**The Messianic Secret**

Text: Mark 8:31-33

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Daniel 7:13-14; Mark 8:31-33

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 163, 110, 288, 505, 72

**Series:** The Gospel of Mark (#25)

**Theme:** Jesus plainly predicts His coming suffering, rejection, death and resurrection; rebuking Peter for his unwillingness to accept the necessity of God’s plan of salvation

**Proposition:** Set your mind on the things of God, not the things of man

**Introduction**

Have you ever re-read a novel or re-watched a movie? Sudden, unexpected, events no longer seem sudden or unexpected! You see them coming because you’ve heard or seen the story before!

The words of Jesus in our text are a monumental revelation of what has been called ‘The Messianic Secret’ because, up until this point in Mark’s gospel, the full meaning of what being ‘the Christ’ – as Peter had just declared – was not known to the disciples. It is clear from Mark’s account that Peter did not see this coming. For him, and the other disciples, Christ’s words would have been sudden, shocking, unexpected and deeply disturbing.

For us they are at the very heart of gospel. When we recite the Apostles’ Creed we say together the words: ‘*suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead*’. We are all likely very familiar with these words, but it is still shocking that it was necessary for Jesus to suffer, die and be raised again to life in order to deal with our sin problem.

It is shocking and wonderful. It was costly and gracious. It was the mind of God that planned this, not the mind of man. Let’s look closely at our text as we see Christ, the promised Messiah, reveal the ‘Messianic Secret’ to his twelve disciples. We’ll do this under two points:

1. Jesus reveals plainly His shocking future
2. Jesus reveals the right mindset for His disciples
3. **Jesus reveals plainly His shocking future (v31)**

In today’s contemporary language people may ask ‘what do you identify as?’ What kind of person do you see yourself to be? Notice, that in his opening words Jesus refers to Himself as the ‘Son of Man’. This name is the one Jesus most identifies as in this gospel. Mark records that “*he began to teach them that the Son of Man*...” This is not the first time in Mark’s gospel that He referred to Himself as ‘the Son of Man’. He said to the paralytic “*But that you may know that the* ***Son of Man*** *has authority on earth to forgive sins…. I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home*” (2:10). After allowing his disciples to pluck heads of grain on the seventh day, Jesus said ‘*So the* ***Son of Man*** *is lord even of the Sabbath*’ (2:27). By using the name ‘Son of Man’ Jesus both emphasised his humanity and associated Himself with the heavenly ‘Son of Man’ in Daniel chapter 7. In that Old Testament prophesy, the eternal God, the enthroned Ancient of Days, gives to the Son of Man an everlasting global kingdom.

As we saw in the last sermon in this series, Peter’s confession on behalf of himself and the other disciples that Jesus is ‘the Christ’ is a key moment in the gospel of Mark. It has been described as one of two ‘high points’ in this gospel, the other being the declaration made by a centurion at the cross of Christ who confessed “*Truly this man* *was the Son of God*” (Mark 15:39).

In our text, it is as though the disciples had been climbing a ‘Hill Difficulty’ (to borrow from the imagery of The Pilgrims Progress); gradually growing in understanding of who Jesus is. Then they come to a pinnacle of comprehension: Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah foretold in the prophecies of Old Testament Scripture.

The expectation of the Jewish people was that this Messiah, the Anointed One, would liberate Israel from oppression and give them back the land that God had promised to them. Many people thought He would be a warrior king. So, in the national Jewish mind was the idea of a military and/or political figure who would transform their lives, bringing lasting peace, prosperity and prominence to Israel. Today, we hear more and more political candidates running for office in their different countries under ear-catching phrases like ‘*I will make America great again*’, ‘*I will make Italy great again*’. This was the kind of slogan that the 1st century Jew likely associated with the Messiah; something like ‘*he will make Israel great again*’.

It is not hard to imagine the shock and surprise when Jesus first said to His disciples: “*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*”. The Greek word translated ‘must’ literally means ‘it is necessary’. Jesus reveals the required mission of the Messiah which will unfold in the future. The events that would most certainly and necessarily take place would not be accidental, but planned - according to the predetermined divine purpose. Peter would remember this after the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ when he preached to Jews gathered on the Day of Pentecost. Then the Apostle said, “*this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men*” (Acts 2:23).

Jesus wanted to prepare His disciples in advance for what was inevitably going to happen to Him. Here, He did not speak in parables that the disciples struggled to understand (4:13), nor perform miracles that left them uncertain about His identity (4:41), instead, as Mark records, he spoke ‘plainly’. The Greek word here means to speak openly with bold courage and confidence. The idea is of words that flow freely without fear. Here Jesus ‘unveiled’ the ‘Messianic secret’ for His disciples.

Looking back now to the Old Testament in light of Christ’s completed work, we see with clarity the fulfilment of past prophesy about the Suffering Servant Messiah; especially in Isaiah 53. For the disciples, this was not in view, their ideas about the Messiah’s mission were likely shattered by Christ’s plain prophecy: “*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*”.

Notice how much is contained in so few bold words:

1. Jesus would suffer many things
2. Jesus would be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes
3. Jesus would be killed
4. Jesus would rise again to life after three days

Jesus would suffer betrayal, misunderstanding, abandonment by his disciples, denial by Peter, insults, shame, humiliation, false charges and injustice, physical, emotional and spiritual pain, abandonment by God the Father, and the full weight of God’s righteous anger against the sin of His people. Many things. Jesus would be rejected by the ‘power brokers’ of the Jewish religious establishment – identified by the three groups: elders, chief priests and scribes. The elders were the non-clergy members of the Sanhedrin; the court that governed Jewish affairs under the higher jurisdiction of the Roman Empire. The chief priests were influential leaders, generally from wealthy families. The scribes were the ‘experts in the law’.

They were the learned teachers of God’s Word, yet they would reject the very One to whom the Old Testament Scriptures pointed. They were indeed ‘blind guides’, a ‘brood of vipers’, like their forebears who ‘*murdered the prophets*’ (from Matt 23). As gospel writer John later wrote of the unbelieving Jews ‘*He came to his own, but his own people did not receive him*’ (John 1:12). Jesus would be killed. The Greek word here implies a violent death. It is an intensified form of the verb ‘to slay’.

The Jews were not authorized by the occupying Roman Government to kill anyone, as they would explain to Pontius Pilate saying, “*It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death*” (John 18:31). So Jesus was telling His disciples that whilst it would be the religious Jewish authorities who would reject Him, someone else would actually put Him to death violently. Jesus does not reveal the additional detail that He would be crucified. Was this to spare the disciples at this time the full horror of what would happen to Him? That seems very plausible. Finally, Jesus predicts His resurrection after three days.

When we read Isaiah 53, we see that Jesus is the promised Suffering Servant who would:

1. ‘*be despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*’ (v3)
2. “*wounded for our transgressions*” (v5)
3. “*by oppression and judgement taken away*” (v8)
4. “*cut off out of the land of the living*” (v8)
5. Yet “*he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days*” (v10)

The ‘Messianic secret’ is no secret to us, but it is still shocking; or at least is should be! Sickening, appalling, distressing that it was necessary for Jesus, the only innocent human who has ever lived, to suffer so much for guilty people like you and me.

Brothers and sisters, we are all familiar with the gospel. That is good. However, in our familiarity, let us never forget what Christ has done for us. ‘Lest we forget’ is a phrase commonly used in war remembrance services in English speaking countries. It comes from Deuteronomy 4:9 “*Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children*”. 11 of the 12 disciples to whom Jesus first plainly revealed the ‘Messianic secret’ did not forget, but faithfully served Him until they died. However, when they first heard Jesus reveal ‘the Messianic Secret’ they, or at least certainly Peter, sought to strongly reject Christ’s Messianic Mission, as we’ll see in our second point.

1. **Jesus reveals the right mindset for His disciples (v32-33)**

As we’ve seen, the plain words of Jesus would have been shocking to His disciples – shattering their ideas of what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ. Peter’s characteristically impulsive reaction is also shocking. Mark records that ‘*Peter took him (Jesus) aside and began to rebuke him*’ (v32). The Greek word translated ‘rebuke’ is very strong. In the classical Greek language it was a ‘*severe, strenuous reproach for unworthy deeds or acts*’. It is a stronger word than ‘reprove’ ‘implying more authority and less argument, thus conveying the idea of censure, including a sharp, severe reprimand.

Here is the prominent disciple Peter (who has just made the monumental declaration that Jesus is the Christ) severely reprimanding the Lord. It’s like him saying, ‘*we now know for sure that you are the promised Messiah, the One who opens the eyes of the blind, who makes the lame leap, who calms the storm, who miraculously provides food for many, but you’ve got it seriously wrong about what is going to happen to you*’.

What strong man, with the supernatural power and authority that Jesus had already demonstrated, suffers many things from weaker people? What sort of conqueror is rejected by the very people He has come to liberate? What sort of warrior is killed before He has won the battle?’ Remember that the Apostle Paul would later write to the Corinthians that preaching Christ crucified was a stumbling block to Jews (1 Cor 1:23). We don’t know exactly what Peter actually said to Jesus, but the ‘Messianic secret’ now revealed was certainly a stumbling block to him at that time.

Mark records the most stinging words of Christ to any of His disciples as He, turning aside and seeing them, openly rebuked Peter and said “*Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man*” (v33). Was Jesus saying that Peter had somehow become the Devil? No! However, behind the unbelief of Peter’s rebuke was the temptation of Satan that Jesus should refuse the suffering that His mission necessitated. Remember that Satan, in the wilderness (1:12-13), had already sought (unsuccessfully) to tempt Jesus away from God’s plan of redemption.

Now Peter was effectively speaking as an agent of the Devil, seeking to entice Jesus away from the path that would lead to the cross. What was Peter’s fault? Jesus diagnoses it perfectly, saying “*you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man*”. When you think about what Jesus did from a worldly perspective, it seems ridiculous, foolish, stupid, idiotic, impractical, illogical, absurd and nonsensical. How could suffering and dying bring about a victory for Israel? The Apostle Paul explains to the Corinthians that the ‘*word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us, who are being saved it is the power of God*’ (1 Cor 1:18).

He goes on to write that ‘*the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men*’ (1 Cor 1:25). The far superior wisdom and strength of God is demonstrated in His heavenly ‘other-worldly’ plan of salvation in that He would give up His only begotten Son to suffer, be rejected, and killed so that ‘*whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*’ (John 3:16).

Brothers and sisters, we are all familiar with the gospel. That is good. However, in our familiarity, let us not forget. Let us not forget the heavenly wisdom and power of God. Let us not forget that Jesus willingly laid down His life for us – no one took it from him (John 10:18). He permitted Himself to be killed that we might live. To understand, to believe, in Jesus the Christ as your Lord and Saviour, it is necessary to set your mind on the things of God.

On this occasion Peter, to his shame, did not do this. Later, after the events of which Jesus had prophesied took place, the resurrected Jesus would restore this disciple who had so vehemently denied Him three times. Then Peter would accept the things of God willingly as Jesus said to him ‘feed my sheep’ and as Jesus predicted Peter’s own death (John 21:19).

Peter came to have the right mindset for a disciple. What is that? To set your mind on the things of God, not on the things of man. What does this mean for you and me?

1. It means ‘having the mind of Christ’ (1 Cor 2:16)
2. It means ‘thinking God’s thoughts after Him’.
3. It means believing God’s Word to be true and reliable.
4. It means accepting both the blessings and the sufferings that are an inseparable part of following Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

Jesus will go on to explain this to a wider audience in the next section of Mark’s gospel, saying: "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it*” (8:34-35). These true words speak of painful self-denial as the true followers of Jesus share in His sufferings (2 Cor 1:5; Phil 3:10; 1 Pet 4:13).

Paul wrote to Timothy “*share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim 2:3). In physical battles, soldiers experience conflict, discomfort, pain, loss, uncertainty, misunderstanding, fatigue and, at times, death. In the Christian life, expect to experience these same things: conflict, discomfort, pain, loss, uncertainty, misunderstanding fatigue and perhaps even death. Not just because you live in a fallen world, but because you follow Jesus.

It is hard to be a disciple of Christ, but by no means as hard as it was for our Saviour to save. Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame for the joy that was set before Him – the joy of serving God and His people – the joy of being raised to glory. So it is for us, brothers and sisters, Jesus calls us to endure the path of a disciple, a pilgrim, accepting the conflict, discomfort, pain, loss, misunderstand, uncertainty and fatigue and perhaps even death for His sake.

Beloved children of God in our text, Jesus reveals the right mindset for His disciples: set your mind on the things of God, not on the things of man. Look to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2). He will never fail you. He is the firstfruits of the resurrection of all who believe in Him (1 Cor 15:20,23). Brothers and sisters, just as He rose from the dead never to die again, so we also will be raised from our death, never to die again.

AMEN.