

LESSON SEVEN

TITLE The Way of the Servant

SCRIPTURE Mark 8:27–9:50

MEMORY VERSE

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

MAIN IDEA OF TEXT

Jesus is the God-sent Messiah who calls us to serve others and lay down our lives for them.

BEGIN this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of his Word, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study.

1 GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

TEACHER TIP

Start your lesson by telling a story that relates to the main idea of the lesson to grab the attention of your participants. In this section, we have provided you with two options, but feel free to develop your own.

OPTION 1: SCENE FROM CHERNOBYL

On the morning of April 26, 1986, an explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine in the former U.S.S.R. created a nuclear fallout that spread across the region and tragically killed countless people, but the damage of this disaster actually could have been much worse. A second explosion from one of the reactors would have caused the whole power plant to go into full meltdown and spread nuclear fallout further into Western Europe, killing untold millions and destroying the land for generations.

A second explosion was avoided because of the bravery of three men, known as the Chernobyl Three, who volunteered to drain the pool underneath a burning reactor, even though they knew it would expose them to highly lethal doses of radiation. It was essentially a suicide mission, but these brave men gave their lives for the sake of others.

Let's watch a scene from the T.V. series Chernobyl that dramatically retells a part of this lesser-known tale of heroism and self-sacrifice.

(Play scene from the series: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsRr-FkCXOA>)

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *"You'll do it because it must be done." When in your life did you do something difficult or make a sacrifice because it had to be done? What did you learn from the experience?*
2. *Think of someone you know who gives sacrificially for others. What are they like? How do they live?*
3. *What other stories of self-sacrifice are particularly powerful to you? Why?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text: The Chernobyl Three courageously gave their lives to save untold millions from death and destruction, even though they knew it would cost them their lives. We resonate with stories of self-sacrifice because they show us the capacity within the human heart to love others and give sacrificially for them.

Prior to his arrest and eventual death on the cross, Jesus told his disciples, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). Throughout Jesus's ministry he alluded to his suffering and death and why it was necessary. This week we are going to look at what Jesus taught his disciples about his impending death and what it means to, like Jesus, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow him.

OPTION 2: SCENE FROM THE IRON GIANT

You might not think a cartoon about a lonely boy and his robot friend would give us a powerful story of self-sacrifice, but the film *The Iron Giant* does just that. Over the course of this animated film, the boy and robot forge a friendship in the town of Rockwell. They bond over superhero comics and the boy teaches the giant that he can choose to be a hero instead of the villain that the military portrays him to be. When the giant learns that a missile has been launched and will destroy Rockwell, he decides that this is his moment to be a true hero for his friend and for others.

Let's watch the climactic scene from this film and reflect on how it shows us the power of sacrificial love for others.

(Play scene from the film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myltbPFbc4U>)

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *Share with someone about a time when someone loved you in a sacrificial way and it had a big impact on you. What did you learn from them?*
2. *Where do you see opportunities in your life to serve others in a sacrificial way?*
3. *What other stories of self-sacrifice are particularly powerful to you? Why?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text: There is something truly superhero-like when someone gives themselves sacrificially to help or save others. We resonate with stories of self-sacrifice because they show us the capacity within the human heart to love others and give sacrificially for them. They also point us to the original and only genuine superhero, Jesus.

Prior to his arrest and eventual death on the cross, Jesus told his disciples, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). Throughout Jesus's ministry he alluded to his suffering and death and why it was necessary. This week we are going to look at what Jesus taught his disciples about his impending death and what it means to, like Jesus, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow him.

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find the historical, cultural, and literary context you need to properly interpret and apply the text.

OUTLINE

1. The Identity and Purpose of Jesus and His Disciples (8:27–9:1)
 - A. Jesus is the Messiah and Suffering Servant (vv. 27–30)
 - i. Jesus questions his disciples about his true identity (vv. 27–28)
 - ii. Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah (vv. 29–30)
 - iii. Jesus predicts his death (8:31–33)
 1. Jesus reveals that he must suffer and die (vv. 31)
 2. Peter rebukes Jesus—Jesus rebukes Peter (vv. 32–33)
 - B. Jesus’s disciples must follow in his footsteps of suffering and death (8:34–9:1)
 - i. The way of the disciple is the way of the cross (v. 34)
 - ii. You must lose your life in order to save it (vv. 35–37)
 - iii. Accept the way of the cross instead of the ways of the world (v. 38)
2. The Transfiguration (9:1–13)
 - A. Jesus alludes to this event to the crowds and his disciples (v. 1)
 - B. Jesus leads three of his disciples to a mountain where he is transfigured before them (vv. 2–4)
 - C. Peter speaks out of fear (vv. 5–6)
 - D. God the Father declares his love and approval of his Son (v. 7)
 - E. The event ends abruptly (v. 8)
 - F. Jesus helps his disciples understand why he must suffer and die (vv. 9–13)
3. The Healing of a Boy Possessed by an Impure Spirit (9:14–29)
 - A. A large crowd greets Jesus and his disciples (vv. 14–16)
 - B. A father tells Jesus about his son who is possessed by an evil spirit and the disciples’ inability to cast it out (vv. 17–18)
 - C. Jesus laments the unbelief of that generation (v. 19)
 - D. The father pleads for pity and help from Jesus (vv. 20–22)
 - E. Jesus speaks about the power of faith (vv. 23–24)
 - F. Jesus casts out the impure spirit (vv. 25–27)
4. Jesus Teaches His Disciples (9:28–50)
 - A. Prayer has power (vv. 28–29)
 - B. Jesus predicts his death a second time (vv. 30–32)
 - C. A disciple is a servant (vv. 33–37)
 - D. A disciple does not value status over others (vv. 38–41)
 - E. Sin is dangerous and deadly and those who lead others to sin will be punished (vv. 42–49)
 - F. Humility and service bring peace to the community (v. 50)

CONTEXT

Jesus has had encounters with the religious leaders of his day and teaches them and his disciples about the nature of God’s kingdom, that it is truly upside-down and unlike other worldly kingdoms. He has also continued to perform miracles of healing that demonstrate that he is truly the God-sent Messiah.

FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS

The greatest are those who have power, control, and status over others.

GOSPEL RESPONSE

Like Jesus at the Cross, true greatness comes in laying down your life for others.

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find exercises you can use to lead your class through the process of Observation, Interpretation, and Application. As the teacher, work through all the exercises below to ensure you gain a good understanding of the text.

This section of Mark's gospel is filled with exciting events in the life and ministry of Jesus as well as his teaching on what it means to follow him as his disciple. When we read the gospels, we can easily identify with the disciples who followed Jesus. They saw something in Jesus that made them leave everything to become disciples. At the same time, they often were confused and did not understand the things that Jesus taught and did until much later.

From the outset of this passage, we see Peter declare whom he believes Jesus to be—the Messiah. He is the promised one. The one sent from God to liberate God's people from bondage to sin and back into a relationship with God. How did Jesus accomplish this mission? By coming as a servant and by laying down his life for others.

Through Jesus's life and teaching, we have a model for how to live in this world and understand what it means to follow him as a disciple. Rest assured that this part of Mark's gospel gives us much to discuss and reflect on, because Jesus reveals to us what his disciples' attitude and actions are to be like. What are they to be like? Just like Jesus in the way that he lived to serve others and to give his life for them.

27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

28 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

31 He then 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.

32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

9 And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. 4 And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

5 Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." 6 (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

7 Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

8 Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10 They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

11 And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

12 Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? 13 But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him."

14 When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. 15 As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

16 "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.

17 A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. 18 Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

19 "You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

20 So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

21 Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. 22 "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

23 "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

29 He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

30 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." 32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

36 He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 37 “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

38 “Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”

39 “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, 40 for whoever is not against us is for us. 41 Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

42 “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. [44] 45 And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. [46] 47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 where

“the worms that eat them do not die,
and the fire is not quenched.”

49 Everyone will be salted with fire.

50 “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: CHART THE PASSAGE

This passage contains significant words and actions of Jesus. Read through the passage and make a list of the things Jesus says and does.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: UNDERLINE THE VERBS

Mark moves the plot of Jesus’s story forward through Jesus’s actions. Read through the passage three times. On the third reading, circle the verbs and note who or what they are associated with.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: IDENTIFYING KEY THEMES

Read the passage and write down as single words or short phrases what you think are the key themes. Remember that identifying key themes will help you develop a good overall-grasp of the passage.

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: CHART THE PASSAGE

Go back to your list. What do the significant things Jesus said and did reveal about his character and purpose?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: UNDERLINE THE VERBS

What do the verbs associated with Jesus reveal about his actions and his character?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: COMPARE TRANSLATIONS

Our study material uses the New International Version (NIV) which is an idea to idea translation. It can often be helpful to compare how different translations word a passage or story. The New American Standard Bible (NASB) is a word-to-word translation that is more direct translation of each word in the original Greek. The English Standard Version (ESV) attempts to find a middle ground between word-to-word and idea-to-idea translating. The New Living Translation (NLT) chooses readability and can help bring the main idea of a passage to our time. Other helpful translations to consult are the New English Translation (NET) and the Christian Standard Bible (CSB). biblegateway.com is a helpful tool when looking up the different translations.

How do the different translations help you discern the most important themes in the passage?

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find questions to choose from that will help your group consider how God is calling them to respond to the text. Help your group set measurable action steps.

APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?

QUESTION 1: Jesus called his followers to take up their cross and follow him. Where in your life is God calling you to lay down your life or put to death something so that you might live and experience more of him?

QUESTION 2: What are the roadblocks in life that can keep you from following Jesus with wholehearted commitment and desire?

QUESTION 3: In what areas of your life do you need faith to believe that, with faith, anything is possible with God? How might the faith of the proclamation, "I do believe; Help me overcome my unbelief!" in Mark 9:24 help you in this?

QUESTION 4: How could God use your time, talent, and treasure to give to others in a sacrificial way? What might the cost be to you?

QUESTION 5: What would it look for our church community to commit to following in the footsteps of Jesus—to serve and give our lives for others?

4

CHALLENGE

TEACHER TIP

End your time of study with one final challenge and prayer. Your final challenge should pull together everything you covered in this lesson and call your participants to action.

Jesus makes it clear to us that there is a cost to discipleship. Following him demands nothing less than sacrifice and turning from our normal ways of thinking and living and choosing to live by a new way—his way. The way of sacrifice is clearly seen in Jesus. He lived as a servant, sent by God, to give his life for the sake of others. This was the mission and character of God's Messiah.

The power of the gospel can be seen in the self-sacrificial love of Jesus who chose the way of the cross and death so that we might live and become the men and women we were created to be. He sacrificed so that we might inherit something we were always meant for—adoption into God's family as a son or daughter. He sacrificed so that we might be indwelt and empowered by God's Spirit to finally be able to live as a true disciple who is humble, serves others, gives to help those in need, welcomes the lowly, and has access to God's power through faith and prayer. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Today we are witnesses of Jesus as his followers and we seek to live as he did—with God-given power through faith and prayer. Faith that his way of living leads to life, growth, and flourishing and prayer that God's kingdom would come, and his will would be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). How are we to witness as disciples of Jesus? Through the sacrificial love and giving of ourselves to others that he modeled for us. By living to serve and sacrifice, we show others what Jesus is like and what it looks like to follow him as a disciple.

LET'S PRAY

COMMENTARY

MARK 8:27-30

James A. Brooks, in his commentary in *The New American Commentary*, provides insight into the significance of what Jesus and his disciples discussed regarding his true identity.

8:27 Caesarea Philippi constituted a rebuilding and enlargement of the ancient city of Paneas by Philip the tetrarch. Paneas was the site of a grotto dedicated to the god Pan. When Herod the Great acquired Iturea, he built a temple in Paneas and dedicated it to the emperor Augustus. When Herod died and Philip succeeded him as the Roman client-king, he renamed the city for the emperor and for himself. The qualification “of Philip” was a necessity in order to distinguish the city, which was about twenty-five miles north of Lake Galilee, from the Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea, which was built by Herod the Great and also named for Augustus. The city enjoyed a most beautiful setting at the foot of Mt. Hermon and beside some gushing springs that constitute one of the sources of the Jordan River.

The Greek expression “on the way” appears seven times in this division (also 9:33, 34; 10:17, 32, 46, 52) and only twice elsewhere (8:3; 11:8). It characterizes the division and perhaps even sets forth a theme of the division. Some describe the entire division as a journey to Jerusalem, but that journey does not begin until 10:1. The entire division is, however, a journey to discipleship.

In rabbinic circles the students usually asked the questions, and the teacher provided the answers. That Jesus here asked the question is just one of many indications that he was not a typical rabbi. “People” (REB, NRSV) is a better translation than “men” because the Greek word properly means human being.

8:28 These “popular” opinions of Jesus are quite similar to those of 6:14-15. Mark cited them only to show their inadequacy.

8:29 In the Greek text the word translated “you” is emphatic because it is the first word in the clause. The NIV evidently tries to bring that out by inserting “But what about you?” Peter functioned as the spokesman for the group so that the confession was as much theirs as it was his. The term “Christ” has not appeared since 1:1. “Christ” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Messiah.” It is translated “Messiah” here by the NRSV, NEB, REB, and GNB.

The account provides another instance of Mark’s use of irony. On the one hand, Peter’s confession went beyond that of the crowds. Jesus was the promised Messiah/Christ. On the other hand, the sequel shows that Peter and the other disciples did not understand what kind of Messiah Jesus was. No doubt Peter had a typical Jewish understanding of a military conqueror who would free the Jews from foreign domination. There is no evidence that any Jew in pre-Christian times thought in terms of a suffering Messiah. The confession, although correct, was also inadequate.¹ For this reason Mark did not indicate that Jesus either accepted or rejected it (cf. Matt 16:17-19). The confession resembles the first, incomplete phase of the previous healing.

8:30 Understanding why Jesus would command silence about a healing or exorcism is relatively easy, but why he would attempt to prevent further confession of his identity is relatively difficult. The

answer has to do both with the popular misconception of the nature and role of the Messiah and with the insufficiency of identifying Jesus only as the Messiah. The verb translated “warned” ordinarily means to rebuke (previously in 1:25; 3:12; 4:39 and in vv. 32–33 following, although the first two are obscured in the NIV). The association of this term with demons and Satan (1:25; 3:12; 8:33) suggests that the popular conception of messiahship is not only inadequate but erroneous.

MARK 8:31–33

Jesus’s prediction of his death was, without question, a surprise to his disciples. In *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss explain the way that Jesus both explained and rebuked his disciples with regard to this aspect of his earthly ministry.

8:31 Jesus now begins to teach his disciples what messiahship really means. However, he does not refer to himself as “Messiah” but as “the Son of Man.” Since this title is so important theologically, extended comment is in order (see comments at 2:10). “Son of Man” is by far Jesus’ favorite self-designation in the Gospels, where it occurs eighty-one times. In them, no one else, neither friend nor foe, refers to Jesus as “the Son of Man” (unless 2:10, 28 are viewed as Mark’s editorial comments; see comments there).

“Son of Man” is a Hebrew (and Aramaic) phrase that occurs in the OT. In the Psalms it means simply “human being” (cf. Pss 8:4; 80:17); and in Ezekiel, where it occurs over ninety times, it is the particular name by which God addresses the prophet. These OT passages throw some light on the NT usage of the phrase. The most important text, however, is Daniel 7:13–14:

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man [i.e., a human being], coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

This passage, depicting the Son of Man as a heavenly figure who at the end time brings the kingdom to the oppressed on earth, is especially reflected in the sayings of Jesus in Mark’s gospel that speak of the coming of the Son of Man with glory and power (8:38; 13:26; 14:62). The title has, however, been infused with additional meaning, especially in those passages that associate the Son of Man with suffering and death (8:31; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 14:21, 41). The combination of eschatological glory with suffering and death characterizes the “Son of Man” idea in Mark’s gospel and elsewhere in the Synoptics. It is evident that Jesus considered “Son of Man” a messianic title because immediately following Peter’s confession of him as the Christ, he began to teach them that the Son of Man (equivalent to Christ in v. 29) must suffer. Presumably, Jesus preferred the title “Son of Man” because, unlike “Messiah,” it was not freighted with political connotations that might prove harmful to his God-appointed mission.

The Son of Man “must [dei, GK 1256] suffer.” Gould, 153, remarks, “The necessity arises, first, from the hostility of men; secondly, from the spiritual nature of his work, which made it impossible for him to oppose force to force; and thirdly, from the providential purpose of God, who made the death of Jesus the central thing in redemption.”

If *dei* refers to God’s will in Scripture, the most likely reference is to the Suffering Servant passage in

Isaiah 52:13–53:12. The Targum to Isaiah shows how difficult it was for the Jews to associate suffering with the Messiah. There the sufferings refer to the people and the other statements in the passage to the Messiah (cf. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC–AD 135)* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979], 2.547–49). It is debated among scholars whether first-century Jews had any conception of a suffering Messiah or whether expectations for the Davidic Messiah were explicitly linked to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Some argue that evidence for a suffering Messiah existed in Judaism before Jesus' day, but that later Jewish sources suppressed it because of anti-Christian polemic (see TDNT 5:677–717; Cranfield, 277). Others such as H. H. Rowley (*The Servant of the Lord and other Essays on the Old Testament* [London: Lutterworth, 1952], 90) claim that "there is no serious evidence ... of the bringing together of the concepts of the suffering servant and the Davidic Messiah before the Christian era." Whether or not such an absolute conclusion can be drawn, it seems safe to conclude, both from the NT and from the paucity of references in Second Temple Judaism, that there was little widespread or popular expectation that the Messiah would suffer and/or die. Jesus' affirmations, therefore, come as a shock and surprise to the disciples.

Jesus predicted that the rejection of the Messiah would be by three main groups: the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law. These three groups made up the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court. The elders were the lay members of the Sanhedrin. The chief priests included not only Caiaphas, the high priest, and Annas, the emeritus high priest, but also the members of the high priestly families. The teachers of the law were the professional scribes and experts in the Mosaic law, who served as advisers to the Sanhedrin (see comments at 1:22). One might wonder where the Pharisees are in this listing, since they are portrayed as Jesus' consistent enemies throughout the gospel of Mark. The answer is that the Pharisees (and Sadducees) comprised religio-political parties rather than offices. The elders identified here would have included both Pharisees and Sadducees, and many of the scribes would have also been Pharisees. There were indeed Pharisees on the Sanhedrin, though they were in the minority.

The death of the Son of Man would be followed by his vindication: after three days he would be raised from the dead. "After three days" (which occurs also in Mk 9:31; 10:34) at first sight seems problematic, since Jesus was raised on a Sunday after his crucifixion on a Friday. Matthew (16:21; 17:23; 20:19) and Luke (9:22; 18:33) use the expression "on the third day," which may indicate they had difficulty with the Markan expression. Several explanations present themselves. Some have noted that "after three days" could be another way of saying "after a short period of time" (Hurtado, 142; cf. Hos 6:2; Jnh 1:17). More likely, the phrase reflects the Jewish custom of counting any part of a day as a day, so that "after three days" is the same as "on the third day" or "the day after tomorrow" (cf. France, 337; Taylor, 378). At least twice Josephus (*Ant.* 7.11.6 §§280–81; 8.8.1 §§214, 218) uses the expression "after three days" to refer to an event that occurs on the third day.

Verse 31 is particularly important because it is the only explanation in Mark's gospel of "the messianic secret." Jesus did not want his messiahship to be disclosed, for it involved suffering, rejection, and death. Igniting popular expectations of messiahship would have hindered, if not prevented, the accomplishment of his divinely ordained (dei, "must") messianic mission.

8:32 Jesus now spoke "plainly" or "with boldness" (*parresia*) about his suffering role as Son of Man and Messiah. The message got through to Peter, but he refused to accept it. Peter had the greatest difficulty in conceiving of messiahship in any other than the popular theological and political categories. A suffering Messiah? Unthinkable! The Messiah was a symbol of strength, not weakness. So Peter took Jesus aside and, amazingly, rebuked him. As noted above (v. 31), the word translated "rebuked" (*epitimao*) here and in v. 33 is the same one used for the silencing of the demons (1:25;

3:12).

8:33 Jesus' words to Peter were not only very severe but also deliberately spoken in the presence of the other disciples ("Jesus turned and looked at his disciples"). They probably shared Peter's views and needed the rebuke too. The severity of the rebuke arises from Jesus' recognition, in Peter's attempt to dissuade him from going to the cross, the same temptation he had experienced from Satan at the outset of his ministry. Satan offered him the option of using the world's means for accomplishing his mission (cf. Mt 4:8-10). On that occasion Jesus rebuked him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only' " (Mt 4:10). Here, too, Jesus recognized the satanic opposition in Peter. " 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns' " (TNIV). Peter was opposing the divine will and so acting as a spokesperson for the archenemy. He was looking at things from a merely human perspective (ta ton anthronon)—probably from the popular Jewish expectation that the Messiah would achieve victory through power and conquest. That was the way the world thought. But it was not how God had planned Jesus' ministry and mission, which would entail suffering and sacrifice.

MARK 8:34-9:1

Geoffrey Grogan, in his Focus on the Bible Commentary, chronicles Jesus's challenge to his disciples about the true nature of discipleship.

Jesus now takes the challenge to Peter's thinking to a deeper level still. Not only is the true disciple to accept the necessity for a cross for Jesus. He is to accept a cross for himself. Here, even in the region of Caesarea Philippi, which was twenty-five miles and more north of the familiar lakeside, there was still a crowd close at hand. Jesus gave this challenging teaching to them as well as to his disciples.

It is notable that Jesus did an unusual thing on this occasion. He invited the crowd to draw near to him. This meant of course that he was giving emphasis to the fact that the teaching he gave here was not meant simply for his closest disciples. There was an important lesson that needed to be heard and understood by all who were giving Jesus a hearing. This teaching was relevant to everybody, and it represents basic truth about Christian discipleship that applies in every place and in every age, for these conditions have never been amended or modified by the One who gave them.

The presence of the crowd in the story reminds us that, at a certain level, Jesus needed no recruiting drive for disciples. If all discipleship involved was following him from place to place, many were willing to do that. It might involve leaving one's familiar surroundings and the various comforts of a settled home-life, but there were many compensations. Drama was never far away, for people were constantly being healed, and this irrespective of the kind of ailments or disabilities they had, and demons were being cast out. In fact, you never really knew what might happen when Jesus was around. The travelling band of disciples were constantly being surprised by the things that happened. Moreover Jesus had such a gift for telling stories that gripped and fascinated all who heard, and people hung upon his words. No wonder his presence acted like a magnet everywhere he went! There had to be more to discipleship than this, and Jesus made this very clear on this occasion.

The same Greek word is used in two sayings of Jesus in this passage, those in verses 33 and 34. In the first of these, the NIV translates it 'behind' and in the second 'after'. The word was regularly used in a physical sense, but Jesus makes it very plain here that he is not simply referring to a physical

following. What did he mean by denying self? He certainly did not mean the temporary loss of a few luxuries, the absence of which might even do us good, but rather a total revolution of outlook, a major readjustment of values and so of priorities. It involved a complete about-turn. It meant in fact embracing a way of thought that came from God (v. 33). For Jesus, this way of thinking God's thoughts after him meant accepting the cross, and this is what it would mean also for the disciples.

At that time a cross would be immediately understood as a place of death, and this it was, yet the word 'death' does not adequately sum up the full horror of crucifixion. Death can sometimes be sudden, even momentary, and sometimes it can even be relatively painless. Crucifixion however meant a lingering, dreadfully painful death. If it was comparable to anything, it was to being tortured to death. Crucifixion also meant a deeply shameful death. It was such for the Jews, for they would recall the words of Deuteronomy 21:23: 'anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.' The Romans too regarded it as the most ignominious of deaths, and they reserved it for slaves and for the worst of criminals. So it meant social ostracism and utter loneliness at a time of the deepest suffering, when the slightest crumb of comfort would have been longed for. Here then are the conditions of discipleship given on the authority of the Christ of God.

Jesus then goes on to explore the implications of this call. The NIV translation fails to reveal to the reader that 'life' in verse 35 and 'soul' in verses 36 and 37 are translations of the same Greek word. This points up the paradoxical nature of this teaching. To be unconcerned about my life is in fact to show the greatest concern for it. Losing it, I will find it. This mystery, puzzling at the intellectual level and quite unacceptable to most non-Christian thinking, shows itself to be profoundly true in the actual experience of the Christian disciple. It is out of death that true life comes. Paul has much to say about this in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, especially in the later chapters of it, where he applies this principle particularly to Christian service.

The linking of Jesus and the gospel in verse 35 and of Jesus and his words in verse 38 are probably two different ways of saying virtually the same thing. At this stage, Jesus was the preacher of the gospel, and he had been proclaiming the good news of God ever since the beginning of his ministry (1:14, 15). Through his death and resurrection, however, he was to become the very gospel itself.

It is interesting to find that he links loyalty to him with the fact that the generation is adulterous, for adultery was often used in the Old Testament as a figure for apostasy, for religious disloyalty. It was the Pharisees and Pharisaic ways of thinking that dominated the religious scene not only in the Holy Land but also everywhere in the Gentile world where Jews had gone. That this generation should be described as adulterous, with all the Old Testament associations with idolatry that this would bring, would have been enormously surprising and deeply shocking, and the use of a figure of speech with such a background means that there can be little doubt that Jesus had his own Jewish people in mind in saying them. The word suggests that there had been, despite their preoccupation with the Law, a departure from God. Perhaps he had in mind their concern with outward things to the neglect of the inward.

The words of Jesus here also suggest that loyalty to him is not in fact disloyalty to God, as if he were a rival, but an expression of it, for he is in fact the Son of God. We wonder if Peter reflected on the solemn words of verse 38 after his threefold denial of Jesus. If so the forgiveness that Jesus brought to him must have seemed almost beyond belief, wonderful fact as it was. This verse contains the first clear reference in this Gospel to the second advent and, along with the reference to the resurrection (v. 31), was a note of strong hope for the future of his cause. His death would certainly not be the end.

A great deal has been written on 9:1. The fact that not only in this Gospel but also in the parallel passages, in Matthew 17:1 and Luke 9:28, a note of time is given that links this saying with the Transfiguration, indicates that the two events should be understood together. This event was a quite special revelation of the power of the kingdom in the glory of its King, but, as this saying of Jesus indicated, only some of the disciples would witness this. To this great event we must now turn.

MARK 9:1-13

The Transfiguration is certainly a bizarre event in the Bible. Rodney L. Cooper, in the Holman New Testament Commentary, helps the reader of scripture understand why this event was important and how it was connected to Jesus's life and ministry.

9:1. This verse is actually the ending of chapter 8 rather than the beginning of chapter 9. It sets up the action that follows—one of the most disputed events in the Gospels. I tell you the truth is a strong injunction from Jesus to those who are listening to pay close attention. The prophecy in this verse is problematic. What did Jesus refer to when he mentioned the kingdom of God coming with power?

9:2. The phrase six days is also mentioned by Matthew. Luke records eight. The eight would be counting the days including Peter's confession and Jesus' transfiguration, while six would be including only the days between these two momentous events. While some commentators believe the mention of six days is Mark's way of noting that this event happened in an historical time and place, it is also possible that the mention of the six days would be a reminder to the reader of the six days of creation. In this case, God's power was being revealed in an undeniable way, as it had been in the days of creation.

Peter, James, and John were chosen as witnesses to the events that follow. Perhaps this was because these three had shown themselves receptive to spiritual truth more than the others. These three had been with Jesus in the earlier miracle of raising Jairus's daughter from the dead.

9:3. R. Alan Cole (Mark, p. 210) notes that white was an unusual color in ancient Palestine. It soiled too easily to be of much practical use. Thus, its mention here signifies something unusual. White is the color of purity, most often identified with God's saints.

9:4. The appearance of Moses and Elijah represent the coming together of the Law and the Prophets. Each of these sections of the Old Testament Scriptures had prophesied about the coming of the Messiah. Here was their fulfillment. Furthermore, Elijah was the restorer of all things. "The stress on Elijah's presence at the transfiguration indicates that the fulfillment of 'all things' has arrived" (Lane, quoted in Barbieri, Mark, p. 196).

9:5-6. As usual, Peter was the first to speak in this situation. Some people talk when they are nervous, afraid, or embarrassed. Verse 6 suggests that Peter was one of these types. Luke 9:32 records that the transfiguration and surprise visitors awakened the three disciples from sleep. Shelters is variously translated as "booths," "tents," and "tabernacles." This suggests that Peter was perhaps ready to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast, described in Leviticus 23:42, commemorated the wandering in the wilderness by the Hebrews. It reminded them how God had brought his people out of Egypt and how the people lived in tents or booths in the wilderness. The celebration occurs five days after the Day of Atonement. The two in conjunction were a reminder of humanity's total dependence upon God.

9:7. Peter's suggestion, and indeed Jewish tradition itself, placed the Messiah on the same level with Moses and Elijah. The cloud covered the mountain, and when it was lifted only Jesus was revealed. The voice of God, speaking the same words that were spoken at Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:17), confirmed that Jesus was on a higher level than the Law and the Prophets—greater than these two highest representatives of everything good in the Jewish religious system.

A cloud was usually identified with God's presence (see Exod. 13:21) and later with Jesus' return in glory. The words regarding Jesus' identity reconfirmed the original message at his baptism, and added an imperative, Listen to him. He was the one who carried authority, as they had witnessed in the miracles; therefore, they should listen to him. Listening in this sense involves listening obediently—with one's entire being.

9:8-9. This event could be easily misunderstood. Therefore, Jesus enjoined the three disciples not to tell anyone about what had happened until after his resurrection when it could be proclaimed freely. This may happen to us at times as his followers. We may receive a special insight into Scripture, or the Holy Spirit may move us in new and exciting directions. We may experience a quickening of God's Spirit within us as he prepares us for his work. But God also knows the best timing. Galatians 4:4 reminds us that in the fullness of time, God sent his Son. His timing is perfect.

9:10. This verse may seem puzzling at first. The Jews were familiar with the concept of resurrection, or at least resuscitation, although it was not widely believed. Abraham, ready to do God's command and sacrifice his son, expected Isaac to be raised from the dead (Heb. 11:19), and Elijah raised a widow's son from death (2 Kgs. 4:32-37). So the concept was not foreign to the Jews. The difficulty the disciples had may have arisen from the concept of Jesus being raised from the dead. He was the Messiah, and there was no room in their thinking for a suffering, dying Messiah.

9:11. The talk of resurrection may have stirred recollections of Elijah's ministry, leading to the discussion that followed. The fact that they asked the question, though, points to their belief that Jesus was the Messiah. They did not have a clear conception of what the Messiah would accomplish, but it is clear that they believed Jesus to be the Messiah. It was commonly believed among the Jews that Elijah would appear before the Messiah.

9:12-13. Jesus stated that this prophecy had been fulfilled in John the Baptist and that he was rejected. How much worse would the people reject the Son of Man? Most interpreters believe Jesus was referring here to the Suffering Servant song in Isaiah 53. He was still concerned to teach his disciples that the Messiah must suffer and die. The fact that Jesus brought up his death again after referring to it just a few minutes before may point to the disciples' unwillingness to believe what Jesus was saying. But he was determined that they would look at reality and not get lost in theological debate.

MARK 9:14-29

Warren W. Wiersbe, with great clarity and down-to-earth style, gives the reader insight into the power that God gives us through faith in him.

The Christian life is "a land of hills and valleys" (Deut. 11:11). In one day, a disciple can move from the glory of heaven to the attacks of hell. When our Lord and His three friends returned to the other nine disciples, they found them involved in a dual problem: they were unable to deliver a boy from

demonic control, and the scribes were debating with them and perhaps even taunting them because of their failure. As always, it was Jesus who stepped in to solve the problem.

The boy was both deaf and dumb (Mark 9:17, 25), and the demon was doing his best to destroy him. Imagine what it would be like for that father to try to care for the boy and protect him! Jesus had given His disciples authority to cast out demons (Mark 6:7, 13), and yet their ministry to the boy was ineffective. No wonder the Lord was grieved with them! How often He must be grieved with us when we fail to use the spiritual resources He has graciously given to His people!

Since the disciples had failed, the desperate father was not even sure that Jesus could succeed; hence his statement, "If you can do anything" (Mark 9:22, NASB). However, the father was honest enough to admit his own unbelief and to ask the Lord to help him and his son. Jesus did cast out the demon and restore the boy to his father.

The main lesson of this miracle is the power of faith to overcome the enemy (Mark 9:19, 23-24; and see Matt. 17:20). Why had the nine disciples failed? Because they had been careless in their personal spiritual walk and had neglected prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29). The authority that Jesus had given them was effective only if exercised by faith, but faith must be cultivated through spiritual discipline and devotion. It may be that the absence of their Lord, or His taking the three disciples with Him and leaving them behind, had dampened their spiritual fervor and diminished their faith. Not only did their failure embarrass them, but it also robbed the Lord of glory and gave the enemy opportunity to criticize. It is our faith in Him that glorifies God (Rom. 4:20).

MARK 9:31-36

R.C. Sproul, in his commentary in the Reformation Study Bible, reflects on what Jesus taught his disciples about being a disciple and living for him.

9:31 teaching his disciples. Again and again Jesus gives priority to the training of the Twelve. Jesus repeats, for emphasis and because the lesson is still unlearned, the forecast of His suffering and resurrection that He previously gave them (8:31).

9:33 house. See note on 2:1.

9:34 who was the greatest. The disciples' dispute over their relative positions of honor demonstrates how thoroughly "they did not understand" Jesus' prediction of the suffering ahead of Him (v. 32). Given the importance of honor in that society, such considerations play a significant role (see 10:35-45). Jesus is bringing about a revolution in that way of thinking, though without destroying the notion of functional hierarchy. See note on 5:37.

9:35 called the twelve. Again the Twelve are singled out (3:14), and their position of leadership is explicitly recognized, even as their understanding of what leadership entails is radically reconfigured.

If anyone would be first. Jesus is not attacking leadership positions, but showing the way in which such roles should be exercised (i.e., as the "last ... and servant of all"). This principle is exemplified by Jesus Himself, who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (10:45). The self-giving manner in which Jesus fulfills His messianic role, which is the first and foremost role in the kingdom, provides the standard for His disciples in whatever secondary roles

they might exercise in the kingdom of God.

9:36 a child. Lit. "infant." The God-given dignity of every human being is exemplified by the little child. This weakest of human beings must be served in the same way as the greatest (9:35 note). By identifying Himself (and the Father who sent Him) with infants and toddlers, who are weak and needy rather than powerful and productive, Jesus counters the inclination to assign people's value according to their usefulness (see 10:13–16).

MARK 9:35–49

The call of Jesus is not often easily understood. However, with the help of John D. Barry, Jesus's call is seen in a light that is more understandable and practical.

9:35 servant Echoes the words of Isa 52:13–53:12, which Jesus will fulfill (compare note on Mark 9:12). Jesus demonstrates this principle by sacrificing His own life.

9:38 he was not following us The apostles apparently believe that they are the only authorized agents of Jesus.

9:41 he will never lose his reward Alludes to the day of final judgment and the expectations that Jesus' followers treat all people with love and kindness. This distinguishes them from those who do not follow Jesus (compare Matt 25:31–46).

9:42 these little ones In Jesus' analogy, this refers most directly to children (Mark 9:36–37), but the implication is that God will deal with those who mislead other people (compare 10:24).

9:43 cut it off Jesus' hyperbolic language here and in His similar descriptions in vv. 43–47 shows the drastic effects of sin—that it only produces death and destruction.

life Refers to eternal life, continuing the theme of final judgment (v. 41).

hell The Greek term used here, *geenna*, is a transliteration of the Hebrew phrase for the "Valley of Hinnom." This valley, located near Jerusalem, was associated with idolatrous sacrifices in Israel's past (e.g., 2 Chr 33:6). In Jesus' time it was used as a metaphor for God's wrath.

unquenchable fire This and Mark 9:48 could imply that those who perpetually and unrepentantly turn from Jesus will experience eternal punishment for their sin. It could also be an affirmation that God's decision to vanquish sin from the earth—and consequently eliminate unrepentant sinners—cannot be undone (see note on 2 Pet 3:7; note on 2 Pet 3:9). Either way, God must ultimately bring final judgment for there to be peace on earth, because sin is what causes disharmony with God's good purposes.

9:45 better for you It is unlikely that Jesus intends for His followers to cut off their appendages. Rather, He indicates the seriousness of sin and the exceeding worth of the life He offers.

9:47 enter into the kingdom of God Focuses on the eternal aspects of God's kingdom. Jesus is referring here to entering God's presence after bodily death or final judgment.

9:48 where their worm does not die Jesus alludes to Isaiah's description of the ultimate fate of the unrepentant wicked (see Isa 66:24 and note).

fire is not extinguished See note on Mark 9:43; note on Isa 66:24.

9:49 everyone will be salted with fire In the previous verses, Jesus associates fire with judgment for unrepentant sinners, suggesting that here Jesus is referring to everyone being judged. Those who choose Jesus experience eternal life (Mark 9:43; compare note on 2 Pet 3:7; Rev 20:11-15).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Hans F. Bayer, *Mark*, The ESV Study Bible.

James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary.

D.A. Carson, *Mark*, The NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible.

Rodney L. Cooper, *Mark*, Holman New Testament Commentary.

Donald English, *The Message of Mark*, The Bible Speaks Today.

Timothy Gombis, *Mark*, The Story of God Bible Commentary.

Geoffrey Grogan, *Mark: Good News from Jerusalem*, Focus on the Bible Commentary.

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Leland Ryken, Introduction to *Mark*: Literary Features, The ESV Study Bible.

R.C. Sproul, *Mark*, The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version.

Charles Swindoll, *Mark*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary.

Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Mark*, The Bible Exposition Commentary.

