

Mark 8.27 – 9.1

Jesus is... the crucified Messiah

Amington

Sunday 9 September 2018

Where we left off

We are picking up our Mark series right where we left off, on Easter Sunday: Jesus says, ‘Who do you say I am?’

]*Video: teacher vs student*

]*Jesus wasn’t trying to cheat on an exam – but nor was he being a petulant z-list celebrity demanding special treatment simply for being ‘famous’.*

He wanted to know what people thought – why? Because it’s easy to get the answer wrong. Jesus knew that – and Mark knew it too. The verse we began with today – Mark 8.29 – stands in the middle of Mark’s gospel, and it marks a big change in the gospel.

]*Here is a graph of Mark – chapters along the x-axis (that’s the bottom one) and miracles along the y-axis (that’s the upright one). In the middle there is a green bar – that’s where Jesus says, ‘Who do you say I am?’*

¶ Here we have the miracles in the first half – there are fifteen in total. The yellow diamonds show every time there is a summary paragraph, where Mark says something like, ‘they brought any who were sick and he healed them’.

It’s a fairly even spread – there isn’t a single chapter without at least one miracle in.


Now let’s look at the second half... ¶ as you can see, there are far fewer miracles (only five), *no* healing summaries, and four chapters without a miracle at all.


¶ Here’s another graphic – which side has more red in it – left, or right? Here’s a smaller version where it’s a bit easier to tell ¶.

To make this graphic I copied the text of Mark chapters 1-15 into a document, with Jesus’ words in red. Then I made the text smaller and smaller until it fit on two pages – as you can see Jesus does a *lot* more teaching in the second half of Mark’s gospel.

I believe this reflects the reality of Jesus’ ministry – as he turned towards Jerusalem, Jesus started to *explain* who he was, instead of simply *showing* who he was. Three times he told his disciples he would be arrested, tried, killed, and rise again – but they didn’t understand. Why? We’ll find out in a few moments...

Superman?

If I told you Superman was about to arrive, I expect you'd picture something like this...  [video of Clark Kent becoming Superman](#).

You certainly wouldn't picture someone like  'Gerald Home', star of the 1980s Mr Muscle adverts... Remember him??

To Jews in Jesus' day, hearing the word 'Messiah' would have made people think of a superhero warrior awesome victory conquering guy, who would free them from the occupying Roman forces, and rule as a godly and wise king – sort of like the best bits of David and Solomon mixed together.

A few decades earlier there had been someone they thought would be the 'Messiah': Judas Maccabeus, who led a revolt against the Greek empire, and restored true worship in Jerusalem.

But, it hadn't lasted – so the Jewish people were expecting someone else, whose victory *would* last. When they saw Jesus performing all those miracles, talk started to grow – 'Can it be? Is it him? Is now the time?'

They were, of course, right: Jesus *was* the Messiah. But they were, of course, also wrong: Jesus wasn't *that* kind of Messiah.

Why did he *have* to die?

¶ I'd like to talk a little about Superman.

If you don't know the story, as a child Superman – real name Kal-L – was rescued from the dying planet Krypton by his parents, Jor-L and Lora. The rescue pod lands in Iowa, where a childless couple – Mr and Mrs Kent find the baby and raise him as their own son, Clark. As Clark grows up, he discovers he isn't like the other children – he has superpowers, and is virtually invulnerable. But he is also a 'nice guy', so when he grows up, he spends his time rescuing people and saving the world. One of his abilities is super hearing, so he can hear cries for help from thousands of miles away – and off he flies, to the rescue.

Why couldn't Jesus be like that? I mean, *really*? We aren't talking about comic books here, we are talking about the God who created the universe, the hands that flung stars into space, the one who holds the world in the palm of his hand... *why couldn't he be like Superman?*

Mark says

Jesus 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.

Mark 8.31 (NIV)

The word is **must**. Not 'will', or 'might', but **must**. Why?

The first reason is that we humans don't like being told we are in the wrong. We like to be right **!** Jesus came and told people that they were missing the point – that religious observance means nothing unless it comes from the heart. He told people that they needed to repent, to turn back to God and say sorry for ignoring him. He told people that they can't do whatever they want and think it's ok – even if they are doing it for 'love'.

Jesus told us what it means to be truly human – and that means putting and loving *God* first, not ourselves. And people didn't like it – so of course Jesus was going to be rejected.

But the second reason is perhaps more important. Superman comes to us from outside, from another planet – and pretends to be human, cunningly disguised by a pair of fake glasses.

Jesus comes to us from outside, too – but not ‘in disguise’ – *he was and is really human*. Jesus emptied himself of his glory and majesty, so he could *become* human.

He didn’t arrive by spaceship from another planet – he was *born*, into poverty. He grew up, ate food, grew tired, hungry and thirsty, fell out with his family, got frustrated and angry. He was *exactly* as we are – except he didn’t sin.

Think of it like this: if someone falls, we have to stoop down to help them up. *That’s what Jesus did*.

He *had* to suffer, because people suffer. He *had* to be rejected, because people are rejected. He had to be killed unjustly because people are killed unjustly.

All these things *had* to happen, because *that’s where we’ve fallen*, and so *that’s where he had to stoop to pick us up*.

It is a chastening truth – but also a wonderful one, because *that’s how much he loves us*. Jesus knew exactly what was coming – he told his disciples at least three times. And yet he went, willingly, though with great pain and sadness, *because he loves us*.

So that’s the third reason: he *had* to suffer and die, *because he loves us*, and his love for us is stronger, even than death.

Someone Else

We are all saddened to learn this week of the death of one of our church's most valuable members, Someone Else. Someone's passing created a vacancy that will be difficult to fill. They have been with us for many years, and for every one of those years, Someone did far more than a normal person's share of the work. Whenever leadership was mentioned, this wonderful person was looked to for inspiration as well as results: 'Someone Else can work with *that* group.' Whenever there was a job to do, a meeting to attend, one name was on everyone's list: Someone Else. 'Let Someone Else do it' was a common refrain heard throughout the church. It was common knowledge that Someone Else was among the largest givers in the church. Whenever there was a financial need, everyone just assumed Someone Else would make up the difference. Someone Else was a wonderful person, sometimes appearing superhuman; but a person can only do so much. Were the truth known, everybody expected too much of Someone Else. Now Someone Else is gone! We wonder what we are going to do. Someone Else left a wonderful example to follow, but who is going to follow it? Who is going to do the things Someone Else did? Remember – we can't depend on Someone Else anymore!

How do we live?

If Jesus wasn't Superman, neither are we. Jesus doesn't expect us to be perfect, either before or after he welcomes us into his family.

I often wonder what people think being a Christian is about. Do people think it's about living a good life, not killing anyone, being kind to people, being polite, paying your taxes, listening to and respecting authority figures, not complaining but getting on with life? These are all good things – but they are more to do with being British than following Jesus.

Shall we see what Jesus says he expects from his followers?

‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’

Mark 8.34 (NIV)

What does it mean to **take up [your] cross**? Well, what did it mean for Jesus?

What does it mean to **deny [ourselves]**? It means not trusting our hearts, but listening to God. It means not doing whatever we feel like – no matter how much we want to, or how good it makes us feel. It means putting *God* first, not ourselves.

Friends, Jesus does not expect his followers to be perfect, and he does not promise a perfect life of ease.

Instead, he calls us to a life of self-sacrifice, putting others before ourselves, putting *God* first, and not our own selfish desires. He calls us to deny ourselves, not to cling on to what we have, but to open our hands and let it go – and find that God has infinitely more in his hands to give us, than we could ever hold onto in ours.

In a few minutes we will be sharing communion together. The bread and wine are like signposts – they point us to the way Jesus gave his life for us, in our place. And, they point us to the way he offers that life, freely, to everyone – all we have to do is open our hands, and receive it.

And then? And then we go out there and share that life with everyone we meet, living lives of self-sacrifice and self-denial, lives of love and faithfulness – not expecting perfection, but doing our best, knowing that Jesus is with us as we try to follow him together, every day and in every way.