



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

Mark 8:27-38 Jesus, recognised as Messiah, predicts his death (15 August)

We come in this passage to what has been called the 'pinnacle' and centre of Mark's Gospel. Peter (probably speaking on behalf of all the Twelve) states his belief not just that Jesus is a prophet – which would place him on a par with a number of OT prophets – but that he is unique: the Messiah. (*Messiah* is the Hebrew word, *Christ* is the Greek word, for *anointed one*.)

The whole Gospel immediately starts moving in a new direction: Jesus suddenly begins to forecast his coming suffering and death (v.31). The disciples have been convinced that Jesus is the Messiah for whom they have been waiting, but now they learn he will be a *suffering* Messiah. This completely goes against their traditional understanding of a victorious, conquering Messiah. Peter's reaction illustrates this: he has no time for any notion of God's glorious Messiah being rejected by his own people and executed. God's unexpected way of suffering through the cross goes against human reasoning and concerns. But this is God's way as predicted in the OT – Isaiah 53:3-5, 10; 55:8-9 – and is the way to victory.

Mk 8:31 underlines that he **MUST** be killed and rise from the dead. Christ's death is necessary because the eternal, Messianic rule of God begins with atonement for sin – that is, the sacrifice that will bring reconciliation between God and humanity. The Messianic Ruler of God's eternal kingdom has come to die for people's sins. Without this, there is no eternal life.

This way of the cross has implications for anyone who follows Jesus. Self-denial means abandoning our own agenda – whether social, political or spiritual – in favour of seeking God's priorities in everything. Whoever lives a self-centred life focused on this present world and its priorities ('would save their life') will not find eternal life with God ('will lose it'). But whoever gives up their self-centred life of rebellion against God ('loses their life') for the sake of Christ and the gospel, will find everlasting communion with God ('will save it') – v.38.

1. Why did Peter react so strongly to what Jesus said (v.32)? Why does Jesus respond so harshly to Peter (v.33)?
2. In what sense is Peter's confession of Jesus incomplete? In light of what Jesus goes on to say and the reaction (v.31-33), what did Peter and the disciples not yet grasp about Jesus? What characteristics of Jesus most

affect you? What characteristics do you think you need to understand more?

3. What is the reason for Jesus' disciples denying themselves (v.34-38)? What is the danger if we resist self-denial and instead pursue the things of the world? How did Jesus set a pattern of self-denial in the verses immediately before v.34?
4. Jesus does not want to be proclaimed King unless he is proclaimed as the King who must die. What does this mean for the way in which we tell the message about Jesus?
5. What makes the way of the cross worthwhile (v.35)?
6. In an age where we are often told the importance of 'loving ourselves' and 'being true to ourselves', how do we respond to Jesus' demands that we are to deny ourselves and lose our lives (v.34-35)?
7. Are there any ways in which we are in danger of being ashamed of Christ (v.38)? What is the opposite of being ashamed of Jesus?
8. How would you summarise the essence of the Christian life from these verses in Mark?
9. How might people today answer the question "Who is Jesus?" What would be *your* answer, and how would you explain it?

Images of Jesus, butWho do YOU say that I am?

