

LESSON 7

THE NATURE OF THE MESSIAH

Mark 8:27—9:50

The Turning Point in Jesus' Ministry

The confession at Caesarea Philippi is the mid-point in Mark's Gospel and is frequently referred to as the turning point in the ministry of Jesus. Previously, His ministry had been largely to the multitudes in the form of miracles, healings, and teachings. Also, He had taught His disciples privately and had encountered some conflict with the Pharisees. After the confession, His teachings began to focus on His death on the cross and to be directed primarily to His disciples. The conflict with the Pharisees intensified.

H. A. Guy, in *The Life of Christ* (see p. 100), mentions four reasons why the confession was important: (1) Jesus was identified publicly as the Messiah. Mark opened his Gospel by announcing that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ) and the demons had so recognized Him, but He was not the type Messiah which the disciples expected. Peter's confession marked a step forward in the education of the disciples. (2) Jesus' teachings turned from emphasis on the nature of the Kingdom, conduct of kingdom citizens, and instructions for service to His suffering and death. Continuing to harbour the concept of a political-military messiah, Peter rebuked Jesus since His death implied defeat rather than victory for the Kingdom. (3) Jesus used the term 'Son of Man'. This idea was associated with the supernatural being in Daniel 7:13 whose dominion, glory, and kingdom would be established forever. Jesus taught that His rule and Kingdom would be established through service and sacrifice rather than by military might. (4) Jesus began to direct His teaching more to His disciples than to the multitudes.

The power of God working through Jesus in defeating the work of the evil powers of this world revealed that God was visiting His people in the person of Jesus. It was necessary for the disciples to come to the conviction that Jesus is the Messiah (the chosen or anointed of God) before Jesus would be able to proceed with the teachings concerning the nature of His messiahship. After that conviction had been expressed in the confession, Jesus proceeded with the second half of His ministry. The time had come for the disciples to receive a new concept of messiahship.

The Confession at Caesarea Philippi

Mark 8:27-33

The place (v. 27). — Caesarea Philippi was outside of Galilee and about twenty-five miles north of the sea. Earlier it had been called Balinas, for it had once been a centre of Baal worship. Later it was called Panias because, on its hillside, there was a cavern which was said to have been the birthplace of the Greek god Pan, a god of nature. A great temple of white

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

The confession at Caesarea Philippi is considered the turning point in Jesus' ministry because:

1. Previously, His ministry had been largely to the _____, in the form of _____, _____, and _____.
2. After the confession, His teachings were directed to His _____ and focused on His _____ on the _____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

LIST FOUR REASONS THE CONFESSION WAS IMPORTANT.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

marble had been built in Caesarea by Herod the Great to honour Caesar Augustus who was regarded as a god. Herod Philip had changed the name of Pnias to Caesarea (Caesar's town) and had added his own name to distinguish it from the Caesarea on the coast of the Mediterranean. One of the great springs of the Jordan River flowed from a cave in a huge cliff and watered the sacred groves of Pan.

The question (v. 27). — 'Who do men say that I am?' (RSV). This question may have grown out of the rumours mentioned in Mark 6:14-18. John mentions that the multitudes turned away from Jesus after He fed them because of His teachings which identified Him as the 'Bread from heaven' (see John 6:15-66). The crowds had been following Him for the bread and miracles. If the disciples were limited to the same motivation, His cause was lost. Jesus needed to know their convictions.

The answer (v. 28). — 'John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets' (RSV). Matthew adds the name Jeremiah. Herod thought that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead (Matt. 14:2). Elijah was expected to return before the final day of judgement (Mal. 4:5). The rabbis taught that when Elijah came the Messiah would not be far away. Those who thought Jesus was Elijah not only thought of Him as the greatest of the prophets but as the herald of the Messiah and the forerunner of God's direct intervention into history. With regard to Jeremiah, 2 Maccabees 2 taught that Jeremiah had taken the ark and the altar of incense out of the Temple before the Exile and had hidden them in a lonely cave on Mount Nebo. Before the Messiah came, he would return and produce them, and the glory of God would come to the people again. With reference to 'one of the prophets', Israel expected a prophet like Moses to appear before the last days because of the statement in Deuteronomy 18:18. Since the tradition was for a prophet to anoint God's chosen, one was to precede the coming Messiah in order to be on hand to anoint him. Also a prophet like Moses would be needed to teach righteousness to the people in preparation for God's return. All four popular views identified Jesus as a prophet, a stirring, fearless spokesman for God.

The second question (v. 29). -- 'But who do you say that I am?' (RSV). Jesus needed to know the conviction of His disciples in order to proceed with His instruction of them. Death was impending, His remaining time for ministry was limited, and Israel as a whole had not responded to His message. He needed a core group that was convinced He was Israel's God-sent leader to carry His work forward among the Israelites and throughout the world. Peter spoke for the disciples in the confession, revealing that they had reached a stage at which He could begin to teach them what lay ahead.

The confession (v. 29). — 'Thou art the Christ.' What Peter meant is uncertain. Messianic expectations varied: (1) Some believed that one day God would intervene in history and establish a reign of justice, mercy, and truth by a divinely-appointed Messiah who would come from the lineage of David and who would restore the glory of David's Golden Age to Israel by a political triumph for Israel over her enemies. (2) In addition to a political victory over Israel's enemies, some believed that God's interventions would involve judgement on

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Jesus needed to know the disciples' convictions concerning His identity because the crowds had followed Him for the _____ and _____.

If the disciples were limited to that motivation, His cause was _____.

(bread, miracles, lost)

Give the disciples' answers to Jesus' first question.

(John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets, Jeremiah—according to Matthew)

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

The rabbis taught that when _____ came the _____ would not be far away.

(Elijah, Messiah)

Briefly summarize the teaching in 2 Maccabees 2 concerning Jeremiah and the coming of the Messiah.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

What did Peter's expression of the disciples' confession reveal?

(That Jesus could begin to teach them what lay ahead)

Israel as well, sifting the righteous from the ungodly. (3) Also there was the growing idea of a supernatural Messiah who would usher in His Kingdom by a cataclysmic advent and would reign over a new heaven and a new earth. John the Baptist seems to have been looking for a supernatural Messiah who would come with a judgement of fire and terror (Luke 3:7-17), and he was genuinely puzzled and wanted to know whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah he had predicted (Luke 7:19). First Enoch 52 and 4 Ezra 12 taught that the Messiah would make war and destroy the great nations.

Some of Jesus' contemporaries thought of a divinely-anointed human descendant of David while others thought of a supernatural Messiah. Blind Bartimaeus addressed Jesus as 'Son of David' (Mark 10:47). The demon possessed man in the synagogue at Capernaum called Him 'Holy One of God' (Mark 1:24). Peter's confession that Jesus was the Messiah gives no indication whether Peter thought in terms of an earthly descendant of David or of a supernatural Messiah, but it is evident from his words and actions on other occasions that he thought of a conquering Messiah who would defeat the enemies of Israel. Without a reinterpretation, the recognition of Jesus' messiahship would lead only to misunderstanding.

Jesus' charge to secrecy (v. 30). — 'And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.' Jesus commanded the disciples to secrecy because of the nationalistic hopes connected with the Messiah. Evidently, not even the Twelve understood His messianic role at this time. To have told the people that He was the Christ would have aroused false nationalistic hopes and would have resulted in suppression from the Romans.

Peter's rebuke and rebuff (vv. 31-33). — After Peter's confession, Jesus began to teach the disciples the nature of His messiahship (v. 31). Jesus' statement that He must suffer as the Messiah was incredible and incomprehensible to the disciples. They had thought of Him as an irresistible conqueror. Peter thought Christ was mistaken when He made such a shocking statement that He must suffer (v. 32). Peter was sternly rebuked because he was putting into words the very temptations which were assailing Jesus at that moment and had been with Him since the voice at His baptism. In the words of a friend, Jesus heard again the temptation to avoid the cross. Satan was using Peter to tempt Jesus to yield to the popular demand for a conquering Messiah (v. 33). Jesus' statement implied that the use of force to conquer was not God's way but Satan's way. God's will requires sacrifice and suffering in love because God is love. The great message of Christianity to our world is that victory comes through humble service to others and not through force or power in defeating others. At no time have individuals had greater need of this message than today. This concept is understood and accepted only by those who are illumined by the Spirit. After the confession, Jesus gave the first of three statements concerning His death in Jerusalem.

The Difficulty of Discipleship

Mark 8:34—9:1

Jesus did not hide the demands of discipleship. To the multitudes, He explained that discipleship involves: (1) following

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Although Peter's confession gives no indication whether Peter was referring to an earthly descendant of David or a supernatural Messiah, his _____ and _____ later implied that he was thinking of a _____ Messiah.

(words, actions, conquering)

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Jesus commanded the disciples to secrecy because of the _____ hopes connected with the _____.

(nationalistic, Messiah)

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Peter rebuked Jesus because—

1. He thought of Christ as an _____ conqueror.
2. He thought Jesus was mistaken that He must _____.

(1. irresistible, 2. suffer)

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Satan used Peter to tempt Jesus to avoid the _____ and yield to the popular demand for a _____ Messiah.

(cross, conquering)

Jesus—to place one's loyalty to Christ ahead of his vocation; (2) denying self—to turn away from self-centredness and personal desires and to do the will of Christ; (3) bearing a cross—to live for Christ even though it requires suffering and leads to rejection instead of social acceptance and worldly success (v. 34).

The paradox of verse 35 teaches that a person who attempts to make the most out of life by accumulating material possessions actually loses his life. In contrast, the person who gives up worldly success in order to do the will of God will find eternal life. The person whose life focuses on accumulating worldly wealth and success neglects his spiritual nature and responsibility to God and forfeits eternity. When the Kingdom of God comes in its fullness or completion, those who have sacrificed self and worldly achievements will inherit the glory of the Father with the holy angels (v. 38). The sincere Christian cannot read these words in the presence of the Holy Spirit without recognizing the tension between the carnal nature which focuses on worldly gain and the spiritual nature which desires to be loyal to Christ (see v. 36).

The meaning of the statement, 'They see the kingdom of God come with power', is debated (9:1, RSV). (1) Some think the passage refers to the final coming of the Son of Man in glory. This interpretation is weakened by the fact that Jesus said that some of those who were present would not taste death before the Kingdom of God came with power; thus He could not have been referring to His return. (2) Others understand Jesus to be saying that the Kingdom of God had already come and that finally some of those present would perceive the truth. (3) Some see a reference to the transfiguration (9:2-8), which was a glimpse of the true glory of Christ. (4) Others see a reference to His triumph over the cross by His resurrection. The triumph of the power of God in the resurrection, the ascension of Jesus, and the sending of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost are closely connected and may be considered as parts of a total event. The Kingdom of God with the power of the Holy Spirit is a present reality. The present reality points towards the complete victory when the Kingdom comes in fullness with the return of Jesus.

The Transfiguration

Mark 9:2-13

The transfiguration is specifically dated in relation to the confession of Peter (v. 2). Mark apparently intended for the transfiguration to support the confession of Jesus as the Messiah and Jesus' emphasis that the Messiah would be the Suffering Servant.

Mark states that three of the disciples were with Jesus when His form was changed before them. Jesus' true nature, or being, shone through the physical body which He had assumed at His birth (v. 3). Three disciples were permitted to see through the fleshly veil in order to behold His true, divine glory. Although Peter may have been uncertain at the time of his confession whether the Christ was an earthly Davidic descendant or a supernatural being, the transfiguration revealed that His nature was divine. He had assumed earthly, human form by His birth as a descendant of David, but He was

READ MARK 8:34-38. THEN EXPLAIN BRIEFLY THE THREE REQUIREMENTS FOR DISCIPLESHIP.

1. Following Jesus _____

2. Denying self _____

3. Bearing a cross _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Mark 8:35 teaches that a person who attempts to make the most out of life by accumulating material _____ actually loses his _____.

(possessions, life)

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

The Kingdom of God coming in power is interpreted best as the total event of the d____, r____, a____, and sending of the H____ S____ by which it is established.

(death, resurrection, ascension, Holy Spirit)

FILL IN THE BLANK.

The transfiguration revealed Jesus' _____ nature.

(divine)

also the Son of God in glory. During the days of His earthly life, His human nature was obvious, but His supernatural nature was manifested only occasionally.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah represented the Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament) which predicted a Messiah who would be the Suffering Servant (v. 4). Jesus was the fulfilment of and was supported by both sections of the Old Testament in His instructions concerning the Messiah who would suffer and die.

Peter's response indicates that He still did not understand the true nature of Jesus (v. 5). His suggestion to make three booths—one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah—reveals that he considered the three as equally great leaders of Israel. The voice from the cloud identified Jesus, the Son of God, as greater than Moses and Elijah (v. 7). Peter had previously rejected the teachings of Jesus concerning His death. The voice commanded Peter to listen to His teachings. Jesus as Son of God spoke with greater authority than Moses; however, the messages of the two were not contradictory but supplementary.

On the descent from the mountain, Jesus charged the disciples to remain silent concerning His resurrection from the dead (v. 9). The implication is that the discussion of Jesus with Elijah and Moses centred in His death and resurrection. Jesus identified Himself again as the Son of Man. The discussion of the disciples concerning the scribal teaching that Elijah would appear first reveals that they then accepted Jesus as the Messiah (v. 11). Elijah was to come and restore righteousness to the land in preparation for the Messiah (v. 12). Jesus confirmed that Elijah had already come (v. 13). Matthew 17:13 identifies John the Baptist as Elijah.

The Healing of the Epileptic Boy

Mark 9:14-29

The disciples who had not accompanied Jesus to the mountain of transfiguration were arguing with the scribes, perhaps concerning the source of power and authority for exorcism (v. 14). They had failed in their attempt to heal a boy possessed by a demon (v. 18). They were surprised by their failure since they had cast out demons before (6:13). Jesus informed them that the problem lay in their lack of faith (v. 19). They represented men of all ages who unconsciously conclude that power for serving Christ is given to man to dispense at will rather than given through man who must pray and believe that God is able to defeat the power of evil. The boy's affliction appears to have been epilepsy (vv. 20-22). Even the father was sceptical whether healing was possible. Jesus assured him that all things are possible if he would believe (v. 23). The father confessed his unbelief and petitioned for help to believe with a faith which sets no limits to God's power (v. 24). After Jesus healed the boy, the disciples inquired why they had not been able to heal him (v. 28). Jesus informed them that only by a life of prayer or a life of intimacy with God through personal communion would they find faith in the power of God to perform such miracles (v. 29).

MATCH BY DRAWING A LINE FROM THE PROPHET TO WHAT HE REPRESENTED IN THE TRANSFIGURATION.

Elijah	the Prophets
Moses	the Law

(Compare your answers with the text.)

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

The Law and the Prophets predicted a Messiah who would be the S S.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

TRUE OR FALSE?

1. The voice from heaven identified Jesus, the Son of God, as equal with Moses and Elijah. _____

2. Peter's wanting to build three booths indicated he considered the three leaders as equal. _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Jesus attributed the disciples' failure to heal the epileptic boy to lack of _____. They had concluded that power for serving Christ is given to man to dispense at will rather than given through man who must pray and _____ that God is able to defeat the power of _____.

(faith, believe, evil)

The Second Statement of Jesus' Passion

Mark 9:30-32

Mark notes that Jesus moved from the experiences of Caesarea Philippi and the mountain of transfiguration towards Jerusalem (v. 30). He passed through Galilee, but He did not tarry to do additional healing or teaching of the multitudes. His teaching was directed primarily to the disciples, and He told them a second time of His coming death and resurrection in Jerusalem (v. 31). Mark points out that the disciples still did not understand fully what Jesus was saying (v. 32).

True Greatness

Mark 9:33-37

The disciples had accepted Jesus as the Messiah but not as a suffering Messiah who would experience defeat in death. On the way to Capernaum, they were discussing which one would occupy the leading political office under Jesus when He came in His Kingdom (vv. 33-34). Jesus used the occasion once again to instruct them concerning the nature of the Kingdom. God honours man, not according to the world's standards, but by the standard of humble service. Jesus embraced a little child in order to teach His disciples that concern for, acceptance of, and service to a little child will receive God's honour which is more important than the honour and praise bestowed by man upon those who hold high political offices. To give attention to little children does little for the ego of the adult, but it does bring joy to the child. Leaders of worldly kingdoms ignore children while giving special attention to dignitaries. God ignores dignitaries who do not have time for Him, and He blesses little children who express needs to Him and experience joy in His concern and care for them.

A Lesson On Tolerance

Mark 9:38-41

John, one of the three who witnessed the transfiguration and one of the two specifically named as being ambitious for a high position, forbade a man to use Jesus' name in healing (v. 38). Jesus' name represented His authority or power. Jesus rejected John's spirit of intolerance; perhaps He detected a motive of selfishness instead of a concern for the afflicted. After all, the miracles of healing were attracting attention and bringing popularity. The man's use of Jesus' name showed his regard for Jesus (v. 39). How often man's disapproval of the activities of others is the result of jealousy instead of conviction! Jesus emphasized that doing good is important whether one is His follower (a Christian) or not. The man whom John tried to stop was probably a magician who used every available name to effect his art of casting out demons.

Faithfulness in Discipleship

Mark 9:42-50

The spiritual hindrance of others is of such gravity that the disciple must avoid such an offence at all cost (v. 42). The millstone was a large stone used to grind flour. Criminals in

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Mark 9:33-37 indicates the disciples had accepted Jesus as the _____ but not as a suffering _____. They still expected Him to establish an earthly _____.

(Messiah, Messiah, kingdom)

REREAD MARK 9:35 AND FILL IN THE BLANKS.

This verse means that God does not honour man according to the world's standards but by the standard of h_____s_____.

(humble service)

FILL IN THE BLANK.

Mark 9:38-41 is a lesson in _____.

(tolerance)

Galilee were punished by hanging a great stone around their necks and casting them into the sea. Jesus taught that death or the loss of a limb is to be preferred to the punishment resulting from hindering little children (vv. 43-48). 'Little ones' may have referred to little children, but it may appropriately be applied to weak or immature Christians. To offend little ones is to influence them to do that which they understand to be evil. Leading others astray is serious and deserves the severest punishment.

Hell is described as the unquenchable fire in Gehenna. Gehenna was a valley at the western edge of Jerusalem where garbage was dumped and burnt. It was considered a defiled place because worshippers of idols had sacrificed their sons or daughters to Molech there preceding Josiah's religious reformation (2 Kings 23:10). The wet garbage was cast into one area where the 'worm dieth not', and dry garbage was cast onto the fire which never ceased to burn.

Salt appears to symbolize purification and preservation (vv. 49-50). The disciples would be purified by the fire of suffering and persecution. Purified disciples would be able to purify others. Disciples were to welcome purity through persecution in order that they might influence positively others instead of being stumbling blocks.

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Gehenna was a valley at the edge of Jerusalem where—

1. _____ was burnt,
2. worshippers had sacrificed their children to _____.

(1. garbage, 2. Molech)

Home Study Exercise

Basic assignment (Levels 1, 2, and 3)

1. Why is the confession at Caesarea Philippi considered to be the turning point in Jesus' ministry?

2. List four reasons why the confession was important.

3. Why was Elijah expected to return before the appearance of the Messiah?

4. Where did the tradition of Jeremiah's return arise?

5. Why did Jesus need to know the disciples' convictions concerning His identity?

6. Why did Jesus charge the disciples to tell no man of His messiahship?

7. Why did Peter rebuke Jesus after the confession?

8. Why was Peter's rebuke so serious to Jesus?

9. What are the requirements for discipleship?

10. Interpret: 'For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it' (Mark 8:35).

11. Interpret: 'There be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power' (Mark 9:1).

12. What was the purpose of the transfiguration?

13. What did Moses and Elijah represent in the transfiguration?

14. Explain the message of the voice from heaven to the disciples.

15. Describe the disciples' lack of faith.

16. What does Mark 9:33-37 reveal about the disciples' concept of the Kingdom?

Supplementary assignment (*Levels 2 and 3*)

1. What are the keys of the Kingdom (Matt. 16:19)?
2. What was symbolized by Moses' and Elijah's talking with Jesus in the transfiguration?
3. Who is responsible for settling a disagreement between Christian brothers, the offended or the offender? (See Matt. 18:15-20.)

Advanced assignment (*Level 3*)

1. Outline the biblical procedure for settling problems between Christian brothers.
2. Develop an outline for a sermon entitled 'The Christian's Cross'.

Seminar Discussion

1. What concept of the Messiah did Peter have in the confession at Caesarea Philippi?
2. What is the rock upon which Christ builds His Church?
3. How does the evaluation of greatness by God differ from that of man? Why is it so difficult for man to accept God's standard?
4. Define the Christian view of success. Is this a valid way of life for today?
5. Time should be given for *Level 3* students to present their sermon outlines.