

Discipleship According to Mark

Why the Christ Has Come (Mark 8:27-9:1)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at Houston Chinese Church on May 10, 2026

Introduction

- ❖ As most of you know, we've been in a sermon series walking through Mark's Gospel. We been calling this series "Discipleship According to Mark." Because that's the main theme of the book. It's a book written to instruct and strengthen our discipleship to Christ. Teaching what it means to follow Jesus.
 - But you might be thinking, "Wait, isn't that what the epistles are for? Aren't Paul's letters about discipleship? I thought the Gospels were about Jesus. They're about who Jesus is and what he came to do as the Messiah, as the Anointed One of God. Isn't Mark's Gospel more about messiahship rather than discipleship?" It's about both.
 - They're related concepts. **A wrong view of messiahship results in a wrong view of discipleship.** If you fail to understand who Jesus is and what he came to do, you won't understand who a disciple is and what a disciple is here to do. Your view of messiahship affects how you understand discipleship.
- ❖ That's why, in our text, Jesus asks his disciples to tell him who people say he is. And more importantly, "Who do you say that I am?" Up to this point in Mark's Gospel, that's been the central question driving the narrative. **Who is Jesus?** People keep asking each other. Who is this who teaches with authority? Who is this who heals the sick and casts out spirits? Who commands the wind and waves? Who forgives sins and raises the dead? Who is this Jesus?
 - **And now we arrive at a turning point in the narrative.** Finally, one of the disciples correctly answers the question. Jesus poses it to his disciples, and Peter responds, "You are the Christ." Correct. He is the Christ, which is the Greek equivalent to Messiah. Both words mean the Anointed. **And now, from this point on, the question shifts from a focus on Jesus's identity to his mission.** From this point, Mark is asking the question, "Why did Jesus come?" What has he come to do?
 - **And a misunderstanding of his mission is a big deal.** Again, a mistaken view of messiahship results in a mistaken view of discipleship. If you think Jesus has come to spark a political revolution, then being his follower will amount to engaging in partisan politics. That was a mistake as common in the first century as it is today in the twenty-first century.
- ❖ So as we walk through this morning's passage, the goal is to establish a clear understanding of both messiahship and discipleship. To do that let's consider three lessons from our text. (1) To confess the Christ is essential but not enough. (2) To correct the Christ is to do the devil's bidding. And (3) To follow the Christ is to pick up your cross and die.

To Confess the Christ is Essential but Not Enough

- ❖ So the first lesson is this: **To confess the Christ as your Lord and Savior is essential, but a confession in itself is not sufficient.** It's not enough. You can't just say that Jesus is the Christ. Getting that right is important, but what does it really mean for him to be the Christ? **What are you actually confessing when you call him the Christ?** Start in v27, "*And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?'*"

- ❖ Here, in his line of questioning, Jesus challenges the disciples and their perception of him. He poses the question, “*Who do people say that I am?*” They list a few mistaken identities. “*And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.”*”
- ❖ We saw earlier that Herod Antipas assumed that Jesus is none other than the reincarnation of **John the Baptist** (whom he beheaded earlier). Or some thought Jesus was the prophet **Elijah** returned to earth but incognito (Mal 4:4-5). Or some thought Jesus was **the prophet** predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15 that God will one day raise up to lead his people like Moses.
 - Now to mistake Jesus for one of these revered figures is a compliment. But, in the end, even these comparisons fall short. **Jesus is far more.** To describe Jesus as the second coming of a biblical hero like Moses or Elijah is to force him into our existing categories of great men of history. It’s like pouring new wine into old wineskins.
 - No, Jesus stands apart. **He can’t be defined by human categories or limited by human expectations.** In other words, he’s *not* just a great moral teacher or the founder of the most influential religion in the world. He’s far more. He’s in a completely different category and class of his own.
- ❖ The crowds may not get it. They may not recognize Jesus’s identity. But his disciples had better. They better know who he is. So he poses the greater question in v29, “*But who do you say that I am?*” **What’s far more important than what others have to say about Jesus is what you have to say.** Who is Christ to *you*? To you personally.
 - Look, the judgement of others is important. What your parents or your friends think about Jesus can be informative and influential. It can sway you. But it can’t save you. **Their judgement is not as important as your confession.** Your confession of faith in Jesus is what matters. It’s what saves.
- ❖ If you grew up in this kind of environment—if you’ve been going to church all your life—you **need to be particularly careful that your entire experience of faith is *not* merely based on the judgment of others.** Based on what others have said about Jesus. Make sure your experience of faith is rooted in a personal confession. Do you know what *you* believe?
 - And for those of you still trying to figure out what you believe, keep asking your questions. Keep inquiring of Jesus. Keep asking others what *they* believe. **But at some point you need to stop and ask yourself: Who do I say Jesus is?** It’s not just about what others say about him. What do you say? What do you believe?
- ❖ Well, when Peter heard Jesus ask that question, he immediately responded. Look at v29, “*Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.”*”³⁰ **And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.”** **This, right here, is the first time in Mark’s Gospel that a confession of Jesus being the Christ was coming from the mouth of a fellow human being.** Prior to this, such confessions only came from the Father above (1:11) or unclean spirits (1:24; 3:11).

- ❖ So this is significant. Peter, speaking representatively on behalf of the Twelve, says, “*You are the Christ.*” **Now I think we’re so used to calling him “Jesus Christ” that we forget (or we never realized) that Christ is *not* his last name.** His full name would’ve been Jesus bar Joseph, Jesus son of Joseph. Christ was merely a title. So it would be more accurate to call him Jesus the Christ. Jesus the Messiah.
 - **Now you’d think Jesus would be celebrating the fact that his disciples are finally getting it.** They’ve caught up with the demons and finally confess him to be the Christ. But then it says in v30 that he strictly charge them to tell no one about him. Why? Aren’t his disciples supposed to be his witnesses? Isn’t our mission to tell the world about him? Why silence them?

- ❖ **Because, while they get the Messiah’s title right, they fail to understand the Messiah’s mission.** Like we said, to confess Christ is essential but not enough. You can use the right title for Jesus, but you can also fill it with a meaning quite contrary to his mission. Which results in a wrong view of messiahship. **You can be using the right words but have a completely different meaning.** Jesus knows that’s the case for Peter and the others. So he silences them at this point. Not wanting them to spread a false understanding of messiahship—a mistaken view of the Christ.

- ❖ And that mistaken view is apparent in vv31-32, when Jesus describes the Messiah’s mission on earth. “³¹*And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.*”
 - **Like the blind man at Bethsaida, in last week’s passage, Peter’s vision was improved at this point—but still blurry.** He had the right title but the wrong understanding of what the Christ has come to do. He’s still not fully seeing.

- ❖ And on one hand, you can understand his confusion. **Here, in v31, it’s the first time in Mark’s Gospel that Jesus discloses that the Christ must suffer and be killed. No one in those days was expecting that.** That’s not to say there weren’t messianic expectations. There were plenty in those days. After the kings of Israel were deposed and the people were exiled to Babylon, the Davidic throne remained empty. And even after the Exile and Jerusalem was repopulated, Israel was still under Gentile rule. They had no king of their own.
 - That’s when all these messianic expectations were birthed, and the more they felt oppressed the more those expectations grew. **By the first-century, the Jews believed the Messiah (Christ) would be this human figure (hereditarily in the line of King David) who would be wise and powerful in word and deed.** He would perform miracles and be filled with the Spirit. He would be a holy figure who vigilantly preserves his ritual purity. And he would lead God’s people to recover the throne of David and deliver them from Gentile rule. That was the Messiah’s mission as commonly understood in those days.

- ❖ **No one spoke of the Messiah as someone who would suffer. Much less as someone that *must* suffer in order to fulfill his mission.** Sure, there's that prophecy in Isaiah 53 about the Suffering Servant, but no one in those days connected Isaiah's Suffering Servant with Israel's long-awaited Messiah. It was actually Jesus who first made that connection.
 - So you can understand why his words would've shocked Peter and the others. **Finally, Jesus is talking plainly and not in parables. But what they plainly hear is appalling.** Jesus is suggesting that the Messiah would suffer, would be rejected, and would be killed? To their ears, he's suggesting that the Messiah will ultimately fail. That the Christ will fail in his mission to deliver God's people. That's blasphemous.

- ❖ **Jesus, you can't talk like that.** Don't say that to the crowds. Definitely don't say that in front of the scribes and Pharisees. Especially since you're saying the Messiah won't be killed by a band of criminals or an unruly mob. By the worst in society. **No, you just said the Messiah will be killed by those people that everyone considers to be the best in society.** The most holy. The most godly. You just said, "*the elders and the chief priests and the scribes.*" You're talking about the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. What are you saying?
 - **You can see why Peter took it upon himself to take Jesus aside and rebuke him.** "Rabbi, you can't say that. You're going to get yourself killed. You're going to confuse your followers and cause them to stumble. You're going to kill the momentum of this movement. What are you doing? What are you saying?"

- ❖ **So the disciple who just made the first confession of the Christ immediately tries to stifle the mission of the Christ.** It just goes to prove our point. To confess Christ is essential but not enough. Getting his title right is important. But what you think it means for him to be the Christ makes all the difference.
 - So you can call Jesus your Lord. You can tell everyone he's your Savior. But what do you mean by that? **What does it mean for Jesus to be your *Lord* and *Savior*?** If that just amounts to him being the One who loves you unconditionally; who gives you meaning and purpose in life; who helps you through life's trials and tribulations—if **what he offers you as the Messiah could effectively be accomplished *without* him suffering and being rejected and killed, then you too, like Peter, have a wrong understanding of messiahship.** It doesn't matter that you use the right words. You have the right title but the wrong person. That's *not* the Christ of the Gospel.

To Correct the Christ is to Do the Devil's Bidding

- ❖ The Christ of the Gospel *must* suffer, and be rejected, and be killed. That was more than Peter could bear. So he took Jesus aside and rebuked him. But in turn, Jesus rebuked Peter. Not in private but in front of all the disciples. Because Peter's mindset and Peter's rebuke was shared by the rest. And that leads to our second lesson—**to correct the Christ is to do the devil's bidding.**
 - In other words, we might think we're merely adapting Jesus and his teachings to better gain an audience. To remove a stumbling block for others. **But to correct Jesus and his teaching—in order to advance what we assume is his mission—could very well be the work of the devil.** And we're just pawns in his wicked scheme.

- ❖ That's what Peter discovered in v33. Look there, "*But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*"
 - **I'm sure Peter had the best of intentions.** He was looking out for Jesus. He was trying to protect his master and his master's ministry. Based on what he thought it meant to be the Messiah. But Peter was wrong. No argument there.
 - **But some of you might be thinking that Jesus overreacted just a bit.** He could've just said, "No, Peter you're wrong." **Did he really have to call him Satan?** That's a bit much. "*Get behind me, Satan!*" That sounds harsh.

- ❖ But Jesus knows what he's doing. And who he's dealing with. **In v33, he's essentially lifting the veil to reveal the spiritual struggle taking place all the time in the spiritual realm.** Unbeknownst to us. We don't see it. We don't know it's happening or that we're even playing a part. I'm sure Peter had no intention to do the devil's bidding. It wasn't on his mind. **But nonetheless, because his mind was set on the things of man and not on the things of God, he was unwittingly doing the will of the devil.**
 - That's the irony. **In trying to protect Jesus's reputation, to protect his mission and ministry, Peter was talking—not like a disciple of Christ—but a disciple of Satan.** Jesus recognized the devil's accent in Peter's speech. So he issues a word of rebuke. "*Get behind me, Satan!*" Literally it says, "*Be gone behind me, Satan!*"

- ❖ **If that sounds familiar, it's because those are practically the same words Jesus said to Satan in the wilderness in Matthew 4:10.** When the devil tried to correct Jesus and veer him off the path of his mission at the very start. That's when Satan took Jesus to the top of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, "*and he said to [Jesus], "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."*"
 - "*Be gone, Satan!,*" is how Jesus replied. He could see through the devil's scheme. **The devil offered Jesus everything his Heavenly Father had promised.** But with one big difference. He offered it all without a cross. Jesus can be that kingly Messiah who receives the praise of the nations and glory from all the kingdoms of the world. **Jesus can have it all. He can accomplish his mission—all without a cross.** Without having to die a brutal, shameful death.

- ❖ **Think of how wonderful the world would be if Jesus had accepted that offer.** If he took that deal, then all wars and hostilities would've immediately ceased. There would be peace on earth. There would be no more hunger, no more poverty, no more loved ones dying of incurable diseases.
 - Think of all the tragedies and disasters that have contributed to so much pain and suffering in this world. **Think of all the horrors that have unfolded in human history since the day the devil made that offer. Had Jesus accepted, none of it would've happened.** Doesn't that sound wonderful? Sounds like heaven on earth.

- ❖ Satan is willing to make that deal. **He has no problem handing the kingdoms of the world over to Jesus to rule as king. As long as our sins remain un-atoned for and unforgiven.** From Satan’s perspective, Jesus can have the crown as long as he avoids the cross. Because at the cross, our sins are covered by the shed blood of the Christ. We are forgiven at the cross. That’s the last thing the devil wants to see happen.
- ❖ Think about it. **Satan doesn’t fear a Christian kingdom on earth, led by a Christian ruler, governed by Christian values and Christian principles.** He won’t lose an ounce of sleep over a cross-less Christ reigning over earth. The devil put up with peace on earth as long as he can accuse us in the courtroom of heaven. As long as our sins remain unforgiven he’ll give up everything on earth.
 - **That’s how much the cross of Christ wrecks the schemes of the devil.** It totally throws a wrench in his plans. That’s why the devil was constantly trying to deter the Christ. Trying to veer him off his path. That’s why Jesus heard the devil’s voice in Peter’s rebuke. **To correct the Christ—even if you have the best of intentions—is to ultimately do the devil’s bidding.**
- ❖ Let that be a warning to us. **Especially when we’re tempted to correct Jesus and his teachings to make it more palatable to a modern audience.** Like Peter, we’re trying to be helpful. We’re trying to protect his reputation and advance his mission. And we think to do effectively it’ll require modifying some of his teachings. Or removing potential stumbling blocks that you think might sow confusion.
 - Sure, you mean well. **But do you see how correcting Jesus boils down to opposing Jesus?** We have to take Jesus as he is. Not as we expect him to be. Or what the world prefers him to be. Let’s receive him as he’s revealed to us in Holy Scripture.

To Follow the Christ is to Pick Up Your Cross and Die

- ❖ If we don’t, if we come away with a wrong view of messiahship, it will result in a wrong view of discipleship. Jesus’s remaining words in the passage will sound strange at best. But to many, they’ll sound cruel and heartless. Because he turns to the crowd and essentially says, “If you want to be my disciple, you have to suffer and die.” That’s the third lesson to draw from our text—**to follow the Christ is to pick up your cross and die.**
 - Friends, if you don’t have a proper view of messiahship, that kind of call to discipleship sounds crazy. **But if yours is a suffering Messiah who took up his own cross for the sake of the gospel, then it all makes perfect sense.**
- ❖ Listen to v34, “*And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”* Again, confessing Christ is not enough. Getting his identity right is only the start. Now you have to be a disciple and come after him. **You have to say No to self and say Yes to the cross.** And you have to follow him.

- ❖ Notice Jesus says that, if you want to be his disciple, you have to deny yourself. **It's not just about denying yourself things. It's about denying yourself altogether.** There's a difference. A lot of people treat Christianity like any other religion. As if it's just about denying yourself pleasures. Giving up this. Sacrificing that.
 - No, that's just behavior modification. That approach merely scratches the surface. Jesus's call of discipleship is far more radical. **He's calling us to deny ourselves—to renounce all claims to absolute self-autonomy.** To being the king of our lives or the captain of our souls.
 - **Jesus is saying, "If you want to be my disciple, then you can't have it your way. You shouldn't follow your heart or be true to yourself."** Because if what Jesus taught is true—that our hearts are sick, that what defiles us comes from our own hearts—then following your heart is the worst possible advice. Wisdom calls for us to deny our sinful hearts and die to our sinful selves.

- ❖ That's what it means to take up your cross. It means to die to self. For Christians today, we're so familiar with the cross that it's viewed as a symbol of salvation. **But in Jesus's day, the cross was viewed as a symbol of horror. It was an instrument of torture.** It was a common form of execution used by the Romans and reserved for the lowest social classes and for the worst of crimes, especially crimes of insurrection.
 - The condemned would be forced to carry the crossbeam they'll eventually be hung on, from out the city to a specified place of execution. Later in Mark 15, Jesus is forced to carry his cross until he physically could go no further. So soldiers compelled Simon of Cyrene to take up his cross and carry it the rest of the way. **Providentially offering a graphic but accurate picture of discipleship.** Whoever would come after Jesus must accept a path of suffering, where you are dying to self to save your life.

- ❖ **In vv35-37, Jesus offers a compelling gospel logic that makes sense of this call to die.** But only if you're hearing with faith. *"³⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷For what can a man give in return for his soul?"*
 - In other words, if all that concerns you are matters of *this* life—if all you want is peace and prosperity on earth—then you just might get it. But you'll lose it all at the end of your life. But if you follow Jesus on the path of discipleship—even if you suffer, even if you're rejected, even if you're killed for his sake and the sake of the gospel—you will be welcomed into life everlasting. Into life beyond this life.
 - The missionary martyr **Jim Elliot**, who lost his life in Ecuador at the hands of the very ones he was trying to evangelize, he famously rephrased Jesus's gospel logic. Putting it like this: **He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.**

- ❖ **In other words, you won't regret it. You won't be ashamed if you give all you have for the sake of Christ and his gospel.** It's the best advice possible. It's the best investment out there. You won't regret giving up what you cannot keep to gain what you cannot lose.

- ❖ In fact, Jesus goes on to warn that the opposite is true. **If you try to preserve your life; if you spurn his call to follow; if you're ashamed to be counted as one of his; you will face a Messiah who returns one day as Judge.** Listen to his warning in v38, *“For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*
 - With all the emphasis on the Christ and his cross, marked by suffering and loss, it's important to balance those images with the emphasis in v38 on the Christ and his crown, marked by glory and power.
 - **Just as the Christ *must* suffer and *must* be rejected and *must* be killed on the cross, he also *must* be raised on the third day.** By gospel necessity, the Crucified Christ must rise again in glory and power.

- ❖ That's what I think Jesus was referring to in Mark 9:1. *“And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.””*
 - He wasn't talking about his Second Coming. He wasn't even just talking about his Transfiguration, which takes place in the next passage. **Jesus was talking about his Resurrection.** He's telling the crowd that his disciples will witness the power of his Resurrection before they lose their own lives for of the sake of the gospel.
 - And though we stand on this side of the Resurrection, thousands of years removed, this is a promise still held out to us. The Church today will see the kingdom of God growing in power—as his disciples are willing to deny ourselves and pick up our crosses daily and follow Jesus.