

I really struggled, as I began writing the message for this week:

- The **first** half of the reading tells us a lot about Jesus, and the nature of what it means for Jesus to be the Christ... and it's **really** important
- The **second** half of the reading tells us a lot about the **Disciples of** Jesus, and the nature of what it means to **be** a true disciple of Jesus And **it's** really important too...

And so there's a lot of **really** important stuff here – And if we get our teeth into it, there's plenty for 3 or 4 weeks of messages... But it would be wrong, to divide it up. It's really important that we hold it all together, because the nature of what it means for Jesus to be the Christ, is so inter-twined and connected to the call of discipleship, it would be vandalism to disconnect it...

**Too often**, the suffering, dying Jesus is seen as the one who disconnects his followers from suffering and dying... **Too often** Jesus gets presented, as the one who was cursed, so that his followers can be blessed...

- He was poor, so we can be rich;
- He was physically tortured and abused so we can be physically safe
- He was put to death so that we might live....

For **too long**, the suffering, dying Jesus has been presented, as the one who disconnects his followers from the very cost of being a disciple...

Now, some who hear this message today, are going to love it, and some are going to be repulsed by it...

Some of you, will be greatly encouraged by these words of Jesus – you'll find them to be some of the most wonderful; inspiring; **encouraging** words that:

- increase your faith;
- gladden your heart; and
- confirm your purpose and calling as a disciple of Jesus...

But some others who hear these words of Jesus, and who listen to this message today, will be shaken to the core... For some, these will be very hard words indeed... - Words that they reject, and some will even find them 'repulsive', because they cannot believe that God could ever let his children suffer...

So in the full knowledge that some of you will be gladdened, while some will be repulsed, let's begin:

**Mark 8:27 - 9:1....**

Those are some tough words, hey.... Let's pray...

*Precious, loving, Heavenly Father,*

*Today, as we study Your word,  
we come in the full knowledge that in many ways,  
we tend to set our minds on the things of man...*

*But Lord, we ask now, that You would help us,  
by Your Holy Spirit,  
to set our minds on the things of God...*

*That we would not be ashamed of You,  
Or ashamed of your words,  
Even though they be repulsive to the world...*

*Open the eyes of our hearts Lord,  
And give us understanding  
We ask in Jesus Name,  
Amen.*

Righto:

Today's reading, is the turning point in the Gospel of Mark...

**1.**

First of all, it's a turning-point geographically... Apart from Jesus' baptism, up until now, Jesus has been flitting from spot to spot, mainly in the rural areas of Galilee and Northern Israel... And his starting point today, is in the villages around Caesarea Philippi... *Geographically, this is about the furthest you can get away from Jerusalem, and still be in Israel*...

And from this point, Jesus now sets His face towards Jerusalem, and He begins His journey toward Jerusalem, where He has an appointment with the cross...

**2.**

Secondly, it's a turning point in establishing the identity of Jesus. Up until now, the disciples haven't been able to figure out who Jesus is... But today, the realisation finally dawns on them, when Peter says "You are the Christ." ("You're the Messiah")...

### 3.

And thirdly;

It's a turning point in teaching... Up until now, we've been hearing a fair bit about the Kingdom of God, but we haven't heard much about "The Son of Man". (in the first 7.5 chapters), only twice (back in Chapter 2), Jesus described Himself as "The Son of Man"... In the **remaining** 8.5 chapters, we hear it **11** times: "The Son of Man" ...

What's the significance in this: In Daniel 7, the "Son of Man" is pictured as the eternal King, of an eternal Kingdom... We have the judgment of God, followed by the establishment of this eternal Kingdom...

And Jesus now begins teaching them that "Yeah, I am the Son of Man", but He's also teaching them, that before the glorious rule of His Kingdom, The Son of Man has to suffer first... And today's reading sets the tone for this.

Jesus asks: **"Who do people say that I am?"**

Now, obviously it's has been a topic of conversation (why wouldn't it be?): Jesus has been doing these amazing miracles, and so far, we've been catching glimpses of the

comments “Who is this?” “Who can do this sort of stuff?” ...  
I mean:

- healing the sick;
- driving out demons;
- walked on water;
- Made the blind to see and the deaf to hear;
- Feed of the 5000; 4000
- The way that He taught with such insight and authority...

His Spiritual abilities, and the amazing insight and authority to His teaching outweighed the abilities of a man of Jesus' age, with little or no education... And so they thought maybe He's one of the great prophets who's come back to life.... (John The Baptist; Elijah; one of the other prophets)...

Now, if we were to consider that question today (“**Who do people say that Jesus is?**”), we'd get all sorts of answers. Some people would say:

- good teacher
- wise sage
- mystic / guru
- Kind man
- conman
- political activist, on a quest for social change

Today, we'd get all sorts of answers...

But Jesus followed that question up, with a much more intensely personal question... And it's a question that all of us have to answer... “**But who do you say that I am?**”

He was forcing His disciples to make a decision: - not just

- “What’s the prevailing opinion of your community?”;
- “What do the preachers or theologians say about me?”;
- “What do your parents / best friends say about me?”

He’s not even asking “Who do you think I might be?”...

He’s asking **who do you say that I am?”**

He forces us to put our cards on the table... “Who do you say that Jesus is”... Would you even say it???

And Peter, (well, let’s face it, Peter has a bit of a record in the Gospels, for putting his foot in his mouth), but this time he got it right... Peter came straight out with it, and he said “**You are the Christ.**” What did he mean by that? He’s saying:

- You’re the anointed one;
- You’re the Messiah –
- the one we’ve been waiting for”...

Finally, they’ve got it... But surprisingly, Jesus says, “Don’t tell anybody else.”... I suspect the reason **might** be, that if everybody knew that Jesus was the Messiah, they’d want to do it man’s way, rather than God’s way... In John 6, it’s beginning to dawn on people that, “Hey, this is the one we’ve been waiting for”, and

**John 6:15** Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force **to make him king**, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Alright, Jesus didn’t come to be their political king... The nation of Israel, had an expectation of what their Messiah was

going to be – their expectation was that their messiah, would lead them in a rebellion, that would set them free from their Roman oppressors... Yes, it would be by a miracle of God, but it was going to physically set them free...

And this Jewish expectation, is what lies behind Peter's rebuke of Jesus....

You see:

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. <sup>32</sup> And he said this plainly.

Alright, Jesus didn't mix it up in riddles; He didn't try and hide it; He said this very plainly:

- that He would be rejected
- suffer
- die; and
- rise again...

Now, this is not at all, the expectation they had for their messiah:

And Peter took Jesus aside, and began to rebuke Him: "No Lord!!! Don't go talking like that..."

But Jesus 'pulled rank' on him. Jesus rebuked Peter: **"Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."**

..... We humans, we like to be on the winning side, don't we??? And can you imagine the joy, when Peter realised that Jesus was the Christ, and Peter had all his expectations of what this meant: "Yahoo! We're on the winning side!!!"... But then Jesus showed him, what it meant for Him to be the Messiah, and that the path to victory, was a road paved with suffering and death...

Man's way, looks for immediate blessing in the here and the now, and takes it by force if necessary... God's way, is so very different...

It was known from the Prophet Daniel, that coming with the judgment of God, the Son of Man was going to become the eternal King,,,,, and that His **kingdom** would be eternal... But they didn't realise that the Son of Man, was also the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, and that the Son of Man, would win His eternal kingdom by His own death...

Man's way, looks for immediate:

- worldly blessings;
- recognition;
- acceptance;
- satisfaction;
- affirmation...

Man's way, focuses on **this** world. It focuses on the here and the now...

But the way of God, is very different... When Peter tried to divert Jesus from the way of God, Jesus said: **Get behind**

**me, Satan!** - It's like He's saying "Don't you dare stand in my way, mister!!!!"

You see: Peter was projecting his aspirations onto Jesus, and Peter attempted to correct Jesus' teaching, so that it would suit the popular (and his own) agenda...

I wonder if you've ever considered how **we** get tempted, to project **our** aspirations onto Jesus... And how we sometimes want to 'correct' Jesus' teaching, to suit our own prejudices<sup>ii</sup>, or to suit our own agenda...

- Those who are greedy, like to twist the Scriptures to say: "God wants us to be rich";
- Those who are racists, like to twist the Scriptures to try and justify their racism;
- Political activists twist the teaching of Jesus, to justify their particular political agenda;
- Various special interest groups cherry-pick a few verses and completely disregard much of both old and New Testament teaching, to justify their own special interest agenda;
- Those who major on social justice, disregard Jesus' teaching on repentance of sin, and the need of a saviour;
- while many evangelicals disregard Jesus' teaching on caring for:
  - the widow; and
  - the fatherless; and
  - the hungry ; and
  - the sick; and
  - the alien (the refugee)

We need to be careful, not to project **our** aspirations onto Jesus, and correct Jesus' teaching, to suit our own agenda...

So, the Son of Man, was going to suffer and die, to bring about His Kingdom...

But the way of suffering, isn't only limited to the master – it's also the way of the Disciple....

Already, we've been forced to consider the question: Can I accept who Jesus is – that Jesus is the Christ... And can I accept, what it means, for Jesus to be the Christ?

Can I accept:

- that Jesus was rejected? (and many will reject Him today)
- that Jesus suffered, to pay the penalty of my sins?
- that Jesus died – that He **willingly** gave His life as a ransom for many; and
- that Jesus rose again – that He lives, and that He is the Son of Man, who will return again, to judge the living and the dead, and to inaugurate his glorious new kingdom, for all those who love Him, and are eagerly waiting for Him????

Can I accept this about Jesus??? Who do you say I am???  
Can you accept that??? Well, what about being a disciple of Jesus???  
Are you ready to accept what it means to be a disciple of Jesus???

V34

<sup>34</sup> And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, **"If anyone would come after me, let him**

deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

**35** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. **36** For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? **37** For what can a man give in return for his soul? **38** For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Wow!!!

The way of Jesus Christ, isn't some kind of 'namby pamby'<sup>iii</sup> option, for those who are too weak to make it in the real world... This is the way of faith and commitment, and even though we in ourselves may be weak, the Holy Spirit makes us strong, so we can live it...

But it doesn't begin, until we dis-own ourselves...

Jesus said: **"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.**

Sometimes, religion waters this down into something called "asceticism" – that's where we choose to go without something, because we feel, that's going to make us better with God...

*E.g.*

*for Lent, somebody might deny themselves red meat: "I really want that piece of steak, but I'm going to deny myself that pleasure."*

Alright, but that's not the true meaning here. The Greek word (which I probably shouldn't try and pronounce) ἀπαρνησάσθω (aparnEsasthO) isn't a denial **to** self, but a denial **of** self... It's to **disown** myself – to **renounce** myself... I **give up** self, to become a follower of Jesus... What do I have to give up to become a disciple of Jesus? Not much – just myself.

If **anyone**, would come after Jesus, they have to **disown** themselves; **renounce** themselves, and they have to take up their cross to follow Jesus....

I'm becoming more and more convinced, that the idolatry of our age; and the idolatry of our culture:

- isn't so much the worship of the sun and moon & stars;
- it's not the worship of calves and bulls;
- it's not the worship of images on the mantle-piece....

I'm becoming more and more convinced, that the idolatry of this age, is the worship of the person in the mirror – maybe not what they look like – but the worship of self...

- self-actualisation;
- self-rule;
- self-assurance;
- self-managed;
- self-administered;
- self-gratification;
- self-awareness;
- self-improvement;
- self-esteem
- celebrate yourself

- celebrate who you are
- value yourself highly

This is the prevailing advice of the world... And let me tell you, "It's the advice of a broken world..."

According to Psychology Today:

*Narcissism is a serious social and psychological problem. The term refers to an inflated view of the self, coupled with relative indifference to others. People who are high in this trait:*

- *fail to help others unless there is immediate gain or recognition to themselves for doing so;*
- *often think they are above the law and therefore violate it; and*
- *readily trample over others in their efforts to rise to the "top," which is where they think they belong.<sup>iv</sup>*

And this article goes on to discuss the increase in Narcissism today. In a survey of university students:

*approximately 70 percent of students today score higher on narcissism and lower on empathy than did the average student thirty years ago.*

Narcissism's an ugly thing, and it's on the rise... It is becoming more and more, the new normal... And why would we be surprised about this, when our culture is teaching us more and more:

- stand up for yourself;
- assert yourself;
- value yourself more highly...

But you know what??? The way of Jesus, is to go against culture, and renounce self – not for the **sake** of renouncing self, but for the sake of **embracing** someone greater... This is what we call being ‘born again’. We give up our old life – we renounce our old life – we die (we nail the old man to the cross)... I recognise that my old life, is broken and pitiful – it’s messed up, and it’s beyond my ability to repair... And we’re born again, into the Lord Jesus Christ – no longer worshipping self, for now we worship the Lord Jesus Christ....

And we take up our cross to follow Him... Jesus never promised us a bed of roses, but He did promise us a cross of nails...

*Oh, in our culture, we’ve trivialised this so much... We might be getting old, and getting a few aches and pains, and say, “Oh, it’s just a cross I have to bear”... That’s nothing of the sort... That sort of talk trivialises, the millions of Christians, who at the threat of death, have remained loyal to Jesus, and been beaten; and imprisoned; and beheaded, rather than deny their Lord... That’s what it means to take up our cross to follow Jesus... It means continuing to worship Jesus, and continuing to be a **witness** for Jesus, even if it means we’ll be killed for doing so....*

But you might say to me, “But Michael, isn’t life sacred?”  
Yeah... For the disciple of Jesus, it’s sacred – it’s set apart for the Lord.

The amazing thing here, is we gain life by giving it away...  
Jesus said:

**35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.**

Let me be really clear here: Christianity is **not** some kind of suicide cult... In fact, disciples of Jesus, value life very highly.

- That's why disciples of Jesus, continue to be the ones who warn the world about the social evil of abortion;
- That's why most of the first hospitals were set up by Christians; and
- it's why we oppose euthanasia...

We value life **very** highly...

*And in our own community, where there's been a spate of recent suicides, I believe it's very important to affirm, that killing one's-self, is a tragedy of the broken world in which we live... And the greatest tragedy, is when those who have lost all hope for themselves, end their life, without realising, that **in** life, Jesus has something far greater for them – it's **far** greater than the hopelessness that they've experienced – that hopelessness that's driven them, to the point they're at... It's Jesus who says to those who've had enough, “Get in the yoke with **Me**. Journey with **Me**. Travel with **Me**. Follow **Me**, because with Me, My yoke is light”... Are you weary? Are you burdened? Come to Me...*

And if there be anyone listening to this today, who is feeling so crushed, and so broken, that they just don't want to go on any more, I'm not going to trivialise it by saying “Cheer up” – I'm going to be real with you.

I want you to know, that “**In** life, there’s **new** life for you in Jesus...” ... The life that God has given you today, is the life that God wants you to live... Oh, He wants to change it for you – He doesn’t want **any** of us to remain the same – He transforms our lives into something better...

But the fact remains: Our lives are the only things we have to offer Him – not to end it, but to live it for Him...

You see, we don’t find hope in ourselves – the hope comes, as we give ourselves over to Jesus, and we live **for** Jesus!!! We don’t “give up” life for Him – we give it over to Him, and we **live** it for Him...

And as we **live** for Jesus, we follow Him, no matter what the cost...

Every one of us, have the choice to make: to either live for self, or to live for Jesus... And to live for Jesus, is the same thing, as living for the Gospel. The Gospel, is the Good News of Jesus...

You’ve probably noticed by now, that most of the time, the world doesn’t care what you personally believe, as long as you don’t tell anybody else ... The persecution usually comes, only when we preach the good news of Jesus...

- In many Muslim countries, you can be a Christian, as long as you don’t preach Christ to anybody else.

- In some places, of course they can't police what you believe, but they will arrest you if you baptise somebody in the Name of Jesus.
- Even in our own country, if I tell people that Jesus loves them, that's not too bad.... But if I also tell them that we are all sinners, who need to repent of our wicked ways and turn to Jesus,,, Well, **that's** when I get persecuted....

For the sake of Jesus, and for the sake of the Gospel... The 2 go hand-in-hand – if we truly believe in Jesus, we'll also be sharing Jesus with others...

What we're talking about here, boils down to perspective:

- Have I got an eternal perspective? or
- have I got temporary (carnal) perspective?

How we live our lives, and the perspective that we have in life, reveals what we really believe about Jesus... I think it was Henry Blackaby, who said, "*What we do, reveals what we truly believe.*"

And the way of discipleship – well, it doesn't make sense, unless we have an eternal perspective. When we renounce our life, that's a turning point – it's a turning away from what is temporary and carnal, to something which is eternal and Spiritual.

Jesus said:

**<sup>36</sup> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> For what can a man give in return for his soul?**

*I personally know people, who started out following Jesus, but after a while, the life that the world had to offer them, was something that they yearned for, so much:*

- *The young woman who so feared she'd be lonely, she began to date a non-Christian man;*
- *the young man who was seduced by psychology and a new-age alternative lifestyle;*
- *the young man who was attracted by other men...*
- *the old man, who didn't want to be seen by the world as being 'judgmental' ...*

*Just a few examples, of some who started out believing in Jesus, and following Jesus, but there was something in the world, that appealed to them more... And for them, it wasn't a slip-up they later repented of... It was a conscious and continuing embracing of what the world had to offer, and a rejection of the way of Jesus ...*

Where's the profit in that? Even if I gain the whole world, what can I give in return for my soul???

Now, at this point, some of you might be thinking, "Well, that sounds a lot like 'legalism', - it doesn't sound like the grace of Jesus"... Well, let's continue with what Jesus has to say:

**V<sup>38</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."**

The greatest pressure, that Christians today encounter, is to be conformed to the world.

I want you to be honest now:

- “Are we ashamed of Jesus?”
- “Are we ashamed of Jesus' words?”

To be ashamed of Jesus and His words, is to conceal our allegiance to Him, and to conceal our allegiance to His teaching...

We live in an adulterous and sinful generation – what does that mean? Well, I believe it's both metaphor, and literal... When Israel rejected God, and turned to other [g]ods, (and idols), the prophets referred to this as “adultery” – God the Husband; Israel the wife, rejecting her husband, and embracing other [g]ods...

But with godlessness, also **often** comes, literal adultery...

The culture we live in, is a godless; promiscuous and sinful culture...

And the world hates anybody who would ever say that.

A message like this one today, many would label as “hate speech”, because they feel judged... And “If you call me a sinner, you hate me.” not at all... If we don't love the people of this world (no matter how godless and no matter how sinful) – if we don't love, then we're not Godly, **for God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son...**

Preaching the Gospel, isn't about ‘hating’ – it's about revealing the good news of Jesus Christ...

In many churches today, topics that offend are avoided – Why are they avoided? ... Because they want to be popular in the eyes of the world – they don't want to be condemned by the world... And so they conceal Jesus' teaching; or they conceal their allegiance to it... ,

But Jesus says some tough words here:

If I'm ashamed of Him; If I'm **ashamed** of His words, He'll be ashamed of me... He'll be ashamed of me, when it really matters... – when He returns... And the image of Jesus coming as “Son of Man”, and with the glory of God the Father, and the holy angels, there's no doubt, this is an image of judgment...

We really need to finish:

When I introduced today's message. I said,  
“Some will be greatly encouraged by these words, and some will be repulsed by them”...

What causes such a massive disparity of response??? Well, I reckon Jesus ‘nailed it’ when He rebuked Peter... He said,  
“**you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.**”

If I'm repulsed by these words of Jesus, it's evidence that my mind is set on the things of man...

A truly fulfilling life, isn't achieved by self-fulfilment – it comes, when we set our minds on the things of God, and we live a life filled with the Spirit... We renounce ourselves, and

we follow Jesus. Nothing else, in the whole wide world, is as important than this...

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Garland David E, The NIV Application Commentary Mark. Zondervan , Grand Rapids Michigan, 1996. p323

<sup>ii</sup> Garland David E, The NIV Application Commentary Mark. Zondervan , Grand Rapids Michigan, 1996. p332

<sup>iii</sup> *adjective. lacking energy, strength, or courage; weak or ineffectual* (in apple MacOS dictionary)

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/freedom-learn/201401/why-is-narcissism-increasing-among-young-americans>