

Bible Study Guide: Week of 9-6-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Mark 8:27-38

²⁷Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

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This week Jesus and his disciples continue traveling to relatively distant lands. Caesarea Philippi was about 30 miles north of Capernaum—probably a few days’ journey. Located in the modern Golan Heights region, as its name implies, Caesarea was named after Augustus Caesar, the first Roman Emperor. It was so named by Philip, one of the sons of Herod the Great who ruled that region at the time—hence, Caesarea Philippi. It was originally known as Paneas after Pan, the Greek god of the wilderness. Against this backdrop of pagan gods and secular rulers, Jesus asks the disciples who others think he is and who they think he is. Peter’s reply is, of course, correct. As we will see, however, Jesus redefines the concept of Messiah from what Peter and many others probably thought it meant. Jesus’ order is characteristic of the gospel of Mark—we’ve seen such a stern warning before. Here, the Greek word is *epitimaō*—the same verb used to describe Jesus’ silencing of the demons in Mark 1 and of the storm at sea in Mark 4. Jesus admonishes the disciples here the same way he admonished the storm at sea and the demons. Both stormy seas and demons were, of course, associated with chaos and evil in the ancient mind. It is interesting, then, that Jesus speaks to the disciples the same way he spoke to the wind and the demons.

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Here, we jump from Peter’s profoundly correct answer that Jesus is the Messiah to Peter’s profoundly wrong interpretation of messiahship. To be fair, who among us would not question Jesus’ outrageous suggestion that his own suffering and death were necessary? Obviously, with 2,000 years of hindsight we can begin to understand Jesus’ plan, but his disciples were hearing all of this for the first time. The word used to describe Jesus’ speech here can mean that he said these things “boldly”—that is, spoke them bluntly or with impudence. Or it can mean he spoke to them frankly or directly. Or it can mean he spoke these things publicly. I would imagine it is something of a mix of these three options, but perhaps “publicly” fits as well as anything here, particularly given Peter’s

somewhat gracious response to pull Jesus aside in private to rebuke him. This word for “rebuke” is, once again, “*epitimaō*.” Upon Peter’s attempt to pull him aside, Jesus came back to the whole group of disciples and began to rebuke them all—Peter included. Again, the word here is “*epitimaō*.” Between the repeated use of that word in this passage, its connection with demons and the murky, chaotic sea earlier in the gospel, and Jesus’ use of the term “Satan,” we get the sense that a spiritual battle is playing out between Jesus and the disciples. He attempts to silence them in part because he knows they are doing the work of the adversary in trying to talk him out of his plan to go to the cross.

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In the last section of our gospel lesson Jesus gets even more bold and open and public with his message. He calls the crowd together with his disciples and doubles down on his harsh language about the necessity of suffering. Not only will he suffer, but those who wish to follow him will have to prepare for the possibility of suffering, as well—taking up their cross and following him. The term for “life” here is “*psyche*”—soul or innermost being. In a sense, what Jesus is saying is that it is no good to be rich in possessions if one has to give up their very essence in order to make that happen. Or if one’s only concerns are selfish ambitions and motives, one will miss out on the challenge and blessing of the good news Jesus came to bring.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. Why do you think it was significant that Jesus asked the disciples about his identity while they were in Caesarea Philippi?**
- 2. What do you think Jesus meant by saying “Get behind me, Satan!” and to whom do you think he was speaking?**
- 3. How do you think a Roman citizen or Jewish person would have interpreted Jesus’ words about taking up the cross at that time?**