

Uniquely Jesus

December 11, 16

Mark 8: 22-9:1

We're at the half-way point in Mark's gospel.

Mark has, in these first eight chapters, been steadily revealing to his readers who Jesus is.

But in the passage, we'll study this morning, Mark begins to address, in light of who Jesus is, what Jesus has come to do.

Mark 8:27

Where is Caesarea Philippi?



Caesarea Philippi is 40 kms north of the Sea of Galilee, at the base of Mt. Hermon. The city was known in ancient times as Panias/Banias; but was renamed Caesarea Philippi in 2 AD by Herod Philip in honor of Caesar Augustus.

Why did Jesus go there? We want to keep this question before us.



At Caesarea Philippi, there is a large cliff, over 100 feet high and about 500 feet wide, called the 'rock of the gods.'

In the center of the 'rock of the gods' is a huge cave, from which one of the largest springs feeding the Jordan River flowed.

This cave was called the "gate of Hades", because it was believed that Baal would enter and leave the underworld through caves like this one.



In front of the gate to Hades was a temple to Pan.



From the back of the temple, sacrifices would be thrown into a very deep pool of water, located in the cave.

In an open-air plaza, next to the cave mouth, there was a large niche, in which a statue of Pan (a half-goat, half-human creature) stood. FYI. There were no decent pictures I could show you of him. Also, carved into the wall were many smaller niches, which contained statues of Pan's attending nymphs.



In front of these niches, worshippers of Pan would congregate and engage in sexual rites, which included having sex with goats.



Near Caesarea Philippi was also a temple dedicated to the worship of Caesar Augustus. With this as background information, let me ask this question again: why did Jesus bring his followers... to this place? Why didn't they have this conversation in Jerusalem?

Read Mark 8:27b.

"Who do people say I am?"

Coffee/Question: In your circle of family/friends/associates, what have you heard people say about who Jesus is?

Feedback:

A good man...

A philosopher...

A prophet...

A teacher...

A madman...

An impostor...

A legend made up by people who lived long ago...

Other....

The religious leaders of that day said: – *“He is possessed by Beelzebub. By the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.”* Mark 3:22

Jesus’ family said: – *“He is out of his mind”* Mark 3:21

The people in Jesus’ home town, sneered and said: – *“Isn’t this the carpenter?”* Mark 6:3

But the disciple didn’t restate these opinions. **Mark 8:28**

The disciples told Jesus what they had recently heard.

John the Baptist – Isaiah 40:3.

Elijah – Malachi 4:5.

One of the prophets.

I find it interesting that Jesus didn’t talk with them about the differing options.

What interested Jesus, was what his disciples thought: **Mark 8:29a**

Back in Mark 4:38, they had identified Jesus as a “Teacher.”

Since then, they’d seen Jesus do many other amazing miracles.

Almost daily they’d heard Jesus teaching the crowds.

They’d had numerous debriefings with Jesus in the evenings, or as they travelled from place to place, where they asked him questions about what he had taught on that day.

So here, in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus pressed his followers –who you do say I am?

According to Jesus, it matters what we think about him.

Peter answered, **v.29b** – **“You are the Messiah.”**

“The Messiah” is a title that means Anointed One.

That word powerfully connected to the Jewish scriptures and to a deep longing in the soul of Jewish people.

What initially drew Peter to Jesus? His brother Andrew after meeting Jesus and spending a day with him, told Peter – *“We have found the Messiah.”* John 1:41.

When Jesus called Philip to follow him, he found Nathaniel, and said, *“We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”* John 1:45.

This claim.... explains why these men left everything to follow Jesus.

Now after being with him for almost two years, Jesus asks them, do you still think I am the Messiah?

Could Jesus and his disciples see “the rock of the gods” as they talked?

I can think of no other reason why Jesus would have brought them to Caesarea Philippi.



There in that particular place, which was home to a temple dedicated to the worship of Pan and another to Caesar; where, one of the “gates of hades” was located, Jesus affirmed, he was not one among many gods, but uniquely was God’s Savior.

As Mark continues to tell the story of Jesus, we will want to watch for the significance of this statement, especially in light of where it was revealed, and what Jesus began to teach them after that day.

How did Jesus respond to Peter’s confession?

Matthew 16:17: *Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.”*

Jesus affirmed to Peter, “You are right!”

But according to Jesus, how did Peter know who he was?

God the Father revealed it to him.

This piece is incredibly important.

Let’s make sure we know why.

Romans 1:20, 19, 18 says:

“Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse...”

According to Romans 1 is the existence/the reality of God hidden?

No. It is clearly seen.

What means/what venue does God use to make himself known?

The creation (what he has made).

What does the creation reveal about God?

His eternal power and his divine nature.

What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them...

Are these two characteristics of God difficult to perceive – his eternal power and his divine nature?

No. God has made them plain for any and all to see.

But this truth is suppressed by people’s godlessness and wickedness.” (paraphrase)

According to Romans 1, if someone can't see the evidence of God's power and person in the creation, why is that?

Because they have suppressed the truth.

How does a person suppress the truth of God?

By practicing sin.

Peter was not unique in that he needed God to reveal to him who Jesus is.

All of us have the same need.

Unless the Father gives understanding to our minds, and softens our hearts to perceive, **we cannot see**, neither the evidence of who God the Father is, nor the revelation he has given of himself in the person of Jesus.

There was more to Jesus' response to Peter's confession.

Matthew 16:17-18: Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

In his teaching ministry, Jesus had announced the kingdom of God was near.

But here in Caesarea Philippi he didn't say he would build the kingdom.

He said he would build - his church – as outposts of heaven on earth.

And the foundation on which his church would be built, would be a rock, far greater and more enduring than that massive rock, the 'rock of the gods,' which they could see.

It would be more powerful than the mighty Roman empire.

And all of hell's power would never overcome his church.

There in a spiritually dark and oppressive place, with a small band of followers, Jesus made these astounding claims!

Mark 8:30.

Why do you think Jesus warned the disciples to be quiet?

There really is a simple answer.

Like everyone else in Israel, the disciples' perspective of who the Messiah would be and what the Messiah would do... was sorely incomplete.

We know this because of what Jesus did next.

Mark 8:31-32a.

God had clearly communicated since the time of Adam and Eve, about the ONE who would come.

There were literally hundreds and hundreds of prophecies, along with historical incidents that pointed ahead to the Messiah – who he would be and what he would do.

What Jesus began to do with his followers that day, was to teach them, not in parables, but plainly – see v.32.

What Jesus did that day, is what he did until his arrest – see **Mark 9:31**.

In fact, even after his resurrection Jesus continued to teach them.

Luke 24:27: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

This is so important.

Our faith is based on the Scriptures.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4: For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins ‘according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day ‘according to the Scriptures’...”

What specifically did Jesus teach?

He taught them about the ‘Son of Man.’

“The Son of Man” is a unique Messianic title rooted in the prophecy of **Daniel 7:9-14**.

In this vision, the Ancient of Days gave to the one who was like ‘a son of man’ the authority, glory and sovereign power to put everything right.

Jesus taught his followers he was the One Daniel saw.

But he told them his victory would be preceded by his suffering and death.

“The Son of Man must suffer many things... must be killed... must rise again.”

The use of the word ‘**must**’ is important.

Tim Keller says, *“Never before this moment had anyone in Israel connected suffering to the Messiah.”* King’s Cross, p.96

This helps us understand why Peter reacted so strongly - v.32b.

“If Jesus could calm the sea and drive out unclean spirits, if he could heal any disease with a word or a touch, if he could raise the dead, if he could feed thousands with a few pieces of bread and a couple fish, if he could forgive sin, and redefine what could be done on the Sabbath, in Peter’s mind, how could such a Messiah fall into the hands of the religious leaders? How could they take his life?” www.gracepointdevotions.org/2010/04/19/mark-8-commentary/

But remember - Jesus never fell into the hands of the religious leaders.

Neither they, nor Pilate, nor Herod, nor the Roman soldiers, took his life.

Jesus could have called on the Father to rescue him. But he didn’t.

Instead, Jesus allowed himself to be arrested.
He never answered the false accusations that secured his conviction.
He allowed them to severely beat him and then nail him to a cross.
And at the end, he gave up his spirit - John 19:30.

But why would Jesus allow this to happen to himself? Why would the Father not stop it?
We need to feel Peter's angst and confusion.
Just moments earlier Jesus had affirmed, "Yes, I am the Messiah and my church will overcome," and now, he is saying, he will be defeated???

It didn't make sense!
And it wasn't only that day that they struggled to understand – see **Mark 9:32**.
But instead of speaking to Peter's confusion, Jesus called him out.
Why? – **v.33**.

When Jesus began his public ministry, he had faced off against Satan in the wilderness...and had won.
But Satan, though badly bruised, wasn't defeated.

Luke writes, 4:13, "*When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him... until... an opportune time.*"

Not until the cross, and his cry of victory, "*It is finished,*" would Jesus "*disarm the powers and authorities, and make a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*" See Colossians 2:15.

What this incident with Peter reveals to us, is that during Jesus' years of public ministry, Satan had continued to watch for an "opportune time."
And at Caesarea Philippi he found that opportunity in Peter's confusion.

Satan didn't openly appear to Jesus.
He remained hidden in the background.
But Peter's incomplete understanding of what the Messiah would do, along with his love for Jesus, was the opportunity Satan had been waiting for!
Through Peter's own words of shock and horror, he again tempted Jesus to choose the easier path – the path without suffering, without death.

Even though Jesus addressed Peter, he really spoke to the one in the shadows:
"Get behind me, Satan!"
Jesus answered the temptation that day, as he had answered in the wilderness.
He also affirmed as he had in the wilderness, that he would pursue the concerns of God.

What was God's will"

Isaiah 53:10 says: *"It was the LORD'S will to crush him and cause him to suffer..."*

This was how it had to be done.

Each time he was tempted by Satan, Jesus said yes to the Father – "Not my will, but yours be done."

There was no other way for the Savior to accomplish our salvation.

Who is Jesus?

Who do you say he is?

Just as it required the Father's help to understand who Jesus is, it also requires the Father's help to understand why Jesus had to suffer and die, and yes rise again.

Tim Keller wrote: *"The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."*

The gospel of Jesus is both bad and good news.

The bad news – we are hopelessly flawed by our sin.

Our situation is worse than we could ever imagine.

The good new – in Jesus, God has come to our rescue.

By Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection, God would cure the disease of sin and undo the corruption it had caused.

He would reverse the curse of death.

He would destroy the works of Satan.

He would make everything new.

This is what Jesus spent taught his followers his last year of ministry.

This is the message he implanted into the very core of their being.

This is the message they would take into the whole world.

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." 1 John 4:16

"This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." 1 John 4:9-10.

Life Group Discussion Questions, Mark 8:27-9:1

1. Do you agree/disagree and why, with the explanation given below as to why Jesus went to Caesarea Philippi?

Ray VanderLaan and other Hebrew contextual scholars ask:

Might it be possible that Jesus took his band of disciples to Caesarea Philippi, this degenerate place, in order to say to them, "THIS is where I want you to build my church. I want you to go out into degenerate places, where God is not even known. I want you to go out to places that make Caesarea Philippi look tame, and THAT is where I want you to build my church."

This is exactly what those disciples did after Jesus' death and resurrection.

They went into the strongholds of paganism, and boldly announced the good news of Jesus; and in doing so, overcame the gates of hell."

Paphos, Cyprus - the stronghold of Elymas - Acts 13:4-12

Athens, Greece - a city full of idols - Acts 17:16

Ephesus - devoted to the worship of Artemis - Acts 19

Pergamum - where Satan had his throne - Revelation 2

<http://www.fishingtheabyss.com/archives/44> Background material from Dr. Tim Brown and Ray VanderLaan.

2. Read Mark 8:34-9:1

According to Jesus, what is required of a person who follows him?

In what ways, if any, is this different from what we tell people is needed if they choose to follow Jesus?

Explain.

3. What does:

"denying themselves,"

"taking up their cross,"

and "losing their life,"

look like for us living in Sooke?

What would you say to a person thinking about following Jesus, to convince them that the price stated by Jesus was worth paying?

4. How do we lose our life for Jesus? Explain. Give examples.

What stops us from living like this?

What motivates us?

Why do you think Jesus talked in economic terms - profit, loss, gain, forfeit?

Why would he want us to do a cost/benefit analysis?

What is the cost of each option? What is the better deal?

5. How can a person be unashamed or ashamed of Jesus? Explain. Give examples.