

September 14, 2025

THE SUFFERING MESSIAH AND HIS FOLLOWERS

Mark 8:27-9:1

(19 of 22 in a series through Mark 1-9)

One of my favorite New Testament scholars, Simon Gathercole, opens the second chapter of his book on the preexistence of the Son of God by writing, “The previous chapter aimed to provide evidence of the widespread dispersion of preexistence Christology in earliest Christianity. . . . The present chapter functions as the second half of the preparatory work for the exegesis of the relevant passages in the Synoptic Gospels.”¹ Now, how gripping is that? Not at all, right? It's downright boring prose. It certainly wasn't written to be entertaining. In fact, the surest sign that even Gathercole himself knew his book was boring was when he humorously thanked his publisher in the introduction for allowing him to retain the rights to the contents of the book should anyone ever want to turn it into a major motion picture. It's hard to make a monograph on the pre-existence of the Son of God in the gospels the most gripping writing ever.

Moreover, in that second chapter, Gathercole only had one aim. He wanted to begin the chapter by reminding the reader of what had been established in chapter one and then tell the reader what he was going to argue in chapter two. That feels like it's necessarily boring. A transitional paragraph that tells what the author has said and then what he plans to focus on next can't be done in an exciting way, can it? Well, I think Mark would say it can. In fact, I think Mark 8:27-9:1, the text we're looking at this morning, *proves* it can.

Mark 8:27-9:1 is something of a transitional text in Mark's gospel. Up to this point, most of Mark's writing has focused on who Jesus is. You may remember back when we started the gospel, Mark's opening words identified Jesus as the “Son of God” (1:1) and then focused on individuals who testified to Jesus' identity.² We've seen Jesus as the one who heals the sick, casts out demons, forgives sins, raises the dead, walks on water, feeds thousands with only a few loaves of bread, and more. That's what these first eight chapters have largely been about—who Jesus is.

From this point on, however, Mark's gospel will transition to focusing more on what Jesus will do to redeem a people for himself, focusing on his suffering, death, and resurrection. We'll see Jesus repeatedly tell his disciples over these next few chapters that he'll suffer, be killed, and then rise from the dead (e.g., 9:30-32, 10:32-34). Then, the final chapters are all located in Jerusalem, the very place where all of this will take place. We're at the point in Mark's gospel where he's established who Jesus is, and he will now focus on Jesus' redemptive work for us. That means that the text we're looking at this morning is a transitional text. It's the equivalent of that

¹ Simon Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), p. 46.

² <https://cccjackson.org/sermons/testimony-to-the-identity-of-jesus>.

opening paragraph in the second chapter of Gathercole's book where he said, "The previous chapter this this, and now the second chapter will do that." But instead of providing us boring prose, Mark reminds us of who Jesus is (the focus of chapters 1-8) and turns our focus to what Jesus will do to redeem us (the focus of chapters 9-16) by telling us of an interaction that Jesus had with his disciples about these very issues. The interaction is interesting, gripping even, to the point that we don't even necessarily recognize that Mark is writing a transitional few paragraphs. Nor is Mark content simply to remind us of who Jesus is and tell us what he's going to focus on concerning Christ's redemptive work. He goes ahead and begins fleshing out for us what that means for us as followers of Jesus. So, those are the three things I want us to see: the identity of Jesus, the nature of his redeeming work, and what that means for us. So, let's start with Jesus' identity, as Mark reminds us that Jesus is God's promised and eternal king.

Jesus is God's promised and eternal king

Let me first explain to you why I'm saying this point in this way, and then I'll show you how Mark reminds us of Jesus' identity as God's promised and eternal king in the text. If you read through the Old Testament, the biggest issue you come away with is looking forward to the day when God will bring his promised, eternal king who will make all things right. The reason that's the case is because in the middle of David's reign as king, David had wanted to build a temple—a house for the Lord. At that time, the ark of the covenant, which represented the Lord's presence, had been in the tabernacle, which was a tent-like structure. Therefore, David thought it unreasonable that he live in a nice house while the Lord's house was a tent. So, he wanted to build the temple.

Well, eventually God told him not to do so because that was what Solomon would one day do (as we saw Aaron address a couple of weeks ago). But in the midst of God telling David that he wasn't to build the temple, God revealed to him that he'd one day raise up one of his offspring who would reign over God's kingdom forever (2 Sam 7). That is, he'd raise up one from David's line who would be God's promised and eternal king. This king would one day come, save his people, judge his enemies, and make everything right.

And the word eventually used for this promised one prior to the writing of the New Testament was "Messiah," which means God's "anointed one." So, the Jews looked for this coming Messiah. Well, when the New Testament was written, Greek had become the dominant language, and so when the New Testament speaks of this "Messiah," instead of using the Hebrew term, we see the Greek term for the same thing, which is "Christ." So, "Messiah," "Christ," and "anointed one" are all terms that refer to the same person—this glorious, eternal king that God promised David he would raise up from his line. That's the one any reader of the Old Testament would have been looking and longing for. Now, with that in mind, we can see how Mark shows us that Jesus is this promised, eternal king in verses 27-30.

As that section opens, Jesus is taking the disciples on a road trip to Caesarea Philippi when, on the way, he poses a question to them, asking, "Who do people say that I am?" (v. 27). And they answer that some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others one of the prophets. And some of these answers make sense. We know that Herod had thought he was John the Baptist

because he had a guilty conscience for killing John. Elijah makes sense because through Malachi God had declared, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes” (Mal 4:5), though Jesus will actually identify John the Baptist as the “Elijah” whom God promised. And the answer that Jesus is one of the prophets makes sense because God had promised Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15 that he’d raise up a prophet like Moses for the people to listen to. So, besides Herod’s weird idea, these answers make some sense and would be pretty flattering for anyone who isn’t, well, *Jesus* (the God-man).

But then Jesus turns his attention to the disciples’ opinion, asking them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter (as a representative of the group) says, “You are the Christ” (v. 29). And Jesus didn’t say, “Peter, are you kidding me. That’s not who I am. You think too highly of me,” or the like. Rather, he affirms this, charging the disciples not to tell anyone (no doubt because people had all kinds of misconceptions about what the Messiah would do).

So there we have it. Mark reminds us of Jesus’ identity, which he has shown repeatedly through the first half of this book, by telling us who Jesus is through Peter’s confession. Jesus is God’s promised and eternal king. He is the Messiah. He is the Christ.

Now, that clearly establishes that Jesus is man. He is the one descended from David’s line. But I’ll also remind you that all of these promises in the Old Testament about David’s promised son coming, speak of him in greater and greater ways. In fact, in Isaiah 9:6-7, the prophet says of the Messiah, that he’ll be called, “Wonderful Counselor, *Mighty God*, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” and will reign “on the throne of David and over his kingdom . . . forevermore.” So, to say Jesus is the Messiah or Christ is not merely to affirm he’s human (David’s son) but also to affirm he’s God. That’s why we say that Jesus, the Christ, is the God-man. And so, this brief interaction with Jesus and the disciples is Mark’s way of saying, “In the first half of this gospel, we’ve established who Jesus is.” But now, Mark will transition to a focus on Jesus’ redeeming work, which he reveals right in our text, as he tells us that Jesus, as God’s promised king, will suffer, die, and rise from the dead.

Jesus, as God’s promised king, will suffer, die, and rise from the dead

Now, of course, I say “will” instead of “did” because I’m looking at it from the vantagepoint of the text itself. But from our perspective, we know this has already happened. Let’s look, though, at how Mark shows us this. Again, we’ll see, that he shows us what will be the focus of the rest of the book through another conversation Jesus has with his disciples. And, interestingly, he just straightforwardly tells them what is going to happen. In fact, Mark tells us that he spoke “plainly” to them, as Jesus “began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again” (vv. 31-32).

Again, to us, this isn’t surprising because we know this is exactly what Jesus did. But to the disciples, this idea that Jesus would suffer, be rejected, and be killed didn’t fit with their understanding of Jesus as the Messiah. Peter even sought to correct Jesus on this, as Mark tells

us that “Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him” (v. 32). Now, why in the world would Peter do this, and how did he have the audacity to think he could rebuke the one whom he just confessed is God’s promised and eternal king?

Well, I’m not exactly sure how he had the audacity except to say that Peter probably thought he had scriptural backing for his idea that the Messiah would *not* be rejected, suffer, and be killed. After all, if you look at Isaiah 60-66, reading about what God’s promised king would do, you see him not only proclaiming “liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound” (Is 61:1) and bringing salvation and reward to his redeemed people (Is 62:11-12) but also conquering his enemies. In fact, in one picture from Isaiah, the Messiah comes onto the scene, looking like he’d been treading grapes in the winepress. His garments are crimson, covered in red. His attire suggests he’s been stomping on grapes to make wine, and the red wine has splattered all over his robe. But then you realize that it’s not red wine splattered up on his robe, it’s the blood of his enemies staining his garments because he has trampled them down as one tramples grapes in the winepress (Is 63:1-6). It’s hard to send a message more clearly that the Messiah will come and judge his enemies.

Therefore, it doesn’t take much imagination to see that Peter might have been confused at Jesus’ announcement that his enemies will inflict suffering on him and kill him. Peter no doubt reminded him, “Jesus, if you’re the Messiah, you’ll trample your enemies until their blood stains your robe, not be killed by them.” Do you see how Peter might have been confused?

But Peter missed one huge detail and misunderstood another. The detail he missed is that the Messiah would not only come and judge his enemies, but he’d save his people from their sins. And Isaiah had made it absolutely clear that in order to save us from our sins, the Messiah must suffer and die for us. Isaiah 53 had given a clear picture that our Savior would suffer in such a way that he’d be “despised and rejected by men” (v. 3). Onlookers would judge that he was being “stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” (v. 4). And they’d be right. Jesus would bear God’s wrath on the cross. But what Isaiah also says is the Christ wouldn’t suffer these things for his own sins or because he deserved it in any way. Rather, as the sinless one, he would be “pierced for *our* transgressions” and “crushed for *our* iniquities” (v. 5) as the Lord would lay on him “the iniquity of *us all*” (v. 6). He would bear our iniquities and the punishment they deserved, but in doing so, he’d make us “to be accounted righteous” (v. 11).

You see, our holy God doesn’t simply overlook sin. When he revealed himself to Moses, he made clear that he would not let the guilty go unpunished (Exod 34:7). He is a just God who must punish sinners. But here’s the miracle. His promised king, the God-man, would suffer in our place as our substitute. As God, the cross is a work of self-substitution. God is both the subject and object of meting out and bearing divine wrath on the cross. As man, and specifically as our high priest, Jesus is our representative, bearing our penalty in our place so that we might not have to bear it but instead could be credited with his perfect righteousness. That’s the glory of Christ’s penalty-bearing, substitutionary death for us. And the Old Testament had been clear about that. Indeed, Isaiah 53 could hardly spell it out clearer. That’s what the Messiah must do in order to save us, and that’s what Peter had missed. The Messiah must suffer and be killed.

And Peter had also misunderstood another reality. Yes, the Messiah would judge his enemies like a man trampling them down in a winepress. But that wouldn't happen until the end. In other words, Jesus carries out the work of salvation and judgment not in one coming but in two. In the first, he came to live, die, and be raised for his people. He did everything necessary for our salvation. In his second coming, he'll come to take us home and give us resurrection bodies, bringing about our final salvation. But he'll also, at that time, judge his enemies, fully and finally, casting them into the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels. That's what Peter had misunderstood. The Messiah will judge his enemies, but that won't happen fully and finally until Jesus comes again. Peter, no doubt, hadn't even imagined the Messiah would come, then leave, and then come again. But that's exactly what Jesus does.

Moreover, by not wanting Jesus to suffer and die, Peter had aligned himself with the very temptation that Satan had thrown at Jesus. Remember how the devil had tempted Jesus to bypass the cross and simply bow to him in order to get all the kingdoms of the earth? Well, by telling Jesus he shouldn't suffer and die, Peter was essentially joining with the devil in hurling that temptation at Jesus. That's why Jesus responded, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (v. 33). Nothing would stop Jesus from being obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. But God's self-substituting, redeeming work could never be imagined by man, and Peter hadn't begun to see it. He one day would, but his blindness was being removed in stages. Jesus, as God's promised king, would suffer, die, and rise again.

Well, we might ask, what are the implications of this for us? Here it is: those who follow Jesus as God's promised king must be willing to suffer as he did.

Those who follow Jesus, as God's promised king, must be willing to suffer as he did

Now, Jesus hadn't mentioned specifically in the prediction of his death that he'd die by crucifixion, a form of capital punishment where one would be tied or nailed to a cross to hang there until you bled out, suffocated, or the like. But he makes that clear when he tells the crowd what is demanded of one who would follow him. Mark tells us that Jesus called the crowd to him with his disciples and said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (vv. 34-35).

What Jesus is saying here would have been clear to his followers who understood crucifixion. If you're going to follow me, you must be willing to suffer and die for me. It doesn't mean that everyone who follows Jesus will be martyred, but we must be willing for that to be our fate. That means that if we're to follow Jesus, we must treasure him more than our own lives. Let us not deceive ourselves about that. Jesus demands that we prize him above our own lives. When believers in Smyrna were facing persecution for their allegiance to Jesus, he didn't tell them, "Okay, now you can back off if you need to in your commitment to me. Things are getting out of

hand.” Rather, he told them, “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10). Jesus demands our lives.

As I was meditating on this section of the text on Wednesday, I got the news that Charlie Kirk had been shot. I stopped and pleaded with the Lord to preserve his life, only getting news about an hour later that he’d died. Charlie had been a bold political voice for conservative values, but by his own confession, that was secondary to him.³ He was ultimately about holding up the gospel. Days before his death, he had posted, “Tell someone about Jesus this weekend,” “The resurrection of Jesus is a fact of history. It really happened. Jesus rose from the dead,” and “Jesus defeated death so you can live.” And Jesus tells his followers, “You will be hated by all for my name’s sake” (Matt 10:22).

Jesus doesn’t pull punches about what it costs to follow him. But he also makes two things clear. Those who are faithful to him to death will receive the crown of life. We may die, but death will only usher us into eternal life in the presence of Jesus, and in the end, we’ll be raised. It’s impossible to sacrifice for Jesus’ sake when eternal life awaits us. And he also makes clear that refusing to follow him means we’ll face the wrath of the Lamb on that great day. That’s why Jesus says that the one who would save his life will lose it (v. 35).

This means that you and I must make clear the nature of his gospel. We don’t proclaim a message that offers people a better life that they may opt for or dismiss. Jesus makes clear that if someone chooses their life over following him, they’ll face his furious wrath in judgment. He’ll be ashamed of those in judgment who are ashamed of him in this life. So, when we proclaim the gospel, we don’t need to think of it as an offer that one can take or leave, whatever they prefer.

We need to think of gospel proclamation as if we’re in war, and Jesus, our conquering king, is riding through the land, pouring out his wrath on all who refuse to bow the knee to him. But we’ve been sent on ahead of him, and everyone we encounter who opposes him, we can offer good news. And the good news is this, they can lay down their weapons, repent of their rebellion, trust in him as they’re only hope, be spared his wrath, and become his beloved subjects in his kingdom. But if they refuse, the conquering king is coming, and his judgment will be merciless. There is no middle ground. That’s what Jesus is saying here.

When he comes again, it won’t be in humility, but in glory. Our text ends with Jesus telling his disciples that some of them would get to see this glory, and a few days later Peter, James, and John would see Jesus transfigured. And I doubt they ever forgot that glimpse of his glory. It’s why they were willing to die for him and to plead with others to bow the knee in faith to him. So, let’s come and proclaim our allegiance to him this morning by coming to the table, proclaiming that we will not treasure even our lives more than our crucified and risen king, Jesus. Amen.

³ See <https://x.com/gotrice2024/status/1966087168713207981>.