



Theme: Jesus and the Earliest Gospel...Mark
“Identity and Calling”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber
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Weekly Memory Verse:

“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me.”—Mark 8:34b

VIDEO Sermon Bumper

SLIDE “Identity and Calling”

My name is Jeff Huber and I’m Lead Pastor at Summit Church and we are so glad you have joined us for this time of worship. Today we continue in reading through the gospel of Mark. The focus of Mark's book is on Jesus’ life and ministry. Mark is a book of action because of the circumstances in which it was written. Mark is trying to answer two important questions for his readers, and they are important for us today as begin this study of Mark’s gospel.

SLIDE **Who is this man Jesus?**

Who is Jesus really? What can we learn about him?

SLIDE **What does his life mean for our lives today?**

Today, we reach the halfway point of Mark’s Gospel and from here on

out, everything points to the cross. Here is what we read in Mark 8.

BIBLE

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples left Galilee and went up to the villages near Caesarea Philippi.

In order to fully grasp the meaning of today's story, we need to understand this movement from Galilee to Caesarea Philippi. Two years ago at this time I was in this region with a group from our church and it has a very important history that makes this story even more powerful. This is one of the most important stories until we get the crucifixion, and it is the turning point for the entire gospel.

GRAPHIC Holy Land Google Map

On this map, we have the Mediterranean Sea to the left. The holy land is this region in the middle with the Sea of Galilee up top in the River Jordan running down into the Dead Sea. We have looked at this series about the baptism of Jesus happening in this lower region and then the public ministry of Jesus happening around Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee. You have to go 25 miles north as the crow flies to reach Caesarea Philippi. It's at the base of Mount Herman, where there is skiing, and the snow melt feeds this entire region.

GRAPHIC Zoom in of Holy Land North

As we zoom in, you see Mount Herman at the top, and the water from the snow melt and rain go into the mountains and emerge at Caesarea Philippi. They form one of the headwaters to the Jordan River which flows into the Sea of Galilee. Jesus makes this trip which is two full days of walking and it begs a question. Why does Jesus go to this region? He doesn't visit this area any other time and it's way out of the way.

It will help to know that thousands of years before the time of Jesus

people would come to this region which was called Paneus or Paniun, named after the god Pan. This region was predominantly pagan, north of the holy land. Most people were not Jewish and were from other cultures, worshiping the Greco-Roman gods, and particularly Pan, who was the God of nature, the wild, wild beasts, sheep, shepherds, and fertility for animals.

GRAPHIC Pan

Pan is often depicted like this, with goat legs and his torso and face are that of a man. He had horns and played the flute. He also was known for making terrifying sounds, which were bloodcurdling, and caused fear in both animals and people. We get the word panic and pandemic from this root, as they have the ability to strike terror into animals or people. People would come from all over the region to this area to worship because it was beautiful. There were sheer cliffs coming down from Mount Herman and that the base was the cave. Today, it is a beautiful nature preserve will take you to in a few minutes.

There was a crevice in the cave which went into the aquifer below which would feed into the rivers coming out from the rock. They lowered 800 feet of rope into the crevice and still did reach the bottom, which tells you how deep that crevice went into the aquifer. People believed going down that deep into the earth was where you would find the underworld, or Hades. It was believed to be a portal to the realm of the dead. As beautiful as this region is, people would naturally want to worship the nature god Pan. They would bring animals, such as sheep or goat, and drop them into the crevice into the water. They would sometimes see the blood of the animal coming out from under the aquifer and the headwaters down beneath the cave and they believed that Pan had accepted their sacrifice.

The area was renamed Caesarea Philippi during the time of Jesus by King Philip, the son of King Herod the great who ruled this region. He named

after the Roman Emperor from whom he derived his authority and himself, Philip. He relocated his capital in the northern part of the holy land to this area, which he named Caesarea Philippi. I thought you might enjoy seeing some video footage from this area to get a picture in your mind.

VIDEO Caesarea Philippi

You can see the large cave above the waterfall, and the sheer rock cliff above it. Some believed that cave was the birthplace of the god Pan. These waters you see flowing become part of the headwaters of the Jordan River and it is a beautiful and stunning place. You can understand why people would worship the God of nature in this area. There still are foundation remnants from the temples which were built in this region. Here is the cave and the crevice has disappeared because of an earthquake which sealed up the opening with stone. In the time of Christ, it opened up into the earth. Each one of those niches would have statues to the god Pan and his cohorts where people could come to worship the idols.

GRAPHIC Artist Rendition of Caesarea Philippi

You see here a rendition of what it may have looked like in the first century. Mount Herman is above and this temple to the left would have existed when Jesus was visiting this region. This temple was built by King Herod the great to honor Caesar Augustus, the first Roman Emperor. Augustus Caesar was considered to be divine and people would come to pay honor and homage to him as a deity. The priests would receive your offering of an animal and drop them through the crevice as an offering to the nature god and Caesar.

The first century, the Roman emperors were given a number of titles which it would be helpful for us to know in reading the story. Let me remind you of the titles and I'm guessing they will sound familiar to you.

SLIDE The King (have them fly in one at a time please)

The King of Kings (many kings served under him, like King Philip)

The Lord (sovereign master, highest authority, first thing)

The Lord of lords

The son of the divine God

The prince of peace (the brought the peace of Rome)

The anointed one (mashiach or messiah)

Pontifex Maximus (the high priest of roman religions)

All the emperors were considered divine because they were somehow related to Caesar Augustus, so they were considered the sun the divine Emperor. These titles should sound familiar because we find them in the Bible. The biblical authors knew that each of these titles was used for the emperors, which is something we don't often catch as Christians today reading the Scriptures. But, in the first century, they knew all these titles were used for Caesar and yet they use them anyway. By using these titles they were making it clear that one was coming who was greater than any of the emperors and it would be Jesus. He is more powerful even than Caesar.

GRAPHIC First Century Coin

Here is a coin from the first century with the image of the Emperor Tiberius on the front. He was Emperor when Jesus was put to death and the Sea of Galilee was named Lake Tiberius for a time. The writing around the edge tells us he is Tiberius, CAESAR the imperial ruler, DIVINE, AWESOME, (fili) son of Caesar Augustus, imperium.

Jesus brings his disciples 25 miles north and we don't read about anything else he does in this region. He doesn't seem to heal anyone or feed multitudes. He does not cast out demons, but he does have one conversation. They traveled two days to get to Caesarea Philippi so Jesus

can ask Peter this important question. Why does he go here? Why does he take his disciples away from the sea of Galilee to go here for this one conversation?

If we understand all the backdrop we just named, this conversation we are about to hear takes on a much deeper meaning. Jesus is going to ask one very dangerous question.

BIBLE

As they were walking along, he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

Remember that one of the main points of the gospel of Mark is to help us know who this person Jesus is and what he needs for our lives today. This is a dangerous question because Jesus has not revealed yet who he is. When Jesus calls each of the disciples he doesn't add, “By the way, I am going to be the Messiah as well.” He simply asks them to follow. Their hearts are burning within them and they feel like there is something they need to follow, and they are beginning to put two and two together. They are beginning to realize that he is not just a rabbi or prophet, but the long-awaited Messiah, even though he has not told them. They have been with him for close to three years and have watched him heal the sick, do amazing miracles, preach, and teach. They have come to believe that Jesus is the long-awaited King.

The Jewish people have been waiting for a king that would fulfill all the prophets and throw off those oppressing Israel. They were waiting for someone to make Israel the light of the nations and bring peace. Jesus brings them to the capital of the northern section of the holy land to ask this question. It is the city where the King lives and it's named after the Emperor and the king! If you are King Philip, and you hear a group of people claiming that someone else is King, how you feel about that person? You would not be

very fond of them because you are the king. This is beginning to raise up a rebellion or insurrection. What you do if someone is raising up a movement against you if you are King Philip? You have them killed, and you kill their followers. So, when Jesus asks this question in the capital city, “Who do say that I am?” He is asking a dangerous question.

I imagine, when Jesus first asked us question, the disciples are looking at their feet. Have you ever been asked a question by someone and you think you know the right answer, but you don't want to say it because you might have the wrong answer? Your little embarrassed, even though you might have the right answer, so you look down and mumble. I imagine the disciples thought they knew the answer to the question, but they also knew that if they say it out loud everybody hears it, it could be the end of life as they know it. Here's what we read happens next.

BIBLE

²⁸ “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets.”

²⁹ Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

Peter replied, “You are the Messiah.”

In Matthew and Luke's gospel, Peter adds that Jesus is the “Son of the living God.” Tiberius, who ruled Galilee in that day, was the son of a God which was dead, Caesar. Tiberius was the son of a dead God. Jesus was the son of the living God. Jesus also adds this that Matthew records in his gospel, chapter 16.

BIBLE

¹⁷ Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. ¹⁸ Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means

‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.

Jesus says this standing in front of the big rock ledge at the base of Mount Herman. Peter is now going to be that rock and the gates of hell will not stand against the church. He says this in front of that cave which is seen as a portal to Hades, the realm of the dead, the gates of hell. The gates of Hades cannot defeat this community of people that Jesus is beginning with his life, death, and resurrection. These Scripture text take on deeper meaning when we know the history and the location of the stories.

SLIDE Messiah (Mashiach = the Anointed One = Christ

Peter spoke Aramaic so he would’ve said, “You are the Mashiach,” or the Messiah. Messiah and Christ mean the same thing and it is not the last name of Jesus, by the title. They mean “the anointed one.” When someone became king, the high priest would take oil and anoint their head, their heart, and their hands. Queen Elizabeth was anointed this way by the Archbishop of Canterbury, on your head, on her chest, and on her hands. This was a sign that they were set apart by God to rule and every King in ancient Israel was anointed, called Messiah or Christ. King David would say in Psalm 23, “Thou anointed my head with oil my cup runneth over.” Simon Peter is announcing that Jesus is the King, then we read...

BIBLE

³⁰ But Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

SLIDE The messianic secret

Many of you have asked about why Jesus often told people not to tell anyone what was happening. Why did Jesus tell people who he has healed not to tell anyone? What did he tell people who find out who he is not to tell anyone? This is known as the messianic secret motif in the gospel of Mark.

One reason is because Jesus wants people to wrestle with who he is for themselves. I often tell you as your pastor that I can't give you faith. It has to be your faith in you have to wrestle with who this man Jesus is for you.

There is also a very pragmatic reason. Once word spread that Jesus is the Messiah, the true King of kings and Lord of lords, those in authority will come to kill him. Jesus is not ready to be killed yet because there is still more for him to do before he goes to the cross. He is going to give his life and in doing so change everything for everyone through his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus is going to defeat darkness, sin and death.

I have friends who are Jewish and if you visit with a rabbi or someone who is faithful in the Judaism many will tell you that they love Jesus and think he is a great prophet. When you ask them why they don't believe Jesus is the Messiah, they all give the same response. Jesus didn't do the things the Scripture said he was going to do. The Hebrew Scriptures don't describe the Messiah as a God figure but as a warrior who would raise up an army and cast out the enemies of Israel, whoever they might be. Then, the Messiah would purify Israel and draw them back to God, establishing the kingdom of which there is no end. His descendants would rule after him and there will be a dynasty so that Israel would be a light to all the nations. Most importantly, there will be everlasting peace.

Since we don't have an everlasting peace and several of the other things named in the Hebrew Scriptures, most of our Jewish friends do not believe Jesus was the Messiah. It's especially difficult because many Jews were slaughtered in 70 A.D. when Rome came into squash a rebellion. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed as was the temple, so clearly Jesus did not do what he should have done to be the Messiah. Jesus knew all those things about the Messiah and how he has been described, but he had a different idea and a different plan for transforming the world into the Kingdom of

God.

Jesus knew that if he raises up an army to defeat the Romans, they will raise up a bigger army and it would go round and round with people being slaughtered. We see that pattern over and over again throughout history and we could do that, but Jesus chose a different way. But Jesus understood the battle was really inside each human heart. He was seeking to be a Messiah who would not wage a war with military weapons but said things like, “Love your enemies,” because that has the power to change the world. Jesus came to be a different kind of Messiah which was rooted and grounded in other prophetic passages in the Hebrew Bible, such as Isaiah 53.

BIBLE

**⁵ But he was pierced for our rebellion,
crushed for our sins.**

He was beaten so we could be whole.

He was whipped so we could be healed.

⁶ All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.

We have left God’s paths to follow our own.

Yet the Lord laid on him

the sins of us all.

Jesus came to share a different way because God was sick of people killing each other. Instead, God has called each of us to sacrificial love which changes everything. He shows us what love looks like as he lays down his life and this is what he shares with his disciples at Caesarea Philippi before they depart. Jesus was correct about what the Messiah needed to be any shows us what it looks like.

BIBLE

³¹ Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and

the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead.³² As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things.

³³ Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. “Get away from me, Satan!” he said. “You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.”

Peter has a different idea of what the Messiah should do and be about, much like the Jewish religious leadership of his day. This brings us back to the question that Jesus asks at the beginning of this passage.

SLIDE Who do you say that I am?

He is looking for the same answer today that he received from Peter, “You are the Christ. You are the king. You are my King.” Many times we talk about being a Christian as someone who receives Jesus into their hearts. That’s a wonderful metaphor and is a beautiful sentiment. Sometimes we talk about our personal relationship with Jesus and that Christianity is about relationship and not religion. What’s interesting is that Jesus does not invite his disciples to have a relationship or allow him to enter into their hearts. What he did say was, “Come and follow me, and I will help you fish for people.”

When Jesus didn’t tell them it first was that they would die for this cause and to follow Jesus. Yes, my personal relationship with Jesus is life-giving for me and I trust God in my heart because of Jesus. But, in this passage, and I believe still today, Jesus is asking us to make him our Christ, our sovereign, our ruler, Lord, and Savior, and the first thing. It is about yielding our lives to him and his kingdom and the ethic of love which is sacrificial. Jesus is looking for the same answer that Peter gave at Caesarea Philippi.

SLIDE You are the Christ

We allow Jesus to be the ruler of our lives and not ourselves, another huge step. We invite Jesus to guide us and give us direction and we are willing to surrender our lives to something bigger than ourselves. If you have a car, you might think of it as being willing to give your keys to someone else so they can drive. Do any of us like to give our keys to someone else and let them drive? It's even worse when we have to write in the backseat of our own car, isn't it? If you're like me, you may even be telling the person up front how they should be driving. Is that just me? Are you tempted to give directions and tell them not just how to drive but which way to go? I mean, it is your car after all! Does anyone have these kinds of conversations when you are driving with someone else and they are at the wheel?

The truth is that I prefer to drive most of the time. We all prefer to have Jesus hand in the passenger seat. We like him to be in the car with us, but would rather he sit in the back and be quiet. Of course, if we need something, then we want Jesus available. If we have a health crisis or pandemic or some other trouble, THEN we want Jesus to show up. Let's be honest, most of us think this way. We want Jesus in the car, but we are not sure we want and driving because that means we are not in charge anymore. If Jesus is driving, we are not in charge of our wallets and we cannot just give a little here and there, because now our wallet belongs to him! It is scary because of Jesus is driving we no longer have the right to satisfy every self-centered ambition that we have, which is usually plenty.

When Jesus is driving, we don't get the gossip, flatter, deceive, enrage, intimidate, manipulate, or exaggerate because my mouth belongs to him. I have to get myself out of the driver's seat and give the keys to Jesus, not just the wheel, but the keys. We can be more alive than ever before but it's because our lives belong to Jesus and not to us.

SLIDE Who do you say that Jesus is?

Are you willing to turn the keys over to Jesus, because that's what it means to follow Jesus? Jesus gets very clear about this as he continues talking to Peter and the disciples at Caesarea Philippi.

BIBLE

³⁴ Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. ³⁵ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. ³⁶ And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? ³⁷ Is anything worth more than your soul?"

How many of us have known and seen people who have sought to gain the whole world but lost their soul in the process? I have watched people lose their children, their spouse, and living by themselves in luxury and miserable in the race to be the one with the most toys. We can gain the world but lose what really matters. We can lose our soul, our identity, and our life spinning on the hamster wheel. We finally get the top and then the people that we care about are no longer there to share with us and we realize it was pointless, because we gain the world but lost what matters most.

Jesus invites us to something simple and yet challenging in these passages as he is trying to impart upon us how we can find life and have a full in ways that make a difference and change us.

SLIDE Self-Denial

The first is self-denial. Does anyone really enjoy self-denial? I know that I don't if I'm honest. I prefer self-indulgence. I like what I like. I want what I

want. I want to satisfy myself and whatever urges or needs come my way. As Freddie Mercury from the band Queen used to saying, “I wanted all I want now!” I don’t think Jesus is telling us not to enjoy life or have a good meal or feel-good about our accomplishments. Jesus moved to a Lakeshore Village for his home base of ministry and he spent many hours on a boat. He went to parties and weddings and clearly enjoyed himself in those gatherings.

At the same time, Jesus is reminding us that the rhythm of our lives should not be about, “me first.” He put God first and then we love others as we love ourselves. During the season of Lent, the 40 days before we get to Easter, many of us fast or give something up. Fasting is about exercising our self-denial muscles. I try to swim a couple times a week and we have some dumbbells and exercise equipment in our house. The point is not to simply do laps for lift weights, but to gain strength so when your spouse calls you to open up a jar of pickles, you can do it! When I need to shovel snow, I can do it without destroying my back. I still need to see the chiropractor after, but if I am exercising regularly, those activities are much easier, and my muscles are available when I need them.

Fasting is about flexing and exercising the self-denial muscles so that when we need to use them, we more readily can do so. This year I’ve given up most carbs so and upbringing several boxes of food and candy to the church and dropping them off for everyone else to eat. Of course, I continue to have things that tempt me, like lasagna we had for our college ministry last week. I love lasagna with lots of cheese and it was sitting right there in the fridge! Why did I give up that for Lent? And why did they sell Girl Scout cookies at the beginning of Lent? That is just not good timing because I love thin mints!

But here is what I have realized. As I have made it through the first couple of weeks, becomes easier and easier those temptations are not near

as strong. I actually found myself eating a Pringle the other day and not liking it because my body was used to decent food. When I see them selling Girl Scout cookies, I just give the money as a donation which is better for me and probably for them. When those new habits form, and we focus on others more often, it becomes easier to deny ourselves.

Fasting helps build those muscles because there are many things in our lives which we probably should be denying ourselves. There is anger, overconsumption of alcohol for food, buying so much that we can't give to others who are in need, sex or pornography, or any other addiction to get a hold of our heart from which we need fast. There are things we must deny ourselves of we are going to follow Jesus and fasting helps us exercise those self-control muscles.

SLIDE Following Jesus

I have discovered that following Jesus means wrestling with self-denial in almost every area of our lives. In marriage, we must deny ourselves and think of our spouse as much as possible. It does not mean we allow ourselves to be abused or walked upon, but it does mean we are willing to set aside our own needs to serve that person who is been placed in our lives so that we can learn how to be Jesus Christ 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I was visiting recently with a church member who needed to change their entire life schedule to care for their spouse who had an emergency medical condition. I was in awe of their self-denial and sacrificial love. I have seen it in many couples in this congregation and it is a gift to not just the church but to your families. Marriages are beautiful when each person is thinking first of the other person and it's a two-way street.

In any relationship, if each person is only thinking about themselves and looking out for number one, it is only a matter time before ends in disaster. In the workplace, we find this same thing is true. Employees who

have blinding ambition and will do anything to get the top might succeed for a while, but eventually they will be isolated. If you had a business, would you rather have that employee or the one that is willing to sacrifice and asks what is best for the team and how they can help the company and their fellow employees accomplish goals they set together? Which is the better employee in which will ultimately succeed in the workplace?

What I witnessed is that the most miserable people I know are the ones who are the most self-absorbed and only think about themselves. They make movies about people in that place to have a transformation and realized is not all about themselves because we know this is true. The people I know are the happiest are those who think very little about themselves and spend most of their time thinking about others and serving as much as possible. When it comes to following Jesus and being a Christian, a “little Christ,” we are called to take up our cross and follow.

Part of the rhythm of our life at Summit Church is to serve others. We exist to bless the community and make a difference. We don't exist for ourselves or just have a place to meet. We gather to be energized and inspired to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. There has been much in the news lately about wearing masks again, something that we have wrestled with as a culture for the past year. I get that we don't want our freedoms stepped upon and there are sometimes physical reasons for not wearing a mask, but when someone complains to me about having to wear a mask at church, and lovingly as possible, I remind them that Jesus wore cross. We can wear a mask. And we as the church are better when we are giving ourselves away as Jesus asked us to, then when we are demanding our way. It just doesn't look good when leaders in the church are demanding our way because at the heart of our faith the man who gave everything!

We are meant to look at the cross when we leave each worship service

remember that he stretched out his arms and now he is us to go into the world and be his presence by denying ourselves and serving others. I think of those of you in this congregation who have given up time and money and devotion to serve people on the Navajo nation, in Nicaragua, down at Manna Soup Kitchen, and in your jobs as teachers, firefighters, police, therapists, medical professionals, and so many others who see your vocation as a ministry and who often sacrifice and deny yourself to follow Jesus. When we allow Jesus to drive the car, and we deny ourselves and follow, we find life, meaning and purpose. We find joy and, wholeness in Christ.

Let me ask you a question this story begs of us as we end. **Is our faith one of convenience, ease and comfort, or are we willing to step out of our comfort zone and risk by denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus?** I ask because it's in the latter we find meaning, purpose, and life.

Dr. William Barclay, one of the great pastors and biblical commentators of the last century wrote these words:

“Jesus never sought to lure people to him by the offer of an easy way. He sought to challenge them; to awaken the sleeping chivalry in their souls. He came not to make life easy, but to make people great.”

Jesus did not come to make our lives easy, but to make them great. So, here's this question again: **Who do you say that he is?**

SLIDE Communion