

## 08 – Road to Jerusalem: following Jesus on the way

**Scripture reading:** Mark 8:27-9:50; 10:13-52.

### I. Who do you say I am? (8:27-30):

- A. Caesarea Philippi:
  - 1. Situated north of the tetrarchy of Philip, twenty-five miles north of Bethsaida.
  - 2. Named in honour of Caesar Augustus (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.28; *War.* 2.168).
  - 3. A Gentile area known for the worship of Pan (hence, Caesarea Paneas).
- B. “On the way:”
  - 1. The “way of the Lord” is first mentioned in 1:1-3.
  - 2. Narrative-wise, Jesus and his disciples are on the way to Jerusalem; spiritually, this journey unveils Jesus’ messianic mission and what is required of a disciple.
- C. Recognising Jesus as the Messiah (8:27-30):
  - 1. “Who do people say that I am?” is the central question that all humanity must answer – everything else is subordinated to this overriding question (8:27).
  - 2. Non-disciples miss the mark on the identity of Jesus – they rank him with the greatest of men; thus far, only God and demons recognise his identity (8:28).
  - 3. A disciple of Jesus is one who recognises that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29).
  - 4. Jesus strictly charges his disciples not to reveal his Messianic identity because they, as one shall soon see, have a flawed stereotype of the Messiah (8:30).

### II. On the way: Jesus’ first foretelling of his death and resurrection (8:31-9:1):

- A. Jesus’ foretelling (8:31-32a):
  - 1. *Began to teach* – denotes that, for the disciples to understand, this teaching is not a one-time matter but it takes the entire journey on the way of the Lord.
  - 2. Content of the revolutionary teaching of the Messiah:
    - a. *The Son of Man must suffer many things* – such a vision of the Messiah goes completely against what the Jews believed him to be.
    - b. *Rejected by the elders and chief priests and the scribes* – Jesus’ messianic claims are completely different from the portrait of the Messiah that the religious establishment pieced together.
    - c. *And be killed* – the death and defeat (or so it was thought) of the Messiah is scandalous to the ears of the Jewish community.
    - d. *After three days rise again* – this teaching does not register in the ears of the disciples and any theory of the resurrection is reserved for the end of the age and is for all the faithful (cf. Dan. 12:2).
    - e. *And he said this plainly* – Jesus does not teach this as a parable but declares the word of the gospel directly and bold conviction.

- B. Jesus and Peter at “cross” purposes (Mark 8:32b-33):<sup>1</sup>
  - 1. *Peter rebukes Jesus* – Peter sets out to correct Jesus’ “misconception” of the tradition about the triumphant Messiah.
  - 2. *Jesus rebukes Peter* – Any attempt to frustrate God’s plan of salvation is Satan’s scheme and must not be tolerated (cf. Matt. 4:10).
- C. Jesus’ teaching on the cross (8:34-8:38):
  - 1. Disciples are to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus (8:34).
  - 2. The cross is not a metaphor – the Caesarea Philippian Christ-followers would have to be prepared to forsake their Roman citizenship and to identify with him in his crucifixion; for Mark’s Roman readers, this was a very pertinent teaching for they were living at the time Nero was crucifying Christians there.
  - 3. Reasons (each begins with “for”) to take up the cross (8:35-38):
    - a. *For* “the one for whom the way of Jesus is more important than his own existence will secure his eternal being; but the one whose existence is more important Jesus will lose both Jesus and his existence” (8:35).<sup>2</sup>
    - b. *For* the whole world is not worth the forfeiture of one’s soul (8:36).
    - c. *For* a person is powerless to redeem one’s soul and to perpetuate its existence; Jesus alone has the power to sustain one eternally (8:37).
    - d. *For* those who are ashamed to identify with Jesus in “this adulterous and sinful generation” (cf. Isa. 57:3-13; Ezek. 32-41; Hos. 2:2-6), he will also be ashamed to identify with them when he returns in glory (Mark 8:38).
    - e. It is paramount to have the right understanding of the Messiah for a wrong view of the Messiah leads to a wrong view of discipleship.
  - 4. Interpreting Mark 9:1:
    - a. The phrase “And he said to them” suggests that this saying of Jesus may not be connected to the topic of his return in 8:38; rather, this saying of Jesus is probably inserted by Mark to introduce the transfiguration.
    - b. In context (prior pericope on Jesus’ teaching on his death and resurrection; subsequent pericope on transfiguration), the appearance of the kingdom of God probably refers to his resurrection.

### III. Mountaintop and countryside (9:2-29):

- A. Mountaintop experience (9:2-13):
  - 1. Going up to the mountain (9:2-8):
    - a. Allusions to Mount Sinai revelation of Yahweh (9:2a):
      - i. *After six days* is an allusion to Exodus 24:16.

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Martin, *Where the Action Is* (Glendale: Regal Books, 1977), 72.

<sup>2</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 257.

- ii. *A high mountain*, although probably Mt. Hermon or Mt. Tabor in the present case, it is nonetheless an allusion to Mt. Sinai.
    - iii. Both Moses and Elijah witnessed the manifestation of Yahweh on Mt. Sinai (Exod. 24; 1 Kgs. 19).
    - iv. Cloud descending on the mountain (Mark 9:7; cf. Exod. 24:16).
  - b. Transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:2b-4):
    - i. Transfiguration (μεταμορφώω) not of nature but of appearance.
    - ii. Moses' face shone as he reflected the presence of God but Jesus' transformation and suffusion with the divine presence was total.<sup>3</sup>
    - iii. Moses and Elijah, whose prophetic ministries now culminate in the revelation of the Son of God, hold a conversation with Jesus (9:4).
  - c. Peter's error and God's response (9:5-8):
    - i. Peter, not knowing what else to say in the presence of that terrific sight, suggests to build three tents (σκηνάς – "tabernacles") (9:5-6).
    - ii. *Cloud overshadowing them* is an allusion to the glory of Yahweh which descended on the tabernacle in Exod. 40:34-38 (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:10-11), signifying that God's tabernacle is right before their eyes (9:7a).
    - iii. God's pronouncement, "This is my beloved Son" sets Jesus apart from Moses and Elijah; "Listen to him" alludes to Deut. 18:15 (9:7b).
    - iv. In context, the disciples must listen to Jesus on the necessity of his death and resurrection as well as their participation in the same.
  - d. "And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only" (9:8).
- 2. Coming down from the mountain (9:9-13):
  - a. The transfiguration should have been sufficient for the disciples to accept God's plan (the death and resurrection of Jesus) but they do not (9:9-10).
  - b. The question posed by Peter, James, and John (9:11-13):
    - i. The reference to Malachi 4:5-6 in their question in Mark 9:11 indicates that they are now very clear that Jesus is the Messiah.
    - ii. Jesus combines their understanding of the coming of Elijah in Mal. 4:5-6 with Isa. 53 on the suffering servant (Mark 9:12).
    - iii. Jesus identifies John the Baptist as the "Elijah" to come (9:13).
- B. Countryside ministry (9:14-29):
  - 1. Ministry by the rest of the disciples (9:14-19):
    - a. The disciples who did not witness the transfiguration were attempting to cast out an unclean spirit from a boy but they did not succeed (9:14-18).

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<sup>3</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 264.

- b. Jesus attributes the disciples' failure to lack of faith (of the disciples? of the father? of the crowd?) (9:19).
  - 2. Jesus heals the boy with an unclean spirit (9:20-29):
    - a. When the spirit saw Jesus, it convulses the boy (9:20) – "This indicates how the presence of God can produce storm and stress before anything constructive is accomplished."<sup>4</sup>
    - b. The father's journey to faith (9:21-24):
      - i. Jesus' question is designed to draw the father to open up about his problem and need in order to lead him to faith (9:21).
      - ii. The father appeals to Jesus' compassion as the basis for his *help* (βοηθέω) although he has some doubt about Jesus' ability (9:22).
      - iii. Jesus' rejoinder invites the father to a response of faith (9:23).
      - iv. The father asks Jesus to *help* (βοηθέω) his unbelief; faith is what he truly needs, Jesus leads him with all compassion towards faith (9:24).
    - c. Jesus casts out the unclean spirit (9:25-27):
      - i. Upon Jesus' rebuke, the unclean spirit caused a great convulsion and departed; however, the boy appears to be dead (9:25-26a).
      - ii. The crowd believes that the boy is dead – but will the father have faith even in the face of the irreversibility of death? (9:26b).
      - iii. But Jesus holds the boy's hand and "raised him up and he was resurrected" (ἤγειρεν αὐτόν καὶ ἀνέστη) (9:27; cf. 9:10).
    - d. Jesus' private teaching to his disciples (9:28-29):
      - i. "Prayer is the focusing and directing of faith in specific requests to God... prayer testifies that spiritual power is not in oneself but in God alone, and both in trust upon his promise to save."<sup>5</sup>
      - ii. "... and fasting" was probably a later scribal insertion.
      - iii. Mountaintop experiences are to fuel countryside ministry.

#### IV. On the way: Jesus' second foretelling of his death and resurrection (9:30-32):

- A. Passing through Galilee for the final time on the way to Jerusalem (9:30-31a).
- B. Second foretelling (9:31b-32):
  - 1. Jesus generalises the perpetrators of his death to "human beings."
  - 2. However, the disciples are ignorant of his teaching and afraid to ask him.

#### V. Turning the disciples right-side up on the kingdom of God – Part 1 (9:33-50):

- A. The setting and context (9:33a):

<sup>4</sup> Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1970), 188.

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 281.

1. Typical setting for Jesus to teach his disciples in private.
  2. At Capernaum for the last time (packing up? Peter's?) *en route* to Jerusalem.
  3. The disciples are now convinced that Jesus is the Messiah and they understand that this journey to Jerusalem is to establish the kingdom of God.
- B. The argument on the way (9:33b-34):
1. Jesus prompts the disciples to confess but, like the Pharisees (3:4), they keep silence due to guilt and shame; both parties share hardened hearts (3:5; 6:52).
  2. The disciples' knowledge that they are following Jesus to Jerusalem to establish the kingdom gives rise to debates about who among them will be the greatest.
  3. Jewish theory on shame and honour permeates their whole way of life including seating arrangements (so Luke 14:7-11) and, in certain sects such as the Qumran community, the order of procession in a service (1QS 2:19-23).
  4. The disciples' thinking is naturally in line with that of their culture.
- C. Jesus' teaching on greatness in his kingdom (Mark 9:35-37):
1. The counter-cultural redefinition of greatness in God's kingdom: "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (9:35b).
  2. The object lesson of a child (9:36-37):
    - a. Children are the least significant members in ancient Jewish societies – infant mortality, inability to work, additional mouth to feed, etc.
    - b. Children are the pristine examples of "the last of all."
    - c. By attending to the need of a child, Jesus is serving the least of all in his society; the disciples are exhorted to emulate Jesus, the greatest in the kingdom, by being servants to the least significant members of society.
- D. The broadness of the kingdom of God (9:38-50):
1. The profile of the exorcist (9:38a):
    - a. Successful exorcism in the name of Jesus.
    - b. Does not belong to the Twelve.
  2. John's report – the Twelve attempted to hinder (κωλύω) the independent exorcist because "he was not following *us*" (9:38b).
  3. Jesus' rationale for not hindering (κωλύω) the independent exorcist (9:39-41):
    - a. The independent exorcist will not soon speak evil of Jesus for he does mighty work in the name of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3).
    - b. This person is not at cross purposes with that of Jesus and the Twelve; in fact, he belongs to Jesus although he does not belong to the Twelve.
    - c. The disciples should not be elitist (even if objectively so) and sectarian but have a broadness of heart for everyone who is on Jesus' side.
    - d. Recalling 9:37, Jesus reminds the Twelve that even the smallest act of kindness for his disciples do not go unrewarded by God (cf. Matt. 25:40).

4. The sin of stumbling others from following Jesus (Mark 9:42-50):
  - a. The danger of frustrating others from following Jesus (9:42):
    - i. “These little ones” refer to Jesus’ disciples (cf. 9:41).
    - ii. *Causing to sin* (σκανδαλίζω) – meaning: to put a snare (in the way), to cause to stumble, to give offense.
    - iii. The Jews fear the sea; death by drowning is a frightening way to die.
    - iv. To have a millstone hung around one’s neck as one drowns in the sea heightens the severity of the offense.
    - v. A horrific death is better than impeding others from following Jesus.
  - b. The need to overcome sin (of stumbling others) at all cost (9:43-48).<sup>6</sup>
    - i. *Cutting off offending body members* – Jesus is not advocating bodily mutilation; the hyperbole emphasises that absolutely nothing in this world can be more important than one’s participation in eternal life.
    - ii. *Hell (Gehenna)* – the Hinnom Valley, located in the southwest of Jerusalem, was the site of human sacrifice (2 Kgs. 16:3; 21:6) which was desecrated by King Josiah who turned it into a dumpsite for garbage, carcasses, and corpses (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:10); the continuous fire at the Hinnom Valley became the prevalent metaphor for hell.
    - iii. *The worm does not die and fire is not quenched* – a quote from the eschatological outlook of Isa. 66:24, “And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall now die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”
  - c. The metaphor of fire and salt (9:49-50):<sup>7</sup>
    - i. *Salted with fire* – salt is used to preserve meat; fire refers to either the fire of hell (preceding pericope) or the fire of purification, i.e., trials that prove the genuineness of faith (cf. 1 Pet. 1:7).
    - ii. If *fire* refers to hell, *salted with fire* means preservation through cognizance of the causes of sin and relentlessness in purging them.
    - iii. If *fire* refers to trials, the phrase means preservation through them.
    - iv. Jesus recommends that the believers have in themselves to the salt of “being at peace with one another.”

<sup>6</sup> Mark 9:44 and 9:46 are repeats of 9:48 (probably scribal errors); the most reliable manuscripts (and modern translations) only have 9:48. See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 102.

<sup>7</sup> Textual variants: (1) For everyone will be salted with fire”; (2) “For every sacrifice will be salted with salt”; and (3) “For everyone will be salted with fire and every sacrifice will be salted with salt.” Variant (1) should be preferred due to better manuscript attestation and provides explanation for the other two: variant (2) is probably an incorporation of a scribal marginal annotation of Lev. 2:13 and variant (3) is a combination of the two variants. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 102-103.

**VI. The way of the Lord: complete dependence on Jesus (Mark 10:13-31):**

- A. Children: vulnerable and total dependence on Jesus (10:13-16):
  - 1. The children are described in passive terms: “brought to Jesus”, “that Jesus might touch them”, “let them come”, “do not hinder them”, “to such belongs the kingdom of God”, “Jesus took them in his arms”, “Jesus blessed them”, and “Jesus laid his hands on them.”
  - 2. The disciples rebukes “them” (the children? those who brought the children?) because the disciples have not learned the lesson of 9:36-37; the disciples are in danger of stumbling the little ones from coming to Jesus (10:13).
  - 3. Jesus commands the disciples to not hinder (κωλύω) shows that they have not learned the lesson of 9:38-41 which teaches against elitism (10:14a).
  - 4. The point about the children (10:14b-15):
    - a. Children are helpless and bring nothing to the table – “whatever a child receives, he or she receives by grace on the basis of sheer neediness rather than by any merit inherent in him- or herself.”<sup>8</sup>
    - b. The children are completely dependent on the grace of Jesus to bless them and bring them into his kingdom – this is the gospel paradigm.
    - c. One who receives the kingdom of God like a child is one who accepts it on the basis of grace and not of his or her own merit.
  - 5. Jesus taking the children into his arms and blessing them by laying his hands on them indicates that, as the Sovereign of the kingdom, he accepts them into his kingdom and grants them an inheritance (10:16).
- B. Rich young man: dependence on works and possessions (10:17-31):
  - 1. *Jesus sets out on his journey*: as Jesus and his disciples set out to be *on the way* to the cross of Jerusalem, a prospective disciple sets out to join him (10:17).
  - 2. In contrast to the passive children, the rich young man is extraordinary active; from every measurement, he appears to be the ideal candidate for a disciple.
  - 3. Jesus’ response to the rich young man (10:18-19):
    - a. *Why do you call me good?* – It is not the case that Jesus does not believe that he is good; here, Jesus is questioning the man’s basis for goodness.
    - b. *No one is good except God alone* – If only God is good then the rich young man should rely on God alone and not his own merits in law-keeping.
    - c. Combining the two phrases above, Jesus is inviting the young man to come to the conclusion that if Jesus is good then he must be divine and that the young man should switch from self-reliance to Christ-reliance.

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<sup>8</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 307.

- d. Jesus lists the moral demands of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:12-16); he added “Do not defraud” as this is very relevant to rich people.
- 4. The young man’s reply to Jesus (10:20):
  - a. Given Jesus’ estimation of him (next verse), the man’s reply, “All these I have kept from my youth,” should not be read as hypocrisy or arrogance.
  - b. However, the ability to keep an *act* prescribed by a commandment speaks nothing of one’s intention (cf. Phil. 3:6).
  - c. The Torah (both the letter and the spirit of it) is meant to expose one’s sinfulness and one’s need to accept God’s grace by faith (cf. Rom. 7:7-25).
- 5. Jesus invites the man to follow him in total dependence (Mark 10:21):
  - a. Jesus loves (ἀγαπάω) the rich young man and wants eternal life for him.
  - b. Jesus reveals to him that his dependence on wealth is preventing him from accepting the Messiah (and eternal life) purely on the basis of grace.
  - c. Jesus offers himself as a substitute for the man’s possessions; he issues the same call he gave to his disciples, “Come, follow me” (1:17; 2:14).
- 6. The man rejects Jesus’ offer because he deemed his possessions to be of greater value than the Giver of eternal life (10:22; cf. 4:19!).
- 7. Jesus’ teaching on the wealthy and the kingdom of God (10:23-31):
  - a. On the difficulty for the wealthy to enter into God’s kingdom (10:23-27):
    - i. 10:23 and 10:24 repeat Jesus’ warning to the wealthy (and others who are entangled differently), which points to its importance.
    - ii. Jesus addresses his disciples as “children” (cf. 10:13-16), indicating that disciples, in contrast to the young man, are those who have nothing else to depend upon except the grace of Jesus Christ (10:24).
    - iii. *Camel through the eye of a needle* – salvation for the wealthy requires a miracle (10:25).
    - iv. The Jewish worldview is such that the wealth is due to God’s blessing for one’s faithfulness to God; the corollary is that poverty is due to God’s covenantal curse for unfaithfulness (10:26; cf. Deut. 28).
    - v. Jesus repeats to the disciples what he told the father of the boy with epilepsy – the miracle of God’s salvation is to be received by faith and not by any other means such as morality or wealth (Mark 10:27).
  - b. Jesus encourages his disciples to sacrifice it all for him (Mark 10:28-31):
    - i. Following Christ and furthering the gospel require one to be free from all entanglements, no matter how important or right those may seem – allegiance to Christ takes supremacy over all else (10:28-29).
    - ii. Those who free themselves from anything that prevents them from following Christ amidst persecution, will be rewarded a hundredfold



- (cf. 4:20!) in the Christ-community and eternal life in the age to come  
– a truly encouraging words to Mark’s audience (10:30).  
iii. “But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (10:31).

**VII. On the way: Jesus’ third foretelling of his death and resurrection (10:32-34):**

- A. Jesus leads the way on the road to his humiliation, suffering, and death in Jerusalem as the disciples cower in fear and amazement (10:32a).
- B. In response to their fear, as they approach Jerusalem, Jesus teaches the Twelve of his impending death and resurrection in greater detail (10:32b-34):
  - 1. The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes.
  - 2. They will condemn him to death.
  - 3. They will deliver him over to the Gentiles.
  - 4. The Gentiles will mock him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him.
  - 5. After three days he will rise.

**VIII. Turning the disciples right-side up on the kingdom of God – Part 2 (10:35-45):**

- A. The self-centred and power-hungry request of James and John (10:35-37):
  - 1. The Zebedee brothers ask Jesus to sign, as it were, a blank cheque (10:35).
  - 2. They request to be appointed as chief ministers in Christ’s kingdom (10:36-37).
- B. Jesus’ reply to James and John (10:38-40):
  - 1. Jesus tells them that they do not understand the cost of greatness the kingdom of God: can they drink his cup (i.e., God’s allotment for Jesus – crucifixion) and his baptism (i.e., his identification with sinners to bear their sins) (10:38)?
  - 2. When the Zebedee brothers answer his rhetorical question in the affirmative (the negative is expected), Jesus reveals to them that they will indeed undergo suffering and martyrdom for following him (10:39).
  - 3. Jesus’ answer to their request shows, in contrast to the self-exalting disciples, his humble deference to the Father: this is greatness exemplified (10:40).
- C. Jesus’ teaching on the concept of greatness (again) in the kingdom of God (10:41-45):
  - 1. The other ten disciples were indignant at the Zebedee brothers (why?) (10:41).
  - 2. Jesus teaches them that they must not follow the world’s definition of greatness, i.e., dominance over others (10:42).
  - 3. Greatness in God’s kingdom is defined by servanthood (διάκονος) (10:43-44).
  - 4. “For *even* the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (10:45; cf. Isa. 53:10-11).
  - 5. The Servant is the greatest in the kingdom; citizens should emulate their king.

**IX. The model disciple: Bartimaeus follows Jesus on the way (Mark 10:46-52):**

- A. Jericho, located twenty miles from Jerusalem, is the final leg of the road trip (10:46a).
- B. Bartimaeus' plea (10:46b-48):
  - 1. "The son of Timaeus" (translation by Mark for his audience); a blind beggar.
  - 2. "Son of David" is an explicit messianic title (cf. 2 Sam. 7:11-14); without hesitation, Bartimaeus recognises Jesus as the Messiah – "What Bartimaeus lacks in eyesight he makes up for in insight."<sup>9</sup>
  - 3. The crowd rebukes him like how the disciples rebuke the children; Bartimaeus, like the children, lacks the ability for self-reliance, relies on Christ alone.
- C. Jesus heals Bartimaeus (Mark 10:49-52a):
  - 1. Bartimaeus' cry stopped Jesus on his tracks and he calls for Bartimaeus (10:49).
  - 2. Bartimaeus throws off his cloak, probably his only possession, and jumps up to meet Jesus (10:50).
  - 3. Jesus repeats the question he asked the Zebedee brothers, "What do you want me to do for you?"; the Zebedee brothers sought fame but Bartimaeus sought wholeness and the privilege to follow Jesus (10:51; cf. 10:36).
  - 4. Jesus heals Bartimaeus due to the latter's faith and asks him to go whichever way he wants to go; Bartimaeus chooses to follow Jesus *on the way* (10:52).

**X. Conclusion:**

- A. The identity of Jesus of Nazareth is the central question everyone must answer.
- B. Faith through prayer is what fuels disciples in the ministry of God's kingdom.
- C. Misconceptions about discipleship are often due to misconceptions about the person and mission of Jesus Christ.
- D. Disciples must not be elitist/sectarian in following Christ.
- E. Disciples must not hinder others from following Christ.
- F. The kingdom of God is to be entered purely by God's miracle of grace through faith.
- G. We must set aside all encumbrances that prevent us from fully trusting in Christ.
- H. Greatness in the kingdom of Jesus Christ is not dominance but servanthood.
- I. Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for the sake of others; followers of the Servant King should do the same.
- J. Those of faith will always choose to follow Jesus on the way of the Lord.

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<sup>9</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 329.