers, you must be willing to buck the trend of popular conceptions of Jesus and hold a much higher view of him than even the highest opinions in the world.

The Blasphemy of Faint Praise

The theories of the crowds were not only wrong; they were blasphemous. Are you familiar with the phrase, "condemning with faint praise"? It's when the "praise" you give someone is so faint—so much less than what they deserve that it ends up being an insult. Like if you told your wife, "You're prettier than the prettiest warthog," technically that's praise, but I don't think she's going to like it. If I told you Bill Gates is so rich that he would qualify as being in the top 1000 richest people in the town of Dacono, would that be true? Sort of, but it's also a lie, isn't it? If I make you think Bill Gates' wealth is somewhere in that income range, that's completely misleading. You can lie about someone with faint praise. And you can blaspheme the Son of God with faint praise. You can blaspheme Jesus by saying he's the greatest of the prophets if you imply that he's in the same class as them.

Jesus wasn't just a prophet. He's not just a anything; he's the Christ. If your idea of who Jesus is starts with "He is a..." instead of "He is THE..." you need to go back to the drawing board because Jesus is unique. The prophets spoke God's Word; Jesus is God's Word. The distance between Jesus and the greatest prophets in the Bible is infinite. He is **the Christ**.

You Are the Christ

The title "Christ" referred to the great king who would someday sit on David's throne, drive out all Israel's enemies, and rule the whole world.⁵ He's the son of man prophesied in Daniel 7 who approaches the Ancient of Days and is given authority, glory and sovereign power and all peoples, nations and men of every language worship him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Dan. 7:14). Jesus has spent his entire earthly ministry so far proving he was that king in Mark part 1. He put on the most staggering, spectacular, and undeniable display of divine power and authority this planet has ever seen.

⁴ The Scribes thought he was satanic, his family thought he was crazy, and his hometown thought he was nothing more than one of Mary's sons.

⁵ After 1:1, the word **Christ** never appears again until now. It means *anointed one*. The Greek word is *Christ*, the Hebrew word is *Messiah*, but they mean exactly the same thing—*anointed one*—someone specially chosen by God. In the OT prophets, priests, and kings were all anointed, but at this point in history when they talked about THE anointed one, mainly what they had in mind was a king.

Faith is from God

The reader has known who Jesus is right from the very first verse of the book Mark introduced Jesus as **Christ, the Son of God**. But the characters in the story don't figure it out until now.⁶ Up until this point the highest title the disciples had given Jesus in Mark was "teacher." Suddenly now they see so much more, which is remarkable if you think about it, because what indication had there been that Jesus would become the king of Israel and rule the world? He did show his power, but other than that, what else is there? Even after all this time, Jesus is going nowhere politically, he has no army, and he's given no indication that he will oppose Rome or do anything other than obey Roman law. Why would anyone assume he's the great deliverer? So for Peter, at this point in history, to recognize that is remarkable. In fact, more than remarkable—it's supernatural.

Put your finger on v.21, and put another finger on v.29. How do you make that leap? How do you get from, "**do you still not see or understand?**" to 8 verses later "**You are Christ!**"? How did they go from blindness to sight? In Matthew's Gospel, Matthew comes right out and tells us—it was a direct act of God, giving Peter insight.

Matthew 16:16 ... "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus doesn't say, "Wow Peter, good thinking. You've got a mind like a theological steel trap." No. He says this:

17 ... "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

Matthew tells us that; Mark teaches the same thing, but in a different way. Remember when I told you that Mark likes to teach with a paint brush instead of a pen? He teaches by showing instead of telling, and this is a great example of that. Right before this Jesus healed a blind man. Then he talks to his disciples about how spiritually blind they all are. And now, 8 verses later they have 20/20 vision on who Jesus is.⁷ How did that happen? The same way the blind man was healed—a miracle of Christ.

So the point is clear: If you hear the truth about Christ and your heart is receptive, make no mistake—you have been visited by grace. You have been touched by Christ's healing hand every bit as literally as that blind man in Bethsaida. And each time you understand something, that's another miracle of Christ. He touched you again—just like the second touch that enable that man to understand what he was seeing.

The Blindness of the Sinful Human Heart

Now, why is it that understanding who Jesus is requires a miracle? It's not like his identity is complicated. It's not a secret. There's plenty of evidence. So why does it take an act of God for someone to get it?

It's because the natural bent of the sinful, rebellious human heart is to suppress the truth about God (Romans 1:18). We suppress the truth about who Jesus is because we want him to fit into what our worldview already is. That's why Karl Marx concluded that Jesus was the first Marxist. Feminist theologians study Jesus and find he was all about feminism. And modern critics who don't believe in the supernatural go on what they call the quest for the historical Jesus and you'll never guess what they find—a Jesus who just happens to fit perfectly into their worldview: a Galilean holy man who was as

⁶ We learn from John's gospel that Andrew Philip knew it early on (John 1:41, 45). But for the most part, the disciples failed to understand who Jesus was throughout most of his ministry (see mark 4:41).

⁷ It's also possible that all the praise Jesus heaped upon Peter after his great confession was not included because Mark received his material from Peter, and in his humility, Peter included Jesus' rebuke but not Jesus' commendation. Given the fact that Peter was the source of Mark's material, it's not surprising that Mark emphasizes more than any other gospel how difficult it was for Jesus' followers to come to terms with his suffering and death.

natural as they come, no miracles and no claims to deity. They say all that stuff was made up later by Jesus' followers.

Based on what evidence? None. These people who claim to be so scientific and evidence-based, and historical; their theory is as unscientific and unhistorical as can be. 100% of the historical evidence we have points to a Jesus who worked miracles by the hundreds and made claims to deity and required absolute obedience and loyalty and who rose from the dead.

If you want to talk about historical evidence—just think about this passage. Can you seriously imagine the church inventing this story if it didn't actually happen? Peter was the primary leader of the early church. The entire Christian religion depended on the credibility of the Apostles; especially Peter. And we're supposed to believe that the church made up a story about Jesus calling Peter Satan? That's impossible to believe.⁸ These are reliable reports of honest men.

The evidence is so clear and so abundant—so why do otherwise intelligent men and women not see it? Why do scientists and historians and educated people, who normally follow the best evidence, suddenly revert to blind faith in their theories about Jesus, believing what they want to believe rather than what is supported by the evidence? It's because the truth about Jesus threatens the lifestyle they don't want to give up. The human heart's love affair with sin and with this world causes blindness that requires a miracle of Christ to cure.

And even those of us who are believers still have a remnant of that blindness. We're still like the guy who saw men like trees walking around. We're all prone to letting our desires and expectations shape what we read and hear from God's Word. We need to be in constant prayer whenever we read the Bible or listen to a sermon or read a book, begging God to touch our eyes and enable us to see what's real rather than just what we want to see or what we expect to see.

The Great Confusion

Gag Order

Okay, so Peter uses supernatural insight from God and makes the great confession: **You are the Christ**. So how does Jesus respond? Did he say, "That's right on Peter. Now get out there and proclaim that in Jerusalem, Judea, and the uttermost parts of the earth"? No. Look what he says.

30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

There's that gag order again. Why does Jesus keep doing that—especially now, after Peter finally gets it right? Mark is finally going to show us the answer in the next two verses.

I think every time I've heard this passage preached, the preacher ends the sermon by saying something like, "Jesus is asking you the same question today: **Who do you say I am?**" And then they go on to say, "That's the most important question you could ever answer. How you answer that question will determine your eternal destiny." Preachers who say that are ending their sermon too soon. If they kept going through the next couple verses they would see that Peter got that question right and yet Jesus still called him Satan. Why? Because Peter's great confession in v.29 is followed immediately by his great confusion in v.32. Peter has 20/20 vision on part 1 of Mark—who Jesus is, but when it comes to part 2, Peter is still seeing men like trees walking around.

⁸ It's also notable that by the time Mark wrote this, the word "Christ" to refer to Jesus was even more ubiquitous than it is today. You can see it in Paul's epistles. Almost every time they mentioned Jesus, it was "Jesus Christ," or "Christ Jesus" or "the Lord Jesus Christ," etc. The fact that none of that leaked back into Mark's account shows how careful he was. The word "Christ" never appears a single time between the opening verse and this passage in ch.8. That points in direction of Mark being accurate history rather than a made up legend after the fact.

Mark Part 2: the Christ Must Suffer, Die, and Rise

Part 1 answers the question “Who is Jesus?” Part 2 answers the question, “Why did Jesus come?” Peter summarizes the first 8 chapters in v.29: **You are the Christ.** Then in v.31 Jesus summarizes the last 8 chapters (Mark part 2).

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

Part 1 of the gospel is all about the divine power and authority of Jesus. Part 2 is all about the weakness and submission of Jesus. People had trouble with part 1 because they keep guessing too low. “Are you a prophet?” “Higher.” “Elijah?” “Higher.” “John the Baptist?” “Higher.” They guessed way too low on Jesus’ identity.

Now that they finally get that, the question is what Jesus came to do, and for the next 8 chapters Jesus has to keep saying, “No, lower. Lower. Lower.” Getting part 2 through their heads proves even more difficult than part 1.

Can you see why both halves of Mark are so crucial? If all you have is part 2—Jesus suffers and dies, what good is that. Thousands of people died on crosses. If you don’t first establish that he’s the Christ, then his death means nothing.

But on the other hand, if all you have is his identity—he’s the Christ, but he doesn’t die on the cross, that leaves us in our sin. So if you miss on either Mark part 1 or Mark part 2, you miss everything.

So Jesus is very clear—I’m the chosen king, but before I rule the world, four things need to happen: all in v.31. First, he **must suffer many things**. The path to glory is the path of suffering.

Second, he must **be rejected** by the official leadership of Israel. And it’s a bipartisan rejection. These three groups Jesus lists—the **elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law (scribes)**, that’s the Sanhedrin, the official governing body of Israel.⁹ And like our government, it was comprised of both liberals and conservatives (liberal Sadducees and conservative Pharisees) who were bitter opponents. Opposing factions would reach across the aisle and join forces to kill the Son of Man. It would be like if today he said, “Nancy Pelosi, Elizabeth Warren, Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, and all 7 justices on the Supreme Court will unanimously agree on this action.” 1) suffer 2) be rejected, then 3) he **must be killed**. Why? We find out later it was to pay the penalty for our sins,¹⁰ but Jesus doesn’t bring that part up here. He just says it **must** happen—not just that it will happen, but that is *has* to happen. It has to because it’s

⁹ Later Jesus would quote Ps.118:22 The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone (Mk.12:10) after the parable of the tenants killing the son. The Sanhedrin are the builders who reject this ideal stone.

¹⁰ **Isaiah 53:10 ... the LORD makes his life a guilt offering...4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows ... 5 he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

James Edwards claims there is no evidence that anyone prior to Jesus connected the Messiah with the suffering servant in Isaiah. But there are records of rabbis making emphatic statements that it was not the Messiah. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 253. Cranfield, however, disagrees. He cites Zimmerli and Jeremias, *Servant*, pp.57-78 as an example and says the rareness of such examples is probably due to anti-Christian polemic. Cranfield, 277.

It must happen because God’s justice demanded it. Jesus cried out in the garden, “If there is any other way, let it be that other way.” Modern people hear that and say, “Oh, there are lots of other ways. All religions lead to heaven.” But God says, “No. There’s no other way. This *must* happen.” Death is the consequence. Death is the requirement. Death is the price. There is no other way. We sinned and someone had to pay—either us or a sacrifice in our place. The moment Jesus first said to that paralytic back in ch.2, “**Son, your sins are forgiven**,” he sealed his fate. In fact, long before that. The first time God ever showed any mercy to any sinner it sealed Jesus’ fate.

Romans 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.

That’s how important God’s justice is—important enough to kill his own Son to keep it in place.

God's plan.¹¹ Isaiah 53:10 It was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. It's interesting that Jesus doesn't mention that it's for the payment of sins. The thing he wants to drive home at this point is simply the fact that the suffering must happen. He wants to change their attitude about suffering. Our natural approach to life is, use the power you have to avoid suffering. Jesus has infinite power but he won't use it to avoid suffering because the goal of life is the will of God, which is glory through suffering. And that's why he uses the word **must**. It's not like plan A was that Israel would embrace Jesus as their Messiah, but when they killed him instead God had to go to plan B. No, this was plan A from before the creation of the earth. Revelation 13:8 says **the Lamb ... was slain from the creation of the world**.

Peter's Response

But look at Peter's response.

32 He spoke plainly about this (it wasn't a parable this time.¹² Peter knew exactly what Jesus was saying), **and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.**

We can understand Peter's emotions, right? Suppose your spouse or your dearest friend said, "I'm going to do something, and I won't make it out alive. So this is goodbye." Would your first impulse be to affirm that? Our natural response would be just like Peter's. Peter loved Jesus.

But not only was Jesus a dear friend, he was also the leader of the movement that Peter had left everything to join. If Jesus goes down in flames, so does Peter. But if Jesus is exalted and honored and ends up ruling the world, Peter is right there with him.

And so this idea of Jesus suffering and dying was an absolute non-starter for Peter. So he takes a kind of chief of staff role. You can picture the President's chief of staff pulling him aside when he's about to make a major PR blunder and trying to correct him. He's the opposite of that Syrophenician woman. Remember her first two words? "**Yes Lord.**" Peter should have learned from her. He starts out with, "No Lord," which are two words that are nonsense when you put them together—you can say no or you can call him Lord, but not both.

Receive the as the Words of God, not Men

Peter thought he had a high view of the Christ, but he was like a lot of people—his opinions about Christ were greater than Christ himself in his heart. That's how people get with their traditions. There are some things we believe because the Bible says them explicitly. There are other things we hold that are opinions. And very often, our confidence in that first category bleeds into the second category, and we start thinking our opinions are in the category of things clearly taught in Scripture. Peter did the opposite of what the Thessalonians did.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God....

When you listen to the word of man, you take in what is said, then you evaluate it to see if it sounds reasonable and you make a decision about whether you agree or not. Listening to something as the Word of God is much different. You don't hear it, evaluate it, sit in judgment on it, then decide whether to receive it. You start with the decision: "I'm going to receive this no matter what God says." Then you hear it and receive it. Where Peter went wrong was he listened to Jesus' words like you would listen to

¹¹ The word "must" is very frequently used to describe necessity due to God's plan throughout the NT.

¹² Prior to this Jesus made the cryptic reference to the fact that the bridegroom would one day be taken away, and on that day Jesus' followers would fast (Mark 2:20). But now Jesus is as clear as crystal—he spells out exactly what's going to happen in simple, literal, plain language.

the words of man, not the words of God. He thought it was his role to evaluate them and make a judgment about them. Big mistake. God's Word judges us; we don't judge it (James 4:11).

And it's easy to jump on Peter with both feet here and say, "Man, if Jesus Christ walked up to me and said he had to die, I would never argue with him." Maybe not. But what happens when God's Word requires something of you that you really don't want to do? It tells you to forgive someone you really don't want to forgive, or to reconcile with someone who hurt you, or to humble yourself in a dispute, or fill in the blank. When that happens, do your ears start getting a big wax buildup and suddenly you can't quite make out what he's saying?

The question of Mark part 1 is, "Who do you say Jesus is?" That's an important question. But equally important is the one we find here—not just who does your mouth say Jesus is, but who do your ears say he is? With your mouth you say Jesus is more than a mere man. But what about your ears? Do you listen to his commands the same way you listen to the words of man? Or do you bow before it as the Word of God? When Scripture says something that is hard to believe, or hard to obey, are you a sponge or a stone?

Jesus' Rebuke

So Jesus explains, "I have to suffer and die and after three days ..." And Peter grabs his elbow and says, "A word, please" and v.32 says **Peter took him aside**. Evidently he didn't want to embarrass Jesus by rebuking him in front of everyone. Jesus stands there, listens to Peter's rebuke. Then Jesus turns back toward the disciples. And now he's looking at the disciples, but he's talking to Peter.

33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter.

And he's not worried about protecting Peter from embarrassment. This is something they all need to hear. And here comes his stunning rebuke.

33 ..."Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Satan's Strategy

All Peter said was he didn't want Jesus to suffer and die. And for that he gets labeled Satan? Is that a satanic attitude? Yes. Satan did not want Jesus to die on the cross. You might remember that old Carmen song, The Champion, where Satan and Jesus are in a boxing match. And when Jesus dies on the cross, Satan thinks he won. But then Jesus gets up again three days later and gets the victory. That's not how the Bible presents it. When Jesus died on the cross, Satan was holding his head saying, "NOOOO!"

Colossians 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Jesus dying on the cross was the last thing Satan wanted, and so he continually tried to tempt Jesus to bypass the cross and get the throne another way—right up to the night before.¹³

¹³ When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, they were all temptations that had to do with getting Jesus to bypass suffering, bypass God's plan, and become king of the world without the cross. And Jesus' rebuke of Peter is very similar to his rebuke of Satan after those temptations.

Mt.4:10 λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ὕπαγε σατανᾶ
Mk. 8:33 λέγει ὕπαγε ὀπίσω μου, σατανᾶ
Mt.4:10 ...Jesus said to him "Go Satan"
Mk.8:33 ...he said, "Go behind me Satan"

Someone might argue, "What about Jn.13:27, where Satan entered Judas and drove him to betray Jesus? We're not told exactly why Satan did that. I suppose it's possible that he completely reversed direction and just decided to commit suicide by sending Jesus to the cross, but I doubt it. I think it's a lot more likely that this was yet another attempt to prevent the cross.

And by the way, as an aside, don't think this was an easy temptation for Jesus to resist. Jesus was a man—a human being, and he had the same instincts to avoid suffering that you and I have. You see that in the garden the night before the crucifixion. I believe this was an agonizingly difficult temptation to resist, which is why each time Jesus faced it, you see him go off alone for an extended time of prayer. He resisted this temptation only through loud shouts and tears, crying out to the Father for help. Temptation was not easier for Jesus because he was perfect. It was painful and hard just like it is for you.

So all his life Satan had been trying to get Jesus to bypass the cross. So you can imagine the horror when Jesus once again hears the hiss of the serpent repeating this temptation, but this time it's coming out of the mouth of Jesus' chief disciple and close friend.

I'm making a point of this because it's important that we not think of the cross as a defeat or setback. It was a victory for Jesus and a defeat for Satan. That's why we never did Good Friday services where everyone was all glum and walked out in silence—as if the cross were a defeat and the resurrection were the victory. The cross and the resurrection were both victories.

Where Jesus Leads

So first it was just Peter and Jesus. Then Jesus gets all 12 disciples involved when he rebukes Peter. And then, starting in v.34, Jesus does something very unusual: he gets the whole crowd involved.

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples.

Usually Jesus is dodging the crowds.¹⁴ But here he wants to make it very clear that what he is about to say applies to everybody, not just the 12. That's important because even to this day there are many Bible teachers who say that what Jesus said next doesn't apply to all Christians. Jesus knew people would try to pull that, so he makes it very clear—this is for everyone.

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Part 1 of the gospel is about *why* you should follow Jesus—because of who Jesus is. Part 2 is about *where* you must follow Jesus—down the path of humiliation, suffering, and death.

We don't have time to look in detail at vv.34-38 tonight. We'll save that for next time. For now I'll just read them.

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? 37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his 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 him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Stand with the rejected Jesus, lose your life, deny yourself, and take up your cross. Jesus didn't bury anything in the fine print. He was right up front with the fact that following him will cost you everything.

When Satan tries to prevent you from doing some great thing in the work of the gospel, how does he do it? The strategy he uses at least as often as any other strategy is discouragement. If he can get you discouraged enough, you might just give up shy of the finish line. That's definitely how he went after Paul. And I can testify that's how he comes after me. What's more discouraging than having a man you spent years pouring yourself into turn against you and against God?

Did it work? When we see Jesus in the garden that night sweating blood and praying like he had never prayed before, having been betrayed by Judas and knowing all the others would also leave him, would we be going out on a limb if we assumed discouragement may have been one of the things he was battling? What did he pray for? The very thing Satan had been pushing for all along—"Let this cup pass from me." I'm not a good enough psychologist to get inside Satan's brain, but I think that explanation is as likely as anything else I can think of.

¹⁴ This is one of only two times when Jesus gathers a crowd (see Mark 7:14).

His path to glory went through suffering and death, and if you want to be one of his followers, that's where you have to follow. Part 2 of the gospel isn't just that Jesus had to suffer and die, it's that his followers must follow him on that path. So if you want to know if you are a follower of Jesus, you need to ask:

- 1) *Who does my mouth say he is? (Do I confess him as the Christ, the Son of God?)*
- 2) *Who do my ears say he is? (Do I accept his words as the Word of God?)*
- 3) *Who does my life say he is? (Do I follow him on the path of rejection, humiliation, suffering, and death?)*

Prosperity Gospel

It's a hard message. And Peter wasn't the last one to have a reaction against it. When Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and death, that's the beginning of what is known today as the prosperity gospel. That's exactly what the prosperity heresy says—"Don't talk about suffering or lowliness or poverty or humiliation or death. Focus on glory and honor and wealth in this world." How old is the prosperity gospel? It dates back to about two seconds after the true gospel was revealed. The moment Jesus revealed the way of the cross, Peter came up with a "better" idea—the way of prosperity—the way that is hard wired deep inside every one of us. We all have prosperity gospel tendencies, which is the very thing Jesus is calling us to crucify if we want to follow him.

Peter Got it

This message that the disciples had such a hard time accepting never did get any easier to accept—not even after Jesus rose from the dead.

1 Corinthians 1:23 We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The idea of a suffering, dying messiah remains to this day a stumbling block for the Jews. That's why the whole second half of Mark is devoted to explaining it. Did you notice the word **began** in v.31—**He began to teach them**. Jesus now turns his attention away from the crowds and devotes the rest of his life, from now until they arrive in Jerusalem, to teaching this to the disciples.¹⁵ They still don't ever really

¹⁵ Mark 9:31 ... "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."

Mark 10:33 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34 who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

The frenetic pace we've seen in the first 8 chapters now slows down to a deliberate march. Instead of every paragraph having Jesus in another city, crisscrossing back and forth across the sea of Galilee, now they are just on the way to Jerusalem where Jesus will suffer and die. They plod steadily toward Jerusalem, and Jesus teaches the disciples. Jesus' ministry takes a decided shift from miracles and ministry to the crowds to private training of his disciples "on the way."

NAC Commentary comments on the phrase "on the way": "The Greek expression 'on the way' appears seven times in this division (also 9:33, 34; 10:17, 32, 46, 52) and only twice elsewhere (8:3; 11:8). It characterizes the division and perhaps even sets forth a theme of the division. Some describe the entire division as a journey to Jerusalem, but that journey does not begin until 10:1. The entire division is, however, a journey to discipleship."

At this point in the book, Jesus is at Caesarea Philippi, which is the farthest distance from Jerusalem, and the whole rest of the book is about his journey back toward Jerusalem to die. It's like a giant rubber band that reaches its full extension, and then snaps back to Jerusalem (which happens to be the place where sacrifices are made).

This is the midpoint of Mark, but that's not to say this is the midpoint of Jesus' ministry. It's well past that. This is just a few months before Jesus dies. The gospels do that—they race through the years of Jesus' ministry quickly, then they slow way down in the final months, and then way, way down in the final week. That's because the cross is what's most important. The trip to

get it until after the resurrection. But then they do. Peter finally got it. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost Peter summed up the whole gospel of Mark in 3 verses.

Acts 2:22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

(that's the first half of Mark)

23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead....

(that's the second half of Mark)

And what happens in the rest of the book of Acts? The disciples follow Jesus in humiliation, suffering, and death.

Conclusion

Is that a depressing message? You might be thinking, "Wow, this Bible study is a barrel of sunshine." If it's depressing, it's only because we haven't finished the passage. There's nothing depressing about the second half of the gospel. Both halves are fantastic news, and we'll see that next time when we look in depth at vv.34-38. It's all about saving your soul and Jesus being unashamed to claim you on Judgment Day. Those are wonderful things—glorious things, so glorious that we can do what Jesus did with his suffering—we can endure it and think little of the shame because of the joy set before us on that day when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

Until next time, here's something for you to think about: Satan's main goal with Jesus was to prevent him from going through with the suffering and crucifixion. Have you ever thought about the fact that Satan might have the same goal for you—to prevent you from suffering? The devil's goal for you in this life might be health, wealth, and prosperity. There's nothing he would like more than for you to gain the whole world, and then lose your soul.

But how do you know when it's ok to avoid suffering and seek comfort, and when it's the devil's plan? And when you should deny yourself what you want, and when it's ok to enjoy the pleasures of life? That's where we'll pick it up next time.

Jerusalem will take from here to the end of ch.10. Then the whole rest of the book, ch.11-16 is all about Jesus' final week.

The second half of Mark is divided into two clear sections: the journey to Jerusalem (8:27-10:45) and Jesus' final week (the rest of the book). The journey has a clear structure as well, based around the three times Jesus tells about his coming suffering.

Geographical reference	8:27	9:30	10:32
Passion/resurrection prediction	8:31	9:31	10:33-34
Misunderstanding	8:32-33	9:32-34	10:35-41
Correction	8:34-9:1	9:35-37	10:42-45