

Mark 1:13, 8:27-33

Mark 1:13

13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Mark 8:27-33

27 Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" 28 And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." 30 And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Title: From Hero to Zero in 60 Seconds

This passage always makes me cringe. As you might guess, as a kid in school I craved the opportunity to demonstrate that I knew the right answer. I also lived in abject fear of being reprimanded. So for Peter to experience both in short succession makes me feel a little sick to my stomach. And to be called Satan? Well, that's about as bad as things can get.

The depth of Peter's failure is accentuated by his short-lived success. Caesarea Philippi was "on the edge" theologically and geographically. It was in the far north of Palestine and was famous for its religious site dedicated to the god Pan. Perhaps Jesus starts talking about his Messiahship and his mission out here precisely because it gives the disciples lots of time to process before they find themselves back in Jerusalem, a hundred miles away. It also signals to us that Jesus' saving work was never going to be just for the Jewish people. The Messiah's work is for the whole world – including people who don't have any idea what a Messiah is or why they might need one.

That Peter rightly understands that Jesus is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah is a really big deal as far as Mark is concerned. It is crucial for the story. Without this confirmation, it would be too easy to misunderstand what takes place in Jerusalem. If we see Jesus as just another truth-to-power-speaking prophet just like John and the other prophets of the Old Testament, we won't understand his mission, his crucifixion, or his resurrection. Even though Peter gets the right

answer, he only half-sees. His idea of what the Messiah is supposed to be doesn't match the kind of Messiah we really need. Peter is looking for Jesus usher in a social revolution to restore Israel. Jesus will usher in a spiritual revolution to restore all of Creation.

**The kind of Messiah Jesus is
indicates the kind of disciples we *are called to be.***

What kind of Messiah is that? Jesus appears to be taking his job description directly from Isaiah 53:2-5 (NIV)...

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering...

4 Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

Sometimes we treat faith in Jesus like something we store in our closet: We pull it out when we want to, at *our* convenience. But Jesus isn't a thing. He is a person, and we have a relationship with him. As our relationship grows, he becomes more to us. No longer just a teacher, Jesus becomes the one we trust to save us, direct us, and call the shots in our lives. This is what is implied by the term Messiah.

Core

Following Jesus means moving toward the reality of pain and suffering, not avoiding it.

Peter earns a gold star for rightly concluding that Jesus is indeed the long-awaited Messiah. Now a few lines later, Peter gets the dunce cap for trying to teach the Teacher.

Of course this moment shocks us. When Jesus calls you Satan, that's gotta leave you shook. But hopefully we can see that Jesus isn't saying this to shame Peter. Peter is his friend. He loves Peter. But Jesus also wants Peter to understand that he IS tempting him, just like Satan did back in chapter three. What were the nature of Satan's temptations? Satan – the adversary – tried to get Jesus to question his identity as the beloved Son, his mission as the suffering Messiah, and the necessary means of completing this mission: the cross. Satan offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world – which were indeed under his power – in exchange for allegiance. You can have this world, Jesus, without having to suffer and die for it. The temptation was real at the beginning of his ministry, and it is still a real temptation for Jesus here.

So he says, “get behind me!” Why? Because the role of the student is never to go in front of the Teacher, but always to behind, being led by the Teacher. Peter gets up in Jesus’ face to say: Look, you can’t be the Messiah the way I think you are supposed to be the Messiah if you go to Jerusalem and get yourself killed. So knock this off already! And Jesus gives it right back: If you want to follow me, Peter, then FOLLOW.

We will do anything to avoid pain. But...

Call

To the extent that we are called to be Jesus’ disciples (which is completely), we make ourselves vulnerable to the reality of suffering, both in our lives and in the lives of others.

Peter is *us*: Even when we get it, we don’t get it. Even if we support God’s ends, we struggle to understand God’s means. In Peter’s mind, a person can’t be rejected and still be the Messiah. How can a rescuer save us if he can’t even save himself? Among those who believe in the power of the cross, it still puzzles us. But Jesus teaches that he will not merely rescue us from temporary things like political oppression or economic injustice. He came to save us from permanent things: Hopelessness, shame, alienation and death. The only way to save us from such things was to confront them head-on at the cross. That requires embracing the fullness of human suffering – taking it in, embracing it, and transforming it in the alchemy of divine love.

This flies in the face of some deeply held beliefs about Christianity, especially among those who offer a prosperity Gospel. Many of us have been led to believe that God’s deepest desire is to bless us with things so will we be happy. But actually God’s deepest desire is to grace us so we will be mature – that is fully human, deeply wise, and fully capable of sharing in the work of *tikkun olam* – healing the world. By Christ’s wounds we are healed. As Christ’s disciples, called to be the Body of Christ in the world, we are called to be wounded healers ourselves. The temptation to isolate and insulate ourselves from the pain of the world is real for us too.

The cross means suffering doesn’t have to be pointless. God can use it to transform our character to be like that of Jesus. Jesus promises us a life of *purpose*, not a life of *ease*. Peter had the gift of half-sight, but it is still a gift. None of us fully understand what a “yes” to following Jesus means. That’s okay. We don’t have to. We just need to bow our heads in humility, and take our place behind Jesus, and keep following him. He will inevitably lead us to people who are poor, who are hurting, who have experienced trauma, whose hope has all but run out. And when we meet them, we love them as best we can. And if suffering comes to us, as it came for Peter and for the churches to whom he wrote, then we can what he taught us in 1 Peter 4:12-13:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Amen.