

A Confession of Faith and a Call to Discipleship

Mark 8:27-38

Mark 8:27-38 – *“Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, “Who do men say that I am?”²⁸ So they answered, “John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.”²⁹ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.”³⁰ Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him.*

³¹ And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ³³ But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

³⁴ When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ³⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? ³⁷ Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

Background Notes

After the healing of the blind man (v22-26), the Lord and His disciples went to the towns in the area of Caesarea Philippi. The blind man was healed in the vicinity of Bethsaida, a town on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. The Lord and His disciples went about twenty-five miles straight north to the area of Caesarea Philippi. (This is not the same Caesarea as “Caesarea Maritima” on the Mediterranean coast, where Paul was later imprisoned.) Caesarea Philippi was in the foothills of Mount Hermon. Most likely the Mount of Transfiguration event took place not far from here, as we will see in Mark 9.

Caesarea Philippi was a pagan town with many idols and shrines to the Greek gods. If you visit there today, you can still see some of the remains of the idolatry in the ruins there. It was a fitting place for Peter to make his great confession of faith, *“Thou art the Christ.”*

Doctrinal Points

1. The content of Christ's teaching changed after Peter's confession of faith.

Right after Peter's great confession of faith, "Thou art the Christ" in verse 31, the Lord *"began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."* In other words, up to this point, any teaching of our Lord about His coming death and resurrection was veiled. It wasn't spoken openly and plainly. For example, in Mark 2:1 there's an indication of His coming rejection and being taken away, but it's veiled: *"But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days."* That's certainly an indication of what was to come, but it was not clear. Peter's great confession of faith was a turning point. After that the Lord began to speak plainly of His coming rejection, death and resurrection.

The change didn't come because the truth was just beginning to dawn upon our Lord! No! He's **God** – He's **omniscient**. As God, He knew all of those details from the beginning. Notice that in His omniscience He knew all the details about how He would be rejected and killed - right down to the number of days before He would rise again. The Lord knew all these things. But up to this point, the theme of our Lord's teaching had been that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." But the nation and its leaders had now officially rejected Him as King, so after Peter (as spokesman for the disciples) confessed Him as the Christ, the Anointed One, the content of Christ's teaching changed.

Again, this was not a change of plans. These facts were known all the way from God's perspective. Verse 31: *"He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things."* Think of the Old Testament prophecies. Certainly Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 indicate that that the Messiah, the perfect Servant, would be rejected and be killed. And yes – even the resurrection is there. But up to Mark 8:31, the Lord did not speak plainly about His coming rejection, death, and resurrection.

In verse 30, most likely the Lord warned the disciples not to tell anyone about Him because they still had faulty views of the Messiah and His program. The Lord wanted to correct their thinking and give them new teaching about His Messiahship.

So remember the doctrinal point – The content of the Lord's teaching changed after Peter's confession of faith. This clearly was the turning point.

2. Even a disciple can voice satanic strategy!

Even a disciple can voice satanic strategy? Where do we see *that*? When the Lord spoke of His coming rejection (v31), Peter began to rebuke the Lord. Verse 32: *"Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him."* Talk about putting

your foot in your mouth! Little did Peter realize that he was voicing satanic strategy! This was exactly what Satan tried to do in the temptations – he wanted to keep Jesus Christ from going to the cross. So the Lord had to rebuke Peter: “*Get thee behind me Satan.*” The Lord wasn’t saying that Peter was really Satan, and He didn’t mean that Peter was possessed by Satan or demons. He meant that Peter was voicing satanic strategy.

Think of it! Just moments before Peter had voiced the divine truth, “*Thou art the Christ*” - and now he’s voicing satanic strategy. Even a disciple can voice satanic strategy!

Let’s be careful that we as believers don’t voice satanic strategy. Let’s make sure our advice to one another is not rooted in worldly values and attitudes. Satan is the god of this world, and one of his goals is to distract us from living for the Lord by introducing attractive worldly values and attitudes to our minds. Let’s make sure all our advice and all our decisions are biblically based so we don’t voice satanic strategy. But remember, even a disciple can voice satanic strategy.

3. Suffering is the way of true servanthood.

Verse 34: “*When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”*” What does it mean to “take up your cross”? Some Christians talk about a handicap that they have, or migraine headaches, or unfriendly in-laws as being “their cross to bear.” That’s not what it means. In those days the cross meant **death**, and the Lord was speaking of the “death to self” principle.

You cannot be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ if you’re going to live a selfish and self-centered life. You can be a Christian, but the Lord is talking about discipleship here. To be a true disciple of Jesus means denying self and taking up the cross - and this will mean suffering. Suffering is the way of true servanthood. Not necessarily physical suffering, but denying yourself is not easy. In addition, as you deny yourself and die to self, people will despise you, or take advantage of you, and not give you credit or thank you for what you do for them or for the Lord. True servanthood involves suffering.

Practical Applications

1. Who do *you* say Jesus is?

Go back to verse 27. The Lord asked His disciples “Who do men say that I am?” He wanted to know what the people thought of Him. Some people said John the Baptist, some said Elijah, and others, one of the prophets. These were great men, prophets of God, but they were only men. Many people have the same opinion today. They’ll say that the Lord was a good man, a great prophet - but not fully God.

What about you? Who do *you* say Jesus is? The Lord not only wanted to know what others thought, but then He asked His disciples, “Who do **you** say that I am?” Who do you say Jesus is? Is it possible that you’ve never really answered that question? Is He just a great man, a great prophet? Or is He truly the Christ, the Anointed One, the Son of God, 100% God - and the only means of salvation?

2. You can lose by gaining and gain by losing.

That sounds like double talk, doesn't it? It certainly doesn't apply to investments or to diets - but it *does* apply to **discipleship**. Verse 35: “*Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.*” What did the Lord mean?

He meant that if you consume your whole life on selfish gain and interests, you will actually lose your life, as far as making it count for eternity. You'll end up with a wasted life and loss of reward. That's certainly what's in view in verse 38: “*For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.*” So there will be a loss of eternal reward if we're not willing to lose our lives for His sake – but there will also be a loss of true joy in this life as well! So if you try to “save” or “gain” your life now by consuming your whole life on your own selfish interests and fleeting pleasures, you actually lose it as far as making it count for eternity.

If, on the other hand, you lose your life by denying self and dying to self (taking up the cross) in the interest of serving Christ as His disciple, you'll actually save or gain your life. There will be rewards for those who “lose” their lives. You'll gain your own life now, as well as rewards later. You will experience joy and the abundant life that our Lord promised in John 10:10 here on this earth, and you'll receive rewards and praise from the Lord in Heaven!

The incredible importance of this principle of discipleship is seen in verse 36-37, where the Lord shows that the value of the life, or soul, surpasses **everything** else: “*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*” If this is the true value of every soul, how much more should we be governed by the principle of “losing” our lives so we can “gain” them for the Lord!