

## Kingdom Essentials

Mark 8:27-9:1

A novice skydiver pulled his ripcord, and then, his backup cord, but nothing happened. As he hurtled toward the ground, he saw a man flying upward toward him from below.

“Do you know anything about parachutes?” he asked, as the man flew by.

“No,” the man replied. “Do you know anything about gas stoves?”

Sometimes, knowing where to go for reliable information can be a matter of life or death. Once, when the teachings of Jesus were so demanding that a huge number of people who had previously followed Him simply ceased to do so. His heart ached. He knew the spiritual darkness into which this mass exodus was marching. He turned to His closest disciples and asked:

<sup>67</sup>“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

<sup>68</sup>Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

<sup>69</sup>We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” – John 6:67-69

In the world today, there is much confusion about what Christianity is because different groups that identify themselves as Christian seem to stand for different things. Perhaps, this is because Jesus Himself has been fashioned into a thousand different images. It seems to me that the surest way to understand, much less, seek the kingdom of God is to back up and know the King.

### I. The Indispensable Recognition of God’s Anointed One (8:27-29)

<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.”

#### A. Most Everybody Likes Jesus

Even in circles where Christians are criticized, Jesus is admired. In fact, the most common criticism levied at Christians is that we aren’t enough like Jesus. That often may be true, but even when we are on our best behavior, the world likes Jesus better than it likes us. Of course, another reason for this is that so few people really understand the biblical Jesus. It’s easy to like Jesus if you latch onto one attribute of His niceness and limit your understanding to that. Typically, the Jesus no one objects to is loving, accepting and caring. He is all those things, but there is more to Him as well. There is no threat to a Jesus Who makes no demands and has no expectations of us.

Jesus struck up this conversation near Caesarea-Philippi. In Old Testament days, as Israel drifted away from God, this area became a center for Baal worship. When the Greeks arrived, they built a temple for Pan, their god of woods and pastures. In fact, the previous name of Caesarea-Philippi was Paneas. Later, Herod the Great built a beautiful temple here for the worship of the Roman emperors. His son, Herod Philip, the brother of the Herod that killed John the Baptist, renamed the city in honor of himself and Caesar. Some Jews lived in the area as did many people who drew from all these different traditions. This religiously pluralistic area was the most interesting area in walking distance of Galilee for Jesus to ask, “Who do people say that I am?”

The disciples had heard many theories. Some thought John the Baptist had come back to life in Jesus. Reincarnation was not foreign to some of the beliefs of the area. Herod in Galilee had executed John to please his wife, who had previously been the wife of Herod Philip. John's stand against that adulterous relationship was at the heart of the woman's scorn for him. Herod in Galilee was one of those who feared that Jesus was John the Baptist, back from the dead.

Malachi spoke of Elijah returning to prepare Israel for the Day of the Lord. Some took this to mean a literal return of the prophet who was taken up into heaven. Others understood this to be someone very much like him. According to Jesus, the prophecy was fulfilled by John the Baptist. Others thought Jesus might be "one of the prophets." Whether they meant a reappearance of some specific prophet or a prophet like them, who can say? In this muddled fusion of religious thought that was Caesarea-Philippi, no doubt, many theories and sub-theories had been floated.

Our age represents precisely that same kind of a muddled fusion of religious thought. Allegedly, all roads lead to God. Allegedly, my religion can be true for me and your religion can be true for you even if our respective beliefs are contradictory. The only intolerable posture in this age of alleged tolerance is insisting that only one truth is always true. Ours is an utterly fascinating age in which to ask, "Who do people say that Jesus is?" Still, after all the speculations of prophet, mystic, metaphysicist, great teacher or really nice guy have been heard, Jesus still wants to hear from you what He asked to hear back then ...

## **B. Who Do You Say I Am?**

Peter answered, "You are the Christ," which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "*Messiah*." Both mean "anointed one." The people of Jesus' day were looking for an anointed deliverer from God whose coming was foretold by the prophets. Peter said, "You are that promised Deliverer."

Even with all the nice things that most people today say about Him, it is imperative that Jesus knows that you know Who He is. What does it mean to say, "You are the Christ"? He alone is our Rescuer Who can impart to man the eternal Life that comes from God. Such assertions caused the world of His day by and large to reject Him. And, when His people today boldly present Him in that same manner, many of the friendly feelings based on ignorance of Who Jesus is and why He came begin to fade. Still, today, just as then, He alone can save sinners. To tell people that God loves them and has a wonderful plan for their life is well and good, as far as it goes, but that message is not the essence of the kingdom of God.

The disciples *did* believe that Jesus was "the Christ," but the term was so nationally and politically charged that they really had no idea what being the Christ would mean, so, He told them.

## **II. The Inevitable Requirements for God's Anointed One (8:30-33)**

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

<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."

## **A. Why Was Jesus Required to Keep His Identity Under Wraps?**

*"Messiah,"* (or "Christ") had become too provocative a term for the disciples to have publicly applied it to Jesus without qualification. The Jews expected *Messiah* to be the most destructive conqueror in history. This is why one crowd could think it appropriate to make Jesus a "king by force" (John 16:14). In the meantime, if Jesus' enemies heard *Messiah* rhetoric, they would have stepped up their opposition before He could paint a proper picture of the kingdom. Besides, the Twelve themselves needed a better grasp of what His being *Messiah* would mean for Jesus and for them.

Jesus never called Himself, "*Messiah*." He often called Himself "the Son of Man." That kept His critics guessing as to what He was up to. In Daniel, the "Son of Man" was a great Messiah-type character, but in Ezekiel, "son of man" was just a designation for that particular prophet. In the Psalms, the phrase simply meant a man. Jesus' use of "Son of Man" kept His enemies from being able to quite put a finger on what He was claiming. The designation identified exactly Who Jesus was for those with ears to hear, but it veiled His true identity from anyone else.

## **B. Why Was Jesus Required to Be Hated?**

Regardless of how likeable people today find Jesus, the "elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law" despised Him. An elder was a "lay leader." In Jerusalem, they were members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council that would one day condemn Jesus. Also members of this council were the chief priests, the professional clergymen who ran the temple. They were what they were by right of birth rather than because of any passion for God. They were often quite corrupt. The teachers of the law were the guys that tacked on all those nutty traditions and rituals onto the Law of God. This group was also represented on the Council.

It is easy to see why Jesus upset these men. He threatened the righteous reputations in which the elders basked. He taught that God was more interested that a heart of compassion beat in a man than in the fact that he had climbed some ladder of civil authority. Jesus threatened the ritualistic routine of the priests. He called them on their corruption and on their indifference to the things of God. Jesus threatened the relevancy of the teachers of the law. These men quoted dead rabbis as often as they quoted Scripture. Few dared to freshly apply the Law of God to real life. The people respected Jesus' explanations of the Scriptures more than those of the teachers of the law.

Jesus is not so cuddly when He shows us that we are too comfortable and not genuinely in tune with God's heart. A reputation of respectability and knowledge of God's Word are good things to have. But, to that, Jesus would ask, "Are you kind? Are you generous? Are you pure? Do you keep your promises? And, especially, does your heart beat with God's Own heart?"

## **C. Why Was Jesus Required to Face the Cross?**

Jesus came to reconcile sinners to God. His was not a victory that could be won with conventional force. He came to make us holy, which means He came to make us new, for there is simply no way that a God Who has given His Law for us to obey can ever say to a sinner, "Aw, don't worry about it. I never really meant it that much." If He winks at our sins and fellowships with us anyway, He is not truly holy. With no sin of His own, Jesus stood in our place to face a punishment due to lawbreakers. That way, Jesus' righteousness can be applied to each of us so that when God looks upon us, He sees Jesus. Jesus is the Lamb of God, "that was slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). Of course, this was shocking news to His disciples.

One of the newest doctors saw one of the practice's oldest patients. After about four minutes in the examination room, she burst out screaming and ran down the hall.

An older doctor asked what the problem was, and she explained. He calmed her before marching back to the first doctor and demanding, "What's the matter with you? Mrs. Terry is 63 years old with four grown children and seven grandchildren, and you told her she was pregnant?"

Never looking up from his clipboard the new doctor smugly answered, "Cured her hiccups though, didn't it?"

Had Peter suffered from hiccups, Jesus would have cured them in a heartbeat when He announced that the Christ must die. Poor ol' Peter - all he knew of *Messiah* was that He would one day exert the strong arm of God. This notion that He would be put to death by Israel's own religious leaders was unthinkable. Peter could not stop himself from protesting. Still, Jesus' death was always God's plan for the redemption of humanity. In the wilderness, Satan had tempted Jesus to use worldly inducements, pragmatic methods and works of power to build a following. What made these temptations so arduous was the fact that Jesus had the power to do exactly as He was tempted.

Jesus stunned them all when He said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." Ouch! Jesus just called Peter "Satan." I don't picture rocks splitting at the sound of holy indignation. He may have gently sighed these words, but Jesus had to rebuke Peter, because Peter sounded like Satan all over again. Peter did not understand the cross. His methods for winning followers were as worldly as the methods Jesus had been resisting since the day He exited the wilderness. "Entertain them." "Exploit them." "Tell them what they want to hear." The world has its ways of making things happen. They are not ways that Jesus or His followers can embrace. We are to embrace the way of the cross.

### **III. The Inescapable Response to God's Anointed One (8:34-37)**

*Messiah's* mission would look nothing like what the disciples had imagined. Their minds would need to be refashioned before they could effectively proclaim Jesus to be the Christ. But, the fact is, we must all learn a new way of thinking if we hope to fully experience God's kingdom.

#### **A. Any Disciple Must Wholly Reorient His Life to Jesus verse 34**

<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 ...

When I think of self-denial, I think of things I do without. "Put the cookie back!" Denial of self runs deeper than that. To deny myself is to exalt another. I cease to be the center of my own universe. If my pursuits remain supreme in the allocations of my energies and my resources, Jesus is not supreme. Jesus must become greater as I become less. To bear a cross is a more vivid picture of abandoning myself to His ways. The cross is not an inconvenience that I bear for Jesus. It is the instrument of my own demise. My choice is simple: Follow Jesus or follow me.

#### **B. Any Disciple Must Wholly Release His Life for Jesus verse 35**

... <sup>35</sup>For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Mark's audience, believers in Rome, was facing persecution. One out they had for literally saving their lives was to deny their allegiance to Jesus. These words would remind them that their lives in this world would eventually end anyway, so they should consider their eternal lives in God's kingdom. Persecution gave them an occasion to process which life meant more to them.

It is not so easy for us to process the relative values of this life and kingdom life. The two existences slam into one another quite violently when Christians are under siege, but not so much when all is calm. Still, these two realities are always contending for our loyalties. The comfort and safety we crave in this life can imperil the life of the kingdom. We can convince ourselves that we are too busy to minister unto the least of these, or that we cannot afford to be sacrificially generous or that we are too strong to desperately need the fellowship of others. Seek God and determine if the life you are living now in any way comes at the expense of the kingdom.

### **C. Any Disciple Must Wholly Reinvest His Life in Jesus** verses 36, 37

... <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?

A few years ago, some nutty 18-year-old kid put his soul up for auction on eBay. Within days, eBay removed the offer and alerted him that eBay does not allow the auctioning of human souls. You can get most anything else on eBay. That's where I got my retro aluminum Christmas tree that I put up downstairs at my house. But apparently, you cannot buy or sale human souls online

Ebay or not, a soul can be squandered, but even the whole world is poor trade. Sadly, it too often requires the passing of years to cause us to see the cheapness and emptiness of the things we have valued or the great worth of the matters we have neglected. Peter was writing to believers, urging them to consider the fleeting realities of this life, but also urging them to see how precious they were to God and at what cost He had secured them for His own:

<sup>17</sup>Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. <sup>18</sup>For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, <sup>19</sup>but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.. – 1 Peter 1:17-19

### **Conclusion (8:38-9:1)**

... <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."

<sup>9:1</sup>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."

Jesus knew that He had confounded His disciples and He knew that theirs was a tough generation for clinging to Him by faith. He called the age "adulterous," meaning spiritually adulterous. Few people were passionate for God. Any voice they heard might taunt their faith. Persecution would surely come, so He told them not be ashamed of Him and He warned them of the consequences of disloyalty. But, knowing their frailty, He promised some of them a glimpse of the glory and power of the kingdom. We will explore what He meant by those words next week.

Until then, seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness. Though its values and wisdom run counter to the values and wisdom of this age, they are true. Seek the kingdom. Cling to the King.