

Road Under Instruction

Mark 8:27-38 January 7, 2026

We've seen it in movies a thousand times. The great coach shows up to evaluate his new team, only to discover that they're a bunch of misfits and losers. They don't know their fundamentals. They squabble with each other. There's no chance they'll win a series, let alone a championship. *The Mighty Ducks, The Bad News Bears, McFarland USA, Cool Runnings, The Big Green, Little Giants.*

Usually these are *comedic* movies. We love to laugh at the antics of the team and shake our head at their inability. But I doubt any of us would actually want to *coach* a team like that.

Tonight we've come to the pivotal moment of the Gospel of Mark both thematically and narratively. Thematically, this is the moment Mark has been building to in the whole first half of the book. So far *almost everyone* has failed to recognize Who Jesus truly is. And here, He requires the 12 to make a determination themselves. Who *is* Jesus and what does that mean for their futures?

But this text is also a pivotal moment in the *narrative* of the book. Up to this point, Jesus has been moving *around* in ministry here and there. Capernaum, the Decapolis, this side of Galilee, then the other, up in Tyre and Sidon, over in Nazareth. Starting in verse 27, He is longer simply moving *around*. From this point, Jesus is moving *toward* His death and resurrection. This is about 6 months before the crucifixion.¹ And Jesus is navigating purposefully, inevitably toward Jericho, then to Jerusalem, to Gethsemane, and then to Golgotha.

In this section, Mark *really* wants us to sense the movement forward, not only of Jesus toward the cross, but also the movement forward for the disciples in their discipleship. Between Mark 8:27 and Mark 10:52, our author points out the road, the journey, the way *seven* times!² The disciples were being brought along as they walked with Jesus and we are brought along as we walk with Him.

As Jesus enters into the finals, as He gets ready for the big event, He stops and takes a look at His rag-tag team and here's what happens: "Looking at His disciples...He said, "Get behind me, Satan!"

In this critical moment, we find they're actually playing for the other team! Of course, they didn't *realize* that was happening. Peter, especially, thought he was scoring some great points. Sometimes disciples see things with blurred spiritual vision. Sometimes we have an inadequate understanding of what God has revealed about Himself and about our calling. But if we want to develop the way God wants us to develop, into a thriving, victorious team of spiritual champions, then we must allow our Lord to teach us, adjust our thinking, and direct our steps.

Mark 8:27 - 27 Jesus went out with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the road he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

¹ Archibald Robertson *Word Pictures In The New Testament*

² James Brooks *The New American Commentary, Volume 23: Mark*

The setting of this scene is climactic. Caesarea Philippi was on the border between Gentile and Jewish territory.³ It was also home to a special grotto dedicated to worship of the Greek god Pan.⁴ Among other things, Pan was said to be the god of shepherds and flocks.⁵ Springs of water gushing from Caesarea Philippi serve as one of the primary sources of the Jordan River.⁶

On top of all that, this city is found in the foothills of Mount Hermon.⁷ A sacred and monumental place in Biblical geography. There are many spiritual illustrations swirling around this sequence.

At *this* site, Jesus asks: Who do people say that I am? He's not asking because He doesn't know - He's not just checking the poll numbers. He's asking because, at this pivotal moment, He wants His disciples to start growing in *their* understanding. It's time for them to advance in their discipleship.

It was not customary for Jewish rabbis to ask their disciples questions. *They* were supposed to ask Him.⁸ But Jesus is not like other rabbis. He is intent on bringing His disciples along. He *knows* they're slow to understand and small of faith. But He is unwilling to leave them in that state. He plans to complete His work in them and to patiently draw them out of blurriness into clarity.

Mark 8:28 - ²⁸ They answered him, "John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, one of the prophets."

There was a lot of talk, a lot of ideas. And, sure, these answers were *better* than what the Scribes and Pharisees thought - that Jesus was an agent of Beelzebub - but they were still wrong.

None of these answers have the right perspective on Jesus. The first problem is that the people giving these answers didn't *listen* to what had been revealed right in their midst. At Jesus' baptism, God the Father said, "This is My beloved Son!" Many demons had also rightly pointed out that Jesus was the Holy One of God and the Son of God. But here people said, "Well, He's a prophet." Or, "He's just John the Baptist 2.0." Someone we can maybe admire, but someone who will come and go just like the rest. Not God Himself, the Creator, the King of kings, the Potter, the Lord.

But on top of being wrong, the second problem is that they didn't *really* believe what they said. In this Gospel, we do not see people coming to Jesus to say, "What must I do to be saved?" When John was around, people came to him saying, "What should we do?" Tax collectors and soldiers. When the Old Testament prophets were doing their thing, kings would go to them for wisdom and for help. But when we see these crowds coming to Jesus, it's not in submission to Him, it's almost always to solicit a miracle. "Jesus, *give* us what we want." But *that's* not discipleship.

³ David Garland *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*

⁴ Craig Keener *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Second Edition)*

⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan_\(god\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan_(god))

⁶ Brooks

⁷ R.T. France *The Gospel Of Mark*

⁸ Frank Gaebelien, D. A. Carson, Walter Wessel, and Walter Liefeld *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*

Mark 8:29 - 29 "But you," he asked them, "who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

Notice the emphatic intensity in Jesus' question. "But *you*, who do *you* say that I am?" He didn't bother talking about what other people thought. This was about what *they* believed.

H.A. Ironside wrote, "It is not enough to be familiar with other men's views of Christ, be they right or wrong."⁹

Discipleship is about *personal* faith. Other people can't believe for you. Those of us who were lucky enough to be raised in Christian households, that is a great privilege. But having parents who are disciples doesn't make *us* disciples. That's a choice a person has to make on their own. Will *you* believe that Christ is the Messiah? Will *you* answer His call to follow Him and walk with Him?

When it comes to spirituality, the most important question is *not*, "What is going to happen?" or, "What will make me feel the best?" Or even, "Where are we going?" The essential question is not about the *what*, but the *Who*. Who Jesus is will determine where the road leads. *If* Jesus is God, *if* Jesus is good, *if* Jesus is loving, *if* Jesus is all-powerful, *if* Jesus is holy, *if* Jesus is trustworthy, *if* Jesus is gracious, *if* Jesus is Who He says He is, then we can follow Him *anywhere* - *and He knows the way to go!* As humans, we get distracted by the path. God wants us to focus on the *Person*.

Peter said, "You're the Messiah." The basic meaning of that term is "the One anointed by God."¹⁰ In the Old Testament, priests and kings and other individuals would be anointed with oil, signifying that they were specially called out for God's holy purposes.

The problem - we'll see - is that the disciples did not agree with Jesus about what those purposes were. What was *the Messiah* set apart to do? What work would He accomplish?

Mark 8:30 - 30 And he strictly warned them to tell no one about him.

Mark leaves out something else Jesus did here. We read in Matthew how he commended Peter and gave the apostles authority - how they would have the keys to the Kingdom.¹¹

Why then would He immediately muzzle them? Isn't the whole point of Christ coming to reveal Himself as the Messiah?

Yes, but not yet. There are at least two reasons why He needed them to keep this secret for the time being. First, as Messiah, He would reveal *Himself* to the leaders of Israel. On the night before His crucifixion, the whole Sanhedrin would gather and put Jesus on trial. And after years of Christ proving Who He was, they would finally ask Him outright, "Are You the Messiah?" And Jesus

⁹ H.A. Ironside *Expository Notes On Mark*

¹⁰ William Lane *The Gospel Of Mark*

¹¹ Matthew 16:17-19

answered, "I Am."¹² And then they condemned Him to death. The stone the builders rejected becomes the cornerstone.¹³

But a second reason to silence the disciples for now was the fact that they had such an inadequate understanding of what it actually meant that Jesus was Messiah. They had their own notions, their own assumptions, their own preferences about what the Messiah would do. And, presently, we'll see their perspective was in contradiction to the truth. They had a *human* design of Messiahship.

You see, they thought of the Messiah as only a *David* Messiah. A giant-slaying warrior who would tear the land of Israel from her captors and bring political power to the Jews.

Jesus *is* a Davidic Messiah. *But* His work is much more than that. He would also be a Second Adam. Another Isaac on the altar. A Messianic Joseph, delivering the brothers who despised Him. But the disciples could not and *would* not see it. They were like the blind man healed in two phases. Spiritually speaking, they saw the Messiah like a tree walking. And in recent scenes, Jesus had been *repeatedly* rebuking them for their lack of faith and their lack of understanding.¹⁴

Since they had a defective view, it was important they didn't go out *spreading* their misinformation - a partial truth that would not properly illuminate those in darkness.

Mark 8:31-32a - ³¹ Then he began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and rise after three days. ³² He spoke openly about this.

So listen, the disciples had a blurry view, but there was some progress. In Matthew, Jesus told Peter, "Peter, My Father in heaven revealed this to you."¹⁵ And it's not just Peter - from this point he really becomes a spokesman for the whole group. After Peter's answer, Jesus starts the next step of their learning. He starts teaching them truths about the Messiah's work they did not know. And He did so plainly - not with parables. Direct teaching about His coming rejection, death, and resurrection.

We should note that Jesus had total clarity and understanding about the plan. None of it was unknown to Him. And He was totally willing to endure *all* of it for you and for me.

Now, the disciples just said, "You are not only our Rabbi, *You* are the Messiah." And, as their Rabbi, Jesus says, "Great. Now here's what I have to teach you about what the Son of Man has to do."

The Son of Man is a title found back in Daniel 7. The disciples would've known it well. The Son of Man comes with the clouds of heaven and the Ancient of Days gives him an everlasting dominion over every people, nation, and language.¹⁶ Jewish believers liked the sound of that.

¹² Mark 14:61-62

¹³ Psalm 118:22

¹⁴ Morna Hooker *The Gospel According To Saint Mark*

¹⁵ Matthew 16:17

¹⁶ Daniel 7:13-14

But now Jesus starts to reveal and explain to them that before the Son of Man conquers the nations with the sword of His mouth, He would conquer sin and death not with a chariot, but with the cross.

He's the rabbi. He's the Messiah. This is the teaching. But like the old adage says, the (human) heart wants what it wants. And the human heart does not naturally want God's way.

Mark 8:32b - Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

Rebuke is the same word used when Jesus commanded the demons.¹⁷ It's the same word seen in verse 30 as "strictly warned." So, Jesus had just commanded His disciples to be silent about Him being Messiah and now Peter is commanding *Jesus* to be silent about this crucifixion stuff. He *immediately* misuses the revelation and authority given to him to try to put *himself* over his Rabbi.

This is what the human heart does. It wants to supplant God's authority, God's commands, God's way in favor of our own wants and designs. It happens when God asks us to do or give something that we want to keep ourselves. It happens when we face sorrow or suffering and get *angry* at God about it. It happens when God gives us a standard or command and we just *don't* want to comply. It's the same as Peter here. A rebuke to God. And here's what Jesus thinks about that:

Mark 8:33 - ³³ But turning around and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! You are not thinking about God's concerns but human concerns."

Mark highlights three moments of severe temptation in Jesus' ministry.¹⁸ At the very beginning, when He is confronted by the Devil directly. At *this* point, when the ministry turns toward Calvary, Satan influences Jesus' friends to discourage Him. And in Gethsemane where Jesus is tempted by His own desire to avoid the suffering of the cross.

Peter is the one rebuked, but we see Jesus was speaking to all the disciples. Peter was simply the spokesman. What a *tough* moment in what should've been such a wonderful scene.

And yet, even in rebuke we see the matchless grace of God. Jesus says, "Satan is speaking through you!" But He doesn't boot Peter from the team. He is still full of love and patience and understanding toward him. Jesus will *still* invite Peter to witness the transfiguration in a few verses.

But He would not allow Peter and the others to stay in their weakness. He would not feed the rebel hearts that, by nature, want to defy the will of God and the truth of God. So, in the moment He says, "I have concerns. I have truth. I have a journey we're going on and I demand that you submit to it if you want to be My disciple."

¹⁷ Brooks

¹⁸ Ben Witherington *The Gospel Of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*

Mark 8:34-38 - ³⁴ Calling the crowd along with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it. ³⁶ For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life? ³⁷ What can anyone give in exchange for his life? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Pretty straight forward. Also pretty serious. But let's pause and recognize that this is where we are brought into the story. This isn't just about something Jesus said to the apostles. Here He calls the crowd, everyone who wanted to follow Him, everyone in attendance. You and me. This is what our Messiah and Rabbi has to say to us as disciples. It's worth reading again.

And man, think about how hard it was for the disciples to hear that the *Messiah* would have to face the cross. Now He says, "And *you* have to take up a cross, too."

But *this* is the disciple's road to life to victory. We win by losing. We navigate life *not* by our own designs or our own desires or the culture around us, but by the revelation of God. His words, His directions, His truth leads to real life and real gain and glory. By answering the question: Who is Jesus?

If we understand Who Jesus is, then we can understand what His work is, and then He leads us to be a part of His work. And following in His work means following the way of the cross. It can be a very difficult path. But the championship at the end of that road is worth more than all the treasures in all the world.

But to lay claim to what Christ offers, we must be disciples. And true discipleship means renouncing ourselves and recognizing our Messiah. It means *embracing* God's revelation, not spinning our own ideas into some sort of self-made spirituality. God has said Who He is, what He wants, what He's doing, who we are, what He expects. Discipleship is a walk of faith that isn't just one step. It's a *lifetime* of steps as we progress with God on this path He's leading us.

We can do it. Did you notice what the Lord said there? "If anyone wants to follow after Me...follow Me!" As we go, He will continue to reveal, He will continue to adjust, He will continue to clarify our spiritual vision, *and* He will continue in His patience, His grace, and His compassion toward us. Because He *wants* us to walk with Him. He *wants* us to grow in our understanding, to grow in our faith, to go from Peter in Mark 8 to Peter in Acts 2.

Do we want to follow on those terms? If so, we must submit to revelation, admit the inadequacy of our presuppositions, surrender our lives, take up a cross, and allow God to lead us forward step by step.