

**Mark 8:22-9:1**  
**December 10, 2023**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: When you think of the disciple Peter, what first comes to mind?

**Transition:** In today's passage, Jesus begins probing the question with his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" After getting their responses, Jesus asks the disciples the same question. And it is Peter who says, "You are the Christ." Jesus then shares what's coming next, which is that he 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. This announcement stunned the disciples. If He is indeed the Christ of God, as they had confessed, then why would He be rejected by the religious leaders? Why would these leaders crucify Him? Did not the Old Testament Scriptures promise that Messiah would defeat all their enemies and establish a glorious kingdom for Israel? There was something wrong somewhere and the disciples were confused.

When we think of Peter, the first thing that tends to come to mind is his rejection of the notion that Jesus would have to suffer and die as the Messiah. Peter was the one who was bold enough to rebuke Jesus for even saying it, and we know that Jesus didn't take kindly to that! Not only does Jesus rebuke Peter, but He also sets forth the cost of discipleship. There's a lot to digest, so let's get started and read the passage.

**BOOK:**

***The Healing of a Blind Man at Bethsaida***

<sup>22</sup> They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. <sup>23</sup> He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"

<sup>24</sup> He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

<sup>25</sup> Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. <sup>26</sup> Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village. (Don't go into the village and tell anyone)"

*Peter's Confession of Christ*

<sup>27</sup> Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

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

<sup>29</sup> "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Christ. (or Messiah)"

<sup>30</sup> Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

*Jesus Predicts His Death*

<sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

<sup>33</sup> 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.”

<sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save his life (life or soul) will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup> What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>38</sup> 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.”

**9** And he said to them, “I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.”

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

Is there any reward for the person who is a true disciple? Yes, there is: he becomes more like Jesus Christ and one day shares in His glory. Satan promises you glory, but in the end, you receive suffering. God promises you suffering, but in the end, that suffering is transformed into glory. If we acknowledge Christ and live for Him, He will one day acknowledge us and share His glory with us.

### **Close in Prayer**

## **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 138-140). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.***

In this section, Mark recorded two miracles that are not found in the other Gospels: the healing of the deaf man who had a speech impediment (Mark 7:31–37), and the healing of the blind man outside Bethsaida (Mark 8:22–26). Perhaps we can see in these two men illustrations of the disciples' spiritual condition described in Mark 8:18! Jewish readers would connect these two miracles with the messianic promises in Isaiah 35.

In both these situations, friends brought the men to Jesus; and in both situations, Jesus led the men away from the crowds. In fact, in the latter case, He took the man *outside the city*. Why? Probably because the city of Bethsaida had already been judged because of its unbelief (Matt. 11:21–24). No more evidence would be given to them.

The unique thing about this miracle of healing is that it occurred *gradually* and not instantly. The Gospels record the healing of at least seven blind men, and they show that our Lord used a variety of approaches. Perhaps it was the atmosphere of unbelief in Bethsaida that hindered Him (see Mark 6:5–6), or it may have been the spiritual condition of the man himself. For some reason not given, the man was not ready for instant sight, so Jesus restored him gradually. The fact that the man recognized men and trees suggests that he had not been born blind but had been blinded by accident or disease.

The man was not from Bethsaida, for Jesus sent him home and cautioned him not to enter that town. Now that he had been healed, why go to unbelieving Bethsaida where Jesus had been rejected? His job was to go home and spread the Good News of the kingdom, and to demonstrate its power by showing others what Jesus had done for him (see Mark 2:11; 5:34; 10:52). Should he not give another opportunity to the people in Bethsaida? Perhaps they would believe if they heard how Jesus had restored his sight. No, Bethsaida had been given adequate evidence, but still had refused to believe. It is a dangerous thing for anybody to reject the message of God and harden his or her heart in unbelief.

The disciples learned some valuable lessons on this trip, lessons that they would need to remember and apply in later years of ministry. We today need to learn these same lessons: (1) don't seek after signs, but live by faith in His Word; (2) trust Jesus to meet needs; (3) avoid the leaven of false doctrine; (4) let Jesus work as He wills, and expect variety in His working.

Mark recorded the events of some busy days in the ministry of God's Servant! Next he will take us "behind the scenes" as the Servant instructs His disciples and prepares them for His death on the cross.

## **THE SERVANT'S SECRETS**

*Mark 8:27–9:50*

A secret has been defined as "something you tell one person at a time." From time to time, Jesus shared special "secrets" with His disciples, and three of them are given here. Believers today need to understand and apply these spiritual secrets if their own lives are to be all that God wants them to be.

### **Suffering Leads to Glory (Mark 8:27–9:1)**

Jesus had been preparing His disciples for this private meeting at which He intended to reveal to them what would happen to Him at Jerusalem. He had given hints along the way, but now He would explain matters to them more fully. For the site, He selected Caesarea Philippi, a town about twenty-five miles north of Bethsaida, sitting at the foot of beautiful Mt. Hermon. The town was named after Augustus Caesar and Herod Philip, and it contained a marble temple dedicated to Augustus. It was a place dedicated to the glory of Rome, and that glory is now gone, but the glory of Jesus Christ remains and will go on eternally.

**Confession (vv. 27–30).** If you were to go around asking your friends, “What do people say about me?” they would take it as an evidence of pride. What difference does it really make what people think or say about us? We are not that important! But what people believe and say about Jesus Christ *is* important, for He is the Son of God and the only Savior of sinners.

Your confession concerning Jesus Christ is a matter of life or death (John 8:21, 24; 1 John 2:22–27; 4:1–3). The citizens of Caesarea Philippi would say, “Caesar is lord!” That confession might identify them as loyal Roman citizens, but it could never save them from their sins and from eternal hell. The only confession that saves us is “Jesus is Lord!” (1 Cor. 12:1–3) when that confession comes from a heart that truly believes in Him (Rom. 10:9–10).

It is remarkable the number of different opinions the people held about Jesus, though the same situation probably exists today. That some thought He was John the Baptist is especially perplexing, since John and Jesus had been seen publicly together. They were quite different in personality and ministry (Matt. 11:16–19), so it seems strange that the people would confuse them.

John the Baptist came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17), in a ministry of judgment, whereas Jesus came in a spirit of meekness and service. John performed no miracles (John 10:41), but Jesus was a miracle-worker. John even dressed like the Prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8; Mark 1:6). How could the people confuse the two?

Some said that Jesus was one of the prophets, perhaps Jeremiah (Matt. 16:14). Jeremiah was “the weeping prophet,” and Jesus was a Man of sorrows; so there is a definite parallel. Jeremiah called the people to true repentance from the heart, and so did Jesus. Both men were misunderstood and rejected by their own people, both condemned the false religious leaders and the hypocritical worship in the temple, and both were persecuted by those in authority.

In His words and His works, Jesus gave every evidence to the people that He was the Son of God, the Messiah, and yet they did not get the message. Instead of diligently seeking for the truth, the people listened to popular opinion and followed it, just as many people do today. They had opinions instead of convictions, and this is what led them astray. Elbert Hubbard defined public opinion as “the judgment of the incapable many, opposed to that of the discerning few.” Thank God for the discerning few!

Peter’s confession was bold and uncompromising, just as ours should be: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!” (Matt. 16:16) The word *Christ* means “the Anointed One, the promised Messiah.” Prophets, priests, and kings were all anointed when installed in their offices, and our Lord holds all three offices.

Why did Jesus warn them to keep quiet about Him? For one thing, the disciples themselves still had much to learn about Him and what it truly meant to follow Him. The religious leaders of the nation had already made up their minds about Him, and to proclaim Him as Messiah now would only upset God’s plans. The common people wanted to see His miracles, but they had little desire to submit to His message. To announce Him as Messiah might well result in a political uprising that would only do harm.

**Confusion (vv. 31–38).** Now that they had confessed their faith in Christ (but see John 6:66–71), the disciples were ready for the “secret” Jesus wanted to share with them: He was going with them to Jerusalem where He would die on a cross. From this point on, Mark will focus on their journey to Jerusalem and the emphasis will be on Jesus’ approaching death and resurrection (Mark 9:30–32; 10:32–34).

This announcement stunned the disciples. If He is indeed the Christ of God, as they had confessed, then why would He be rejected by the religious leaders? Why would these leaders crucify Him? Did not the Old Testament Scriptures promise that Messiah would defeat all their enemies and establish a glorious kingdom for Israel? There was something wrong somewhere and the disciples were confused.

True to character, it was Peter who expressed their concern. One minute Peter was led by God to confess his faith in Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:17), and the next minute he was thinking like an unbelieving man and expressing the thoughts of Satan! This is a warning to us that when we argue with God’s Word, we open the door for Satan’s lies. Peter began rebuking his Master, and Mark used the same word that describes our Lord’s rebuking of the demons (Mark 1:25; 3:12).

Peter’s protest was born out of his ignorance of God’s will and his deep love for his Lord. One minute Peter was a “rock,” and the next minute he was a stumbling block! Dr. G. Campbell Morgan said, “The man who loves Jesus, but who shuns God’s method, is a stumbling block to Him.” Peter did not yet understand the relationship between suffering and glory. He would eventually learn this lesson and would even emphasize it in his first epistle (note 1 Peter 1:6–8; 4:13–5:10).

Note, however, that when Jesus rebuked Peter, He also “looked on His disciples,” because they agreed with Peter’s assessment of the situation! Steeped in Jewish traditional interpretation, they were unable to understand how their Messiah could ever suffer and die. To be sure, some of the prophets had written about Messiah’s sufferings, but much more had been written about Messiah’s glory. Some of the rabbis even taught that there would be *two* Messiahs, one who would suffer and one who would reign (see 1 Peter 1:10–12). No wonder the disciples were confused.

But the problem was more than theological; it was very practical. Jesus had called these men to follow Him, and they knew that whatever happened to Him would happen to them. If there was a cross in *His* future, there would be one in *their* future as well. That would be reason enough to disagree with Him! In spite of their devotion to Him, the disciples were still ignorant of the true relationship between the cross and the crown. They were following Satan’s philosophy (glory without suffering) instead of God’s philosophy (suffering transformed into glory). Which philosophy you accept will determine how you live and how you serve.

Mark 8:34 indicates that, though Jesus and His disciples had met in private, the crowds were not far away. Jesus summoned the people and taught them what He taught His own disciples: *there is a price to pay for true discipleship*. He knew that the crowds were following Him only because of the miracles, and that most of the people were unwilling to pay the price to become true disciples.

Jesus laid down three conditions for true discipleship: (1) we must surrender ourselves completely to Him; (2) we must identify with Him in suffering and death; and (3) we must follow Him obediently, wherever He leads. If we live for ourselves, we will lose ourselves, but if we lose ourselves for His sake and the Gospel’s, we will find ourselves.

Denying self is not the same as self-denial. We practice self-denial when, for a good purpose, we occasionally give up things or activities. But we deny self when we surrender ourselves to

Christ and determine to obey His will. This once-for-all dedication is followed by a daily “dying to self” as we take up the cross and follow Him. From the human point of view, we are losing ourselves, but from the divine perspective, we are finding ourselves. When we live for Christ, we become more like Him, and this brings out our own unique individuality.

But note the motivation for true discipleship: “for My sake and the Gospel’s” (Mark 8:35). To lose yourself is not an act of desperation; it is an act of devotion. But we do not stop there: personal devotion should lead to practical duty, the sharing of the Gospel with a lost world. “For My sake” could lead to selfish religious isolationism, so it must be balanced with “and the Gospel’s.” Because we live for Him, we live for others.

Discipleship is a matter of profit and loss, a question of whether we will *waste* our lives or *invest* our lives. Note the severe warning Jesus gives us here: once we have spent our lives, we cannot buy them back! Remember, He was instructing His *disciples*, men who had already confessed Him as the Son of God. He was not telling them how to be saved and go to heaven, but how to save their lives and make the most of their opportunities on earth. “Losing your soul” is the equivalent of wasting your life, missing the great opportunities God gives you to make your life count. You may “gain the whole world” and be a success in the eyes of men, and yet have nothing to show for your life when you stand before God. If that happens, though you did own the whole world, it would not be a sufficient price to give to God to buy another chance at life.

Is there any reward for the person who is a true disciple? Yes, there is: he becomes more like Jesus Christ and one day shares in His glory. Satan promises you glory, but in the end, you receive suffering. God promises you suffering, but in the end, that suffering is transformed into glory. If we acknowledge Christ and live for Him, He will one day acknowledge us and share His glory with us.

**Confirmation (v. 1).** It takes faith to accept and practice this lesson on discipleship, so six days later, the Lord gave a dazzling proof that God indeed does transform suffering into glory. (Luke’s “about eight days” is inclusive of the day of the lesson and the day of the glory, Luke 9:28.)

**Grassmick, J. D. (1985). *Mark*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 138-142) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

#### 10. THE HEALING OF THE BLIND MAN AT BETHSAIDA (8:22–26)

This miracle and its structural parallel (7:31–37) are the only miracles recorded in Mark alone. It is the only recorded two-stage miracle which Jesus performed. Sight was a widely used metaphor for understanding. This miracle depicts the correct but incomplete understanding of the disciples.

8:22. When **Jesus** and the disciples arrived in **Bethsaida** Julias (cf. v. 13; 6:32), **some people brought a blind man and begged Him to touch him** with healing (cf. 5:23; 7:32).

8:23–24. Jesus **led** the man **outside the village**, probably to establish a one-to-one relationship with him (cf. 7:33) and to avoid publicity (8:26). In general Jesus’ miracles were public events (cf. 1:23–28, 32–34; 3:1–12; 6:53–56; 9:14–27; 10:46–52). But there are three exceptions in Mark (5:35–43; 7:31–37; 8:22–26). The latter two may teach that a true understanding of Jesus comes through a personal relationship with Him apart from the crowd’s opinions.

The touch of saliva and Jesus' **hands** (cf. 7:33) conveyed His intentions and stimulated the blind man's faith. At first the healing was only partial: **He looked up** (cf. 8:25) **and saw people** (lit., "the men," perhaps the Twelve) moving in a blur **like trees walking around**. Jesus' unusual question, **Do you see anything?** indicated that this was intentional on His part (not a weakness in the man's faith). It was a fitting follow-up to His rebuking the disciples (vv. 17–21). The man was no longer totally blind, but his sight was still poor. How like him were the disciples!

8:25. Then **Jesus put His hands on the man's eyes** again. He looked intently (from *diablepō*; v. 24 has a form of *anablepō*); **his sight was restored, and he** began to see (from *emlepō*) **everything clearly**. Now his sight was perfect. This was the outcome the disciples could anticipate despite difficulties in the process.

8:26. Apparently the man did not live in Bethsaida since **Jesus sent him home** with the admonition, **Don't go into the village** (i.e., "Don't go there first"). This is likely another instance of a command for silence in order to safeguard His planned activity (cf. 1:44–45; 5:43; 7:36).

*D. Conclusion: Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ (8:27–30) (Matt. 16:13–20; Luke 9:18–21)*

At the center of his Gospel Mark placed Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah. Up to this point the underlying question had been, "Who is He?" After Peter's declaration on behalf of the Twelve, Mark's narrative is oriented toward the Cross and the Resurrection. From now on, the underlying double question was, "What kind of Messiah is He, and what does it mean to follow Him?" This crucial passage is the point to which the first half of the book leads and from which the second half proceeds.

8:27. **Jesus** took **His disciples** about 25 miles north of Bethsaida (cf. v. 22) **to the villages around Caesarea Philippi**, a city located at the source of the Jordan River on the southern slopes of Mount Hermon. It was in the tetrarchy of Herod Philip, who gave it his own name to distinguish it from the Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast.

**On the way** (*en tē hodō*; cf. 1:2; 9:33–34; 10:17, 32, 52) **Jesus asked** the disciples what **people** were saying about Him. Often Jesus' questions were springboards for new teaching (cf. 8:29; 9:33; 12:24–25).

8:28. Their response was the same as that given in 6:14–16: **John the Baptist ... Elijah ... one of the prophets**. All three responses were wrong, indicating that Jesus' identity and mission remained veiled from the people.

8:29. Then more directly and personally **Jesus asked** the disciples, **Who do you say I am?** The emphasis is on **you**, those He had chosen and trained. **Peter**, acting as the Twelve's spokesman (cf. 3:16; 9:5; 10:28; 11:21; 14:29), declared openly, **You are the Christ**, the Messiah, God's Anointed One (cf. 1:1).

Their open confession of Him at this point (cf. John 1:41, 51) was necessary because people in general were failing to discern His true identity, the religious leaders were strongly opposed to Him, and He was about to give the disciples additional revelation about Himself that would have costly implications for them. It was essential that the question of His identity be firmly settled. This affirmation of faith in Jesus was the anchor of their discipleship despite their temporary failures and defections (cf. Mark 14:50, 66–72).

Mark gave Peter's confession in its simplest, most direct form (cf. Matt. 16:16–19) to focus on Jesus' teaching on the nature of His messiahship (cf. Mark 8:31; 9:30–32; 10:32–34, 45).

8:30. **Jesus sternly warned** (lit., "ordered"; cf. 1:25; 3:12) **them not to tell anyone** He is the Messiah. People had thought up many false ideas about the concept of the "Messiah." The

promised Davidic Messiah (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14–16; Isa. 55:3–5; Jer. 23:5) was commonly thought to be a political, nationalistic figure destined to free the Jews from Roman domination (cf. Mark 11:9–10). But Jesus’ messianic mission was broader in scope and far different in nature. So He was reluctant to use this title (cf. 12:35–37; 14:61–62), and the disciples were not yet ready to proclaim the true meaning of His messiahship.

Jesus knew He is God’s Anointed One (cf. 9:41; 14:62), so He accepted Peter’s declaration as correct. However, because of the disciple’s misunderstandings (cf. 8:32–33), He commanded silence (cf. 1:44) until He could explain that as Messiah it was necessary for Him to suffer and die in obedience to God’s will (cf. 8:31).

## VI. Jesus’ Journey to Jerusalem (8:31–10:52)

The fourth major section of Mark’s Gospel is set in the framework of His journey from Caesarea Philippi in the north, where Jesus was confessed as Messiah, to Jerusalem in the south, where He fulfilled His messianic mission (cf. 8:27; 9:30; 10:1, 17, 32; 11:1; also cf. 14:28; 16:7).

Jesus explained the nature of His messianic vocation and its implications for those who wish to follow Him. There is a balanced tension between His veiledness in suffering and His future revelation in glory. The structure of this section revolves around three Passion predictions: 8:31–9:29; 9:30–10:31; 10:32–52. Each unit includes a prediction (8:31; 9:30–31; 10:32–34); a reaction by the disciples (8:32–33; 9:32; 10:35–41); and one or more lessons in discipleship (8:34–9:29; 9:33–10:31; 10:42–52).

### A. *The first Passion prediction unit (8:31–9:29)*

#### 1. JESUS’ FIRST PREDICTION OF HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION (8:31) (Matt. 16:21; Luke 9:22)

8:31. After Peter declared that Jesus is the Messiah (v. 29), **He ... began to teach them** what this meant. This marked a turning point to new content in His teaching.

Contrary to popular messianic expectations, Jesus had not come to establish an earthly messianic kingdom *at that time*. Instead He declared **that the Son of Man must suffer many things** (cf. Isa. 53:4, 11), **be rejected by the Jewish authorities, be killed, and after three days** (“on the third day”; cf. Matt. 16:21; Luke 9:22) **rise again** (Isa. 52:13; 53:10–12). This introduced to the disciples a new element in God’s kingdom program for which they were not prepared (cf. Mark 8:32). “Must” (*dei*, “it is necessary”) denotes compulsion. In this context it refers to the compulsion of God’s will, the divine plan for Jesus’ messianic mission (cf. 1:11). This prediction shows His submission to it (cf. 14:35–36).

Three groups—the **elders** (influential lay leaders), **chief priests** (Sadducees, cf. 12:18, including former high priests), **teachers of the Law** (scribes, mostly Pharisees)—constituted the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court which met in Jerusalem (cf. 11:27; 14:53).

Though Peter identified Him as “the Christ” (8:29), Jesus did not discuss the title or the issue of His identity. Rather, He focused on His mission and used the designation “the Son of Man.” This expression has appeared only twice before in Mark (cf. 2:10, 28). Both times Mark used it to show the significance of an event for his Christian readers. From now on it occurs more often but only when Jesus talked about Himself (cf. 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26; 14:21 [twice], 41, 62).



This title especially suited Jesus' total mission. It was free of political connotations, thus preventing false expectations. Yet it was sufficiently ambiguous (like a parable) to preserve the balance between concealment and disclosure in Jesus' life and mission (cf. 4:11–12). It combined the elements of suffering and glory in a way no other designation could. It served to define His unique role as Messiah.

## 2. PETER'S REBUKE AND JESUS' COUNTER REBUKE (8:32–33) (Matt. 16:22–23)

8:32–33. In contrast with previously veiled allusions (cf. 2:20), Jesus **spoke plainly**, in unambiguous terms, **about** the need for His death and resurrection.

**Peter** clearly understood Jesus' words (8:31), but could not reconcile his view of "Messiah" (v. 29b) with the suffering and death Jesus predicted. So Peter **began to rebuke Him** for this defeatist approach.

Peter's reaction, which the other disciples probably shared, was a satanic attempt similar to the wilderness temptation (cf. 1:12–13), to divert Jesus from the Cross. **Jesus ... rebuked** (cf. 8:32) **Peter** for the benefit of them all. This was not a personal attack. The words, **Out of My sight**, are literally, "Go away behind (after) Me." This is probably not a command to Peter to take his proper place as a disciple (contrast 1:17; 8:34), for Jesus named **Satan** as the source of Peter's thoughts.

Peter was an unwitting spokesman for Satan because he was setting his **mind** (*phroneō* means "to have a mental disposition for"; cf. Col. 3:2) **not on the things of God**, His ways and purposes (cf. Isa. 55:8–9), **but on the things of men**, human values and viewpoints. The way of the Cross was God's will and Jesus refused to abandon it.

## 3. JESUS' TEACHING ON THE MEANING OF DISCIPLESHIP (8:34–9:1) (Matt. 16:24–28; Luke 9:23–27)

A suffering Messiah had important implications for those who would follow Him. This section contains a series of short sayings concerning personal allegiance to Jesus (cf. Mark 9:43–50; 10:24–31). The main statement (8:34) is followed by four explanatory (*gar*, "for") clauses (vv. 35–38) and a concluding assurance (9:1). This instruction was part of the disciples' preparation for future ministry. It also provided encouragement for Mark's readers who were facing persecution in Rome.

8:34. Jesus summoned **the crowd**, interested onlookers (cf. 4:1, 10–12; 7:14–15), **along with His disciples and** addressed them both. His words, **If anyone** (not just the Twelve) **would come after Me** (cf. 1:17) indicated that Jesus was talking about their following Him as disciples (cf. 1:16–20). He then stated two requirements which, like repent and believe (cf. 1:15), are bound together.

Negatively, one **must deny himself** decisively saying no to selfish interests and earthly securities. Self-denial is not to deny one's personality, to die as a martyr, or to deny "things" (as in asceticism). Rather it is the denial of "self," turning away from the idolatry of self-centeredness and every attempt to orient one's life by the dictates of self-interest. Self-denial, however, is only the negative side of the picture and is not done for its own sake alone.

Positively, one must **take up his cross**, decisively ("take up") saying yes to God's will and way. Cross-bearing was not an established Jewish metaphor. But the figure was appropriate in Roman-occupied Palestine. It brought to mind the sight of a condemned man who was forced to demonstrate his submission to Rome by carrying part of his cross through the city to his place of

execution. Thus “to take up one’s cross” was to demonstrate publicly one’s submission/obedience to the authority against which he had previously rebelled.

Jesus’ submission to God’s will is the proper response to God’s claims over self’s claims. For Him it meant death on the cross. Those who follow Him must take up *their* (not His) cross, whatever comes to them in God’s will as a follower of Jesus. This does not mean suffering as He did or being crucified as He was. Nor does it mean stoically bearing life’s troubles. Rather, it is obedience to God’s will as revealed in His Word, accepting the consequences without reservations for Jesus’ sake and the gospel (cf. 8:35). For some this includes physical suffering and even death, as history has demonstrated (cf. 10:38–39).

In Jesus’ words, **Follow Me**, “follow” is a present imperative: “(So) let him keep following Me” (cf. 1:17–18; 2:14; 10:21, 52b; cf. “daily” in Luke 9:23). Saying no to self and yes to God is to continue all through one’s following Jesus (cf. Rom. 13:14; Phil. 3:7–11).

8:35. Verses 35–38 each begin with the explanatory Greek *gar* (**for**, only once in the NIV). These verses explain Jesus’ requirements in verse 34, focusing on entrance into discipleship, leaving one’s old allegiance to this life (the crowd), and pledging allegiance to Jesus as a disciple.

Paradoxically a person **who wants to save** (from *sōzō*, “preserve”) **his life** (*psychēn*, “soul, life”) **will lose it**; he will not be saved to eternal life. **But** a person who **loses** (lit., “will lose”) **his life** (*psychē*) **for** the sake of Jesus and **the gospel** (cf. 1:1) **will save** (from *sōzō*, “preserve”) **it**; he will be saved to eternal life (cf. comments on 10:26–27; 13:13).

Jesus made a word play on the terms “lose” and “life” (*psychē*). The *psychē* on one hand is one’s natural physical life but it also refers to one’s true self, the essential person that transcends the earthly sphere (cf. 8:36; Matt. 10:28). One who decides to maintain a self-centered life in this world by refusing Jesus’ requirements (Mark 8:34) will ultimately lose his life to eternal ruin. Conversely a person who will “lose” (give over, “deny himself”) his life (even literally, if necessary) in loyalty to Jesus and the gospel (cf. 10:29) by accepting His requirements (8:34) will actually preserve it forever. As a follower of Jesus, he is heir to eternal life forever with God (cf. 10:29–30; Rom. 8:16–17).

8:36–37. Jesus used penetrating rhetorical questions and economic terms to show the supreme value of eternal life and to reinforce the paradox of verse 35.

For (*gar*, confirming v. 35) **what good** (lit., “benefit, profit”) **is it for a man** (generic, “person”) **to gain the whole world**, all earthly pleasures and possessions, if this were possible, and **yet forfeit** (lit., “suffer the loss of”) **his soul** (*psychēn*) not gaining eternal life with God? The expected answer: “It is no good!” (Cf. Ps. 49, esp. vv. 16–20.)

For (*gar*, confirming Mark 8:36) **what can a man** (generic, “person”) **give in exchange for his soul** (*psychēs*), for eternal life with God? The answer: Nothing, because having “gained the world” he has in the end irrevocably lost eternal life with God, with nothing to compensate for it.

8:38. Structurally this verse parallels and complements verse 35 by carrying the thought to its ultimate consequence.

For (*gar*, confirming v. 35) a person who **is ashamed of** (denies) Jesus **and His words** (cf. 13:31) **in this adulterous** (spiritually unfaithful) **and sinful generation** (*genea*; cf. 8:12; Matt. 12:39; Isa. 1:4; Hosea 1:2), **the Son of Man** (cf. comments on Mark 8:31) **will also be ashamed of him when** (lit., “whenever”) **He comes in His Father’s glory** (visibly invested with God’s splendor), **with the holy angels** (cf. 13:26–27).

Clearly Jesus (cf. “Me, My”) and the Son of Man are the *same* Person (cf. 14:41b–42, 62). The veiled reference to His future role as Judge was appropriate because of the crowd’s presence.

To be “ashamed” of Jesus is to reject Him (cf. 8:34–35a) and to retain allegiance to “this generation” because of unbelief and fear of the world’s contempt. In return, when Jesus comes in glory as the awesome Judge, He will refuse to claim those as His own (cf. Matt. 7:20–23; Luke 13:22–30), and they will experience shame (cf. Isa. 28:16; 45:20–25; Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6, 8).

9:1. This verse is the positive side of 8:38 (cf. Matt. 10:32–33; Luke 12:8–9) and provides a reassuring conclusion to this section (Mark 8:34–9:1).

The words **And He said to them** (cf. 2:27) introduce an authoritative statement by Jesus. He predicted that **some who** stood there listening to Him would **not** (lit., “by no means,” *ou mē*) **taste death before** (lit., “until”) **they** saw a powerful display of God’s kingdom. The words “taste death” are a Hebrew idiom for experiencing physical death, like a fatal poison that all must take sooner or later (cf. Heb. 2:9).

Several interpretations have been suggested for the meaning of **the kingdom of God come with power**: (a) Jesus’ transfiguration, (b) Jesus’ resurrection and Ascension, (c) the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4) and the spread of Christianity by the early church, (d) the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in A.D. 70, and (e) the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The first of these is the most reasonable view in this context. The specific time reference in the following account of Jesus’ transfiguration (Mark 9:2a) indicates that Mark understood a definite connection between Jesus’ prediction (v. 1) and this event. Jesus’ transfiguration was a striking preview and guarantee of His future coming in glory (cf. 2 Peter 1:16–19).

**Church, C.L. (1998). *Mark In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 435-437). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.***

### **SUFFERING DISCIPLESHIP (8:22–26)**

Mark’s central section is “sandwiched” by two accounts of Jesus’ giving sight to blind men (8:22–26; 10:46–52). The “meat” in between consists of teaching on the costliness of discipleship and the suffering/glorification of the Son of man.

The healing of the blind man at Bethsaida is distinct from other miracles in the gospel traditions as a two-part healing. The man at first saw distorted images—people who looked like walking trees. Only after a “second touch” from Jesus did he see clearly. Similarly, the disciples would soon see that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but their understanding of messiahship would be badly distorted, even Satanic. In this larger section of Mark, Jesus would remind them repeatedly of the necessity of His suffering and death (8:31; 9:31; 10:32, 45).

### **WHO AM I? (8:27–38)**

Jesus’ first question at Caesarea Philippi is merely preparatory; the crucial question then, as now, is, “Who do you say I am?” Peter, as usual, spoke for all the disciples in declaring, “You are the Christ.” In Mark’s account Peter received no “pat on the back” (see Matt. 16:17–19). English translations obscure the harshness of Jesus’ response (using the same Greek verb translated “rebuked” in Mark 8:33). Jesus taught plainly that as the Son of man He must suffer rejection and death (contrast 8:31, 33–34). About this central truth of the necessity of the Messiah’s

suffering, death, and resurrection there was to be no misunderstanding. But disciples had a way of calling Jesus “Lord” and then telling Him what kind of Lord to be. Peter’s rebuke of Jesus serves as a warning to modern disciples: one can mouth the correct titles and still have a false understanding of who Christ is. To accept Jesus as Lord is to accept not only His glory but also His suffering, rejection, and death. Peter, realizing the deeper implications for his own discipleship said No thank you to Jesus’ brand of suffering messiahship. He knew that those who follow this Christ will experience more of the same.

Faithful discipleship in persecution depends on the grace of seeing circumstances from God’s perspective rather than in terms of human cost. On the cross Jesus would be tempted to follow the world’s way and save Himself (15:30). Though He felt abandoned by God, Jesus did not seek an easy way out. True life is lost by failing to follow Christ in the way of the cross. Just as Christ endured the cross by setting His gaze beyond the pain (see Heb. 12:2), believers are called to endure present sufferings for the gospel in hope of future glory (9:1; see Rom. 8:18).

### **GOD’S KINGDOM COMES (9:1)**

Jesus encouraged the crowds (8:34) and His disciples that some of those listening to His teaching on costly discipleship would not die (“taste death”) until they saw that God’s kingdom had come in power. The two most probable interpretations of this difficult saying are that (1) God’s kingdom came in power at the resurrection and at Pentecost (Rom. 1:4; Acts 1:8), or (2) the transfiguration served as an anticipation of the powerful coming of God’s kingdom at Christ’s second coming.

***Leavell, L.P. (1972). Mark. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (p. 625). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.***

Beginning in 8:22 we have the only recorded instance of a gradual healing. It was a miracle, but was brought about in a different manner. In order, this man looked up, looked through, and looked in. This could be descriptive of the gradual comprehension of the truth of the ministry and purpose of Jesus. The twelve did not suddenly grasp the intention of Jesus. Their understanding was slowly opened.

The supreme confession of Peter recorded in 8:27–30 comes when Jesus was finally alone with the apostles. Peter scored one hundred on this theological question. He was much slower to learn about emotions, for Jesus later had to ask the third time, “Lovest thou Me?”

In 8:31 through 9:1 Jesus issued his call to commitment. It is apparent that the twelve were not ready for Jesus to die, nor to die themselves.

The Kingdom had come already when Jesus spoke the words in 9:1. They had not yet seen it and were still looking for signs. They will understand the kingdom better in light of the cross and resurrection. The verb form here is best translated “having come” or “has come.” The kingdom came with Jesus, but the disciples could not see it because they were looking for the wrong thing.

***The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Mark 8:22-9:1. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.***

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