

Jesus' Identity, Mission and Following Him

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[0 : 00] And 12. Yeah, thank you. So page 1012.

And it's my aim this morning for us to consider from this passage to think about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. And obviously we can't understand what it means to be a disciple unless we know something of who Jesus is and what he has come to do.

And so that's what we're going to look at, Jesus' identity, his mission, and then what it is for us to be his disciples. The Bible has more to say about discipleship than just this passage, but this is the text we have before us this morning, so let's read through it together.

Starting in verse 27. Mark 8, 27. Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi and on the way asked them, Who do people say that I am?

They replied, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others one of the prophets. But what about you, he asked. Who do you say that I am?

[1 : 29] Peter answered, you are the Christ. Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. 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.

He spoke plainly about this and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 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. 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.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul?

What can a man give in exchange for his soul? 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.

[2 : 58] Let's pray. Father, we declare that your word is true. We acknowledge that your word is true.

And we acknowledge that one day your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, will come back in the glory that you have given to him. And Father, in light of that coming event, in light of the return of your Son, would you help us this morning before your word to humble ourselves?

Lord, that you would give me clarity to speak and give us all hearts, hearts, Lord, that are wide open to receive your word. Thank you, Lord, that we have your word in our language.

Thank you that you have loved us with an everlasting love and called us into fellowship with you, the triune God. Help us, Father, for your sake, for our sake, Lord, that we might serve you all the better during this time of exile on earth.

Through Christ we pray. Amen. A few years ago, Roxy and I were in holidays in Romania. I'm not too sure the last time I was here if I used an illustration from when I was on holidays in Romania, so forgive me if it was, but it doesn't really matter.

[4 : 19] The point was that we met up with some of Roxy's friends, one of her girlfriends, and this girl's, Shusie was her name, this girl's boyfriend, he was on tour in Afghanistan.

I think he was serving with the UN or something like that, I can't remember. Anyway, he brought this up in conversation, he was very proud of it, and he rightly should have been, he served very well. It's a very difficult place to be, obviously, at the time.

And he said, would you like to see some photos of my tour? And I was like, I would actually like to see some photos of what it looks like and what it looked like to serve there. But he showed us, I

would say, close to a thousand photos.

And we were there for, I don't want to exaggerate because let's face it, exaggeration is just another form of lying, really, but I think we were there for over half an hour, huddled around the PC monitor and clicking next and next.

And you know, I think, have you ever had that experience where someone shows you photos and, to be honest, your attention is strained? When Roxy and I got our wedding photos back on a CD, all the photos, there was like 700 of them and we got bored halfway through and we just said, you know, we get the picture.

[5 : 29] Have you ever had that experience where someone sits you down and says, I want to show you something and it's just, it's overkill. The Bible is not like that. God does not waste your time when you read the Bible.

There are parts of the Bible that are long, that are detailed, that require concentration, but it's not without a point. God doesn't just, God never waffles when he speaks.

But there's a great variety in Scripture. There are long psalms and short psalms. There are long books of history, poetry, prophecy, all variety.

But the Gospel of Mark, if you read through it, which doesn't take very long, is a very small photo album. It's 16 chapters long.

Obviously, when Mark wrote it, he didn't say, Mark chapter 1, verse 1. He wrote one Gospel and we've broken it down into different chapters and verses just to help us get through it and to find our way in it. But it covers Jesus' earthly ministry, which is about three and a half years.

[6 : 35] So if you do the math, every time you read a chapter of Mark, it doesn't really divide up this easily, but if you just do the quick math, every time you read a chapter, it's about ten weeks of his life, or of his earthly ministry, rather.

And so you cover an awful lot of ground in a very short amount of time. And so as I said at the start, I want to begin looking at what Mark's purpose is, which is to say that Jesus is the Christ or the Messiah, those words can be used interchangeably, and that he is the Son of God.

And so that's what I want to look at this morning, Jesus' identity, the identity of Jesus. Beginning in chapter 1, verse 1, it says, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we read about how Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove, and immediately afterwards, that same spirit leads him out into the wilderness where he's tempted by Satan.

And then he begins his ministry, which is primarily a ministry of preaching, with the clarion call of saying, the time is fulfilled, the kingdom is at hand, repent, and believe in the gospel.

And Mark's gospel is absolutely packed full of examples of Jesus' ministry, and I think there's four, roughly four main categories that you can put these into. First of all, as I said, there's teaching.

[8 : 05] Jesus taught in the synagogue because he was a Jew. He taught on the beaches, he taught on the mountainsides, in houses, in towns, he taught in public, to the crowds, and he taught privately to his disciples.

Secondly, he healed people. He healed a woman with a fever, people with diseases, leopards, the blind, the paralyzed, the deaf, the mute, people with withered hands. You're talking about a day when there are no hospitals, and a man who, if you make contact with him, will heal you.

Thirdly, he cast out demons. Jesus casts out demons a lot. Men, women, and children. And you'll notice when you read these that the demons don't wrestle with Jesus.

They beg him to be lenient with them. He has complete authority over them. And fourthly, that general category of miracles, Jesus walked on water.

He brought food from a very small amount out to enough to feed 5,000, and then 4,000. But no sooner had Jesus' ministry had begun, than he's been followed around by crowds of people.

[9 : 22] At one point, Mark said the whole city was at his door. In fact, they almost crush him. Jesus and his disciples can't even get time to eat. And it's no disrespect to say it.

It's accurate to say that Jesus was famous. He was famous. People followed him everywhere. He was always being followed by people. And a crowd attracts a crowd.

And the more Jesus ministers, the more his fame seems to snowball. People seem to be coming after him for all kinds of reasons. We could say the same today, couldn't we?

People come to Jesus for all kinds of reasons, don't they? Why did you come to him initially?

Something to think about. But these people wanted to be healed of their sicknesses and diseases.

Some wanted to receive free bread. Others wanted to just see miracles. Others were just probably just curious about who he was and what he had to say and they just wanted to hear more.

[10:33] Because he taught with authority. He spoke with authority unlike the scribes. But this produces a problem because Jesus has a crowd of people following him and they all have different goals.

They all have different agendas as it were. Some of them good, some of them not so good. Masses of people. And so you can picture them where our text picks up this morning.

They're walking from the Sea of Galilee, Bethsaida, and then they're walking up north to Caesarea Philippi. They're walking along the road. Jesus is on his mission. He knows where he's going. And you can picture them as they're walking along.

Jesus is in front. The disciples are next to him and then shortly behind there's just probably, I would imagine a throng of people. Hundreds of people. And Jesus asks his disciples that question.

Who do people say that I am? And they chime in with the different views that are going around about who Jesus is. Some say you're John the Baptist whom Herod had killed.

[11:34] John the Baptist back from the dead as it were. Elijah. If you look at the very last verses in the Old Testament, God says that he's going to send Elijah to turn the parts of the people back to the Father.

Or one of the prophets. And so there's all these sorts of different ideas of who Christ is. And then Christ brings the follow-up question to the disciples. Who do you say that I am?

Peter seems to always be the first to speak, doesn't he? He speaks on behalf of the disciples and says, you are the Christ or the Messiah.

You're the Messiah, the promised one, the anointed one, the Savior, the deliverer who will restore Israel to glory, the one who the law and the prophets speak about. You are the Savior of the world to all who believe, the Jew first and to the Gentile.

And so Jesus affirms Peter's answer. He doesn't say, no, no, you're wrong. But he affirms it and he gives him a warning. He says, don't tell anyone about who I am.

[12:44] Now that seems kind of odd, doesn't it? Why does Jesus at different points in the Gospel turn people and say, don't tell anyone about who I am? Or he forbids people. I do not give you permission to tell people who I am.

Why does he do that? It would seem counterproductive if he wants to get his message out there. But that's exactly the point. There were thousands of different, as we've already seen, different ideas and concepts and messages about who Jesus was and he wants to make sure the right one gets out there.

And until the time is right, Jesus does not want to put fuel on the fire of misinformation. Because there are people out there who want to use Jesus for their own agenda. They want Jesus to basically be a political activist and to get rid of the Roman rule and to break off the shackles of bondage so that the Jewish people can be free.

And if they hear that he is the Christ and they'll say, that's wonderful, that's it. And he'll do what we want him to do. In John chapter 6, for example, I'll read it for you, but right after he's fed the 5,000, it says, Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

And so Jesus sees that the people, having just fed them 5,000 of them, he sees that they're so enamored with his miraculous power and his usefulness that they want to make him king.

[14:17] Jesus, you are so useful and you're so powerful, you can get so much done. You tick all the boxes. You can be our king.

And Jesus wants nothing to do with it. The only agenda that Jesus Christ is interested in fulfilling is the agenda of the Father. Not my will, but yours be done.

And so Peter's answer is correct in terms of the words he uses. But as we go on to look at Christ's mission, we'll see that Peter's understanding of what the Christ is is totally off base.

He misses it. So let's read verses 31 to 33 again where Christ goes on to expand upon what it means that he is the Christ. And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

He spoke plainly about this and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 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 concerns of God, but merely human concerns.

[15:35] So Jesus and his disciples have been together for months. He has taught them so much, but at this time he begins to teach them about what is going to happen to him. They have not heard this before.

This is the first time that they have heard anything about suffering or dying or going to the cross or being rejected by the leadership of Israel.

And it says he taught them. So he didn't just say it and throw it out there and sort of leave an awkward silence. He taught them. He explained it for them.

He said he spoke plainly. He didn't use parables to explain it to them. He just spoke plainly. This is what is going to happen. And no doubt he would have turned to the scriptures and shown how that is why, because it is in scripture, this is why he must be killed.

As he said later in John, the Son of Man goes as it is written of him. Jesus didn't die because man got his way. Jesus died ultimately because God got his way.

[16:38] Let me read from you Isaiah 53. You can turn there if you want, Isaiah 53. But I'll read it for you. It speaks of the suffering servant who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed, speaking of Christ prophetically before he arrived.

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him. nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, like one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised and we esteemed him not.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities.

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[17:55] So Jesus is saying this is what must take place, this is why I am here. And Peter takes him aside.

You can almost picture him taking him by the elbow and saying, you know, Jesus, this is not on. It doesn't say Jesus disagreed with him, it said he rebuked him. That's strong language.

He took him aside and said, Jesus, that's not right. We don't know exactly what he said but if it says rebuke it means he probably used very forceful and determined language towards Christ that that's not the way it's going to go.

No one's going to kill you. You're safe. Who can touch you? It says Jesus turns so Peter's taking him aside and Jesus turns and looks at the disciples.

I think that's indicating that his response to what he's about to say to Peter is a corrective for all of them. Peter has spoken on behalf of the disciples and so he's now responding to Peter but I think what he's saying is true for all.

[19:00] It's a corrective for all rather. It's startling what he says. He says, get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the concerns of God but merely human concerns.

That's strong language, isn't it? Jesus calling you Satan. He says, get behind me. In other words, you're in my way. Insofar, Peter, as you are getting in the way of my true mission, insofar as you do not understand and do not believe what I have told you about what I came here to do, you are in my way and you're serving the purposes of Satan.

You're an obstruction to my mission. You know, Peter probably, you know, took him off to the side. Physically and literally took him aside from his path and he's trying now to put him aside from his true mission too.

I wonder what Peter's expression was in his face. He's probably very shocked to hear Jesus say to him, get behind me, Satan. But unwittingly, he was opposing Jesus' true mission.

And so Jesus responds in equal force saying that that thinking ultimately, its source is satanic. Can you think of anything more that the devil would have wanted to have done than to derail Christ's mission?

[20:30] 1 John 3, 8, the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the work of the devil. I recently watched a documentary on JFK and it obviously dealt with the Cold War and the nuclear standoff.

with Khrushchev and there was a point where the world really did seem to be on the brink of nuclear war. And in the end, the final decision, JFK at times had advisors telling him they've put missiles in Cuba now, press the button, let's get war on the way, let's just prove, let's show them who's boss. and the ultimate decision, the rest, the decision rested, that burden ultimately rested on JFK. No one else, he was the person, the commander-in-chief who had to make that decision and he very nearly came close to doing it but he waited and waited and thankfully it was avoided.

Friends, we will never understand the weight of responsibility that Jesus had on his shoulders. The intensity of the spiritual warfare that Jesus endured for you and for me is beyond what we can ever understand.

No one was tempted more than Jesus was tempted. Remember in the wilderness, Satan offers him a shortcut to glory, doesn't he?

[22 : 05] He says, I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world, you just bow down and give me a little worship. no one endured more spiritual opposition than Jesus did.

And when Jesus' hour had eventually come, Christ endured the full burden of God's wrath on the cross for you and for me.

And as he prayed before going to Calvary, such was the agony of his soul that he prayed, Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me.

Yes, not my will, but yours be done. We will never understand what Christ faced on the cross, the weight and the burden of it.

There was no plan B, there was no spare Messiah, I don't mean that disrespectfully, but there was one, and he was this. And as clearly as we emphasize the sovereignty of God and saying who can undermine God's purposes, no one can, let us not say that at the expense of also being able to say that Christ struggled and that he had to, with all of his frame, go to the cross for you and me.

[23 : 28] I used to have a bad understanding of what it meant that Jesus was fully God and fully man, I certainly don't have a perfect understanding, but I often thought that when Jesus was tempted it was sort of like it was not a bother to him.

It was kind of like playing tennis, it would be like you and I playing tennis or Roger Federer, he could just wipe the floor with his hands behind his back or one of his hands behind his back. There's no real effort involved, it's just a show.

But Jesus was tempted in his humanity, he was pressured in his humanity, he was being pulled in all different directions, and in this instance even by his own disciples.

Peter, you're not thinking on the things of God, you're thinking on the things of man. And what follows from verse 34 to the end of the chapter is an expansion on this statement I believe, where Jesus says this is what it means, if you're going to follow me, this is what it's going to look like.

So having looked at his identity and his mission, finally, what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Verse 34, then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

[24 : 52] I struggled how to, in my preparation, how to sort of express what Jesus is getting at here, but I think it's fairly straightforward.

I was getting myself tied up on knots. Jesus is presenting two main ways of life. Essentially he's saying, you can live for yourself or you can live for me.

Thy will be done or my will be done. Following Jesus Christ costs you costs you.

I wonder, what does it cost you so far in your life? It costs different people different things, but there is no one who makes it to glory, having followed the way of righteousness, that hasn't had to pay some cost.

We're not saved by denying ourselves, we're not saved by suffering, we're not saved by denying anything. We're saved solely through the work of Christ, but having been made his, we follow after him and that costs us.

[25 : 59] It might cost you financially, it might cost you in relationships with other people who say, I don't want to be with you anymore, I don't want to know you. It might cost you comfort or security, and it might even cost you the ultimate sacrifice, which is your life.

You know, we get a prayer letter of some friends of ours who work in Jordan, and one of their friends, I can't say his name because they've asked we don't say his name, but he's come to faith from Islam, and he's gotten text from people saying, we're going to kill you, we're going to kill you.

Now, he's still alive, but that man is carrying around with him that burden every day. He is paying a cost, and all he has to do is, if he wanted it to all go away, he could say, I repent, I'm not a Christian, I go back to the Muslim faith.

But because he is following Christ, he is sharing in Christ's sufferings. As Romans 8 says, having shared in Christ's sufferings, we will also share in his glory to come.

See, Jesus says, I will suffer, I will die, but I will rise again in three days. He will come back in glory. And just as sure as Christ's resurrection has occurred, so too is it sure that we will be raised with him in glory.

[27 : 36] And he goes on in verse 36, for whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. In other words, if you try and preserve your life, if your goal is just to have as much as you can in this life, have security, and your priority is on you and what you want, in the end you lose it all.

But if you give me your life, you follow me, in the end, although you will have suffering and you will have pain in this world, and trouble in this world, and hassle, you will inherit eternal life.

In verse 36, let me flick there.

Verse 36, where Christ gives those two rhetorical questions. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul, or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

It hardly needs explaining, does it? What good is it if you get everything in this life, and in the end you end up in hell?

[29 : 01] That's sobering, isn't it? Do you think there's anyone in hell who takes comfort from something they owned in this life? Do you think there's anyone who thinks, at least in earth I had X, Y, or Z?

there's nothing more important than the salvation of your soul. What could possibly be worth more to you than your very self? love? And finally, verse 38, Jesus points out that his words will be the dividing line.

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. There are lots of people who like Jesus, but let us as his people be those who listen to him.

He doesn't have a mute button. We must listen to what he says. And Jesus is saying that there will be lots of people who hear my words and they're ashamed of them, they don't want to have anything to do with them.

No, not for me. That's no thanks. They might be even polite about it, but they're just saying no. They mightn't come out and say that's shameful, but they won't want anything to do with them.

[30 : 27] And Jesus is saying if that's where you are at, then when I come back, I will treat you the same. I won't want anything to do with you. Now bear in mind who Jesus is speaking to here.

Jesus is speaking to a crowd of people. This is not Jesus speaking to his sheep, saying you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Get the wrong end of the stick. But Christ is giving a solemn warning that in order to follow him, it involves denial of self.

It involves cost and sacrifice. We don't want to fall into an extreme of saying that to be a Christian, you basically have to get rid of everything you enjoy in life, and that somehow makes you godly.

I mean, Jesus was accused of being a drunkard because he enjoyed eating and drinking. For the glory of God. That's not what Jesus is getting at.

And again, we don't earn our way to heaven by denying ourselves of things. But what Jesus is getting at is saying, when you come into conflict with this world and you have a decision between me, what I say, and what the world wants you to do, you choose me, whatever it costs.

[31 : 49] And no, we don't always get it right, do we? I was, yesterday we were handing out tracts in Valancholy, we do that on Saturday mornings, and I tell you this because I feel it's, I'm not happy to say it, but we're handing out tracts, and a guy I used to go to school with, Jack, I barely knew the guy, and he was walking up, and I saw him coming, and I started talking to somebody else, and a part of me was just embarrassed.

I'm being honest, I'm not proud of that, I'm not saying that's wrong, I don't think in my mind I said, I'm ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I'm going to turn away, but a part of me felt embarrassment.

I'm sure I'm not alone in that, but friends, Christ is gracious, and he will give us what we need. We fail, I have failed him, I failed him yesterday, but he loves you, and he will bring you into glory, but

let us stand by what he says, and I thank God for the forgiveness that we have in Christ, I thank God that he bears with us, that he remembers that we are with dust, he remembers our frame, and I thank him that he will help us to be faithful unto the end.

let's pray. Let's pray. blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to his great mercy with which he has caused us to be born again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved with various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[34 : 23] Our Father in heaven, we pray, Lord, that you would impress upon us the words of Christ. Christ, I pray, Father, for your strength for us as your people in this adulterous and wicked generation to stand by your word, Lord.

Whatever it may cost us, Lord, help us to be faithful to what you have commanded us, what you have taught us in your scriptures. And I thank you, Lord, for your grace, which covers our failures, which covers our sin.

And I thank you, Lord, that Jesus Christ, Lord, that for the joy set before him endured the shame of the cross, and that he is now seated at your right hand. Lord, as we make our way as pilgrims in this world, as foreigners, Lord, I pray, Lord, that you would keep us from the love of this world. May we love those who are in the world, Lord, and call them to you. Help us, Lord, to be witnesses to those who are not yet yours. But, Father, help us never, Lord, to be ashamed of your word. Give us strength, we pray, Lord, for the days before us. And I thank you for your word, Lord, and for your grace to us this morning in Christ Jesus. Amen. Amen.

[36 : 00] thank you very much, Kevin, for bringing God's words to us for all your preparation, but also for your honesty, and thank God we do have a God who does forgive us.

I was thinking as you were speaking just about Peter, and isn't it wonderful that we can look back and have the whole canon of scripture here, for we can have a fuller understanding. I think of Peter, that even though he was able to correctly identify that Jesus was the Christ, the one they were waiting for, and yet he didn't have at that time a full understanding of why Jesus came, nor perhaps the full idea of following Jesus, but that as we read God's word, we can see of why Jesus came, and that cost in following, and yet the joy that we have because of following.

So thank you very much, Kevin. We're going to stand and sing, can the song be brought up, the final song? Yes, we're going to sing, beneath the cross of Jesus, I find a place to stand and wonder at such mercy that calls me as I am, because as people, when we came to know Jesus, we recognized that we were the cross of Jesus.

We were the cross of Jesus. We were the cross of Jesus. We were the