

Eastwood Baptist (PM, 25/2/18) **“YOU ARE THE MESSIAH”** (Mark 8:27-9:1)

**Introduction** I am commencing a sermon series on Mark, to continue at both 6pm and 9.30am services through until Easter. I am going to begin the preaching series at the middle of the Gospel of Mark. Why so? Partly so that I can bring the story up to a convenient point at Easter. But also because today's passage is generally thought to play a key role in Mark's Gospel. It brings to a head the question which has been raised repeatedly up to this point: "Who is this man Jesus?" And it uses the answer to this question to foreshadow the second half of the Gospel, which moves toward Jesus' death and resurrection.

**“Who do people say I am?”** (8:27-28) **Read 8:27.** Jesus asked his disciples this question “on the way”. But on the way where? Jesus is about to begin his journey toward Jerusalem, a journey toward death and resurrection, as we'll see in v.31. This journey is closely related to Jesus' identity and mission. **Read 8:28.** What do these ideas reveal? They reveal that people had seen or heard about Jesus' powerful deeds, and heard for themselves or from others his authoritative teaching. They believed that he must be someone great, someone special, like a recent prophet raised from the dead or an ancient prophet sent back by God. They are on the right track, but they don't yet have the right answer. What about today? Who do people who are not disciples of Jesus say he is today? There is even less agreement, I think. Some think he is a legendary figure; some think he was a real person, but no more than a good teacher; some agree that there is something special about him, but they're not sure what; some use expressions like “Christ” and “Son of God”, but without a clear idea of what they mean. Talking to people of what they think about Jesus can be an excellent way of leading them to hear about who he really is. And many people who have not yet come to faith nonetheless are interested in Jesus, and often impressed by him, so that it is usually wise to begin with him in talking about Christianity. But there is a more important question than what other people think.

**“Who do you say I am?”** (8:29-30) **Read 8:29a.** This was the really important question for the disciples, as it is for people today. But it was more challenging than being asked about what other people said. **Read 8:29b.** Peter's is a remarkable response. To us today it is an obvious answer, and not the largest answer possible. But this is a Jew of the first century speaking, before the Cross and the Resurrection, and even before the Transfiguration. At this time the great hope of many Jews was the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed One, the king like David but even greater. Although Jesus had already done great things, he had not looked

much like David, the warrior king. This was a wonderful answer at this time. **Read 8:30.** So why did Jesus say this? I think that it was because what Peter said was right but easily misunderstood. We'll soon see that Peter himself didn't properly understand what sort of Messiah Jesus was, so certainly it couldn't be expected that people generally would have had a right understanding. They would have expected a warrior like David, a military leader who would drive out the Romans.

**“The Son of Man Must Suffer”** (8:31-33) **Read 8:31.** Jesus' words would have taken all the disciples by surprise. Notice that he doesn't use the title “Messiah”, but instead calls himself “Son of Man”. This was an ambiguous title, which could simply mean “human being”, or could suggest a representative role of some kind, or could recall the glorious figure “like a son of man” in Daniel 7. And the only clues he offers are about suffering – these don't fit well with people's ideas about the Messiah, or even in any obvious way with the title Son of Man. The only Old Testament figure which might possibly come to mind is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. **Read 8:32.** Jesus speaks about suffering and rejection and death and rising from the dead. Peter could understand the first three, but they weren't what the Messiah should experience. And the fourth was too strange to understand at all. So Peter tried to make Jesus see sense. **Read 8:33.** Peter must have been disappointed and puzzled to hear these words. He had just made a great confession of faith, only to be harshly rebuked. For us, I believe, this is a warning that faith in Jesus is not a matter of merely using the correct formulas. It is possible to call Jesus “Messiah” and “Christ” and “Son of God”, and yet not get beyond a human understanding of his identity and mission.

**“Take up your cross and follow me”** (8:34-9:1) Jesus goes on to make it clear that his identity as a suffering Messiah has implications for his followers. He doesn't promise them continual prosperity and success, but calls them to sacrifice. **Read 8:34-8:37.** Jesus tells them that they can't call him “Messiah” then refuse to allow him to be the Messiah whom God intends him to be. And Jesus tells them that they can't follow this Messiah and tell God what he can do with their lives. The Messiah who gave up his life to obey God the Father and offer salvation to human beings demands of his followers that they give up control of their own lives as genuinely as Jesus did in dying on the cross. But Jesus hasn't quite finished – **read 8:38.** This is partly a warning to underline what he has said before: his followers must be openly so, not being ashamed of their Lord, even when it is unpopular or dangerous to be known as one of his followers. But it is also indirectly an encouragement. Those who do acknowledge him will be acknowledged by him when he comes in glory. Finally there are the rather puzzling words of **9:1.** In context, it is reasonably clear that these words

reinforce the element of encouragement in 8:38 – Jesus’ followers don’t have to wait very long to see God’s rule revealed in glory and power. But what event or events are we meant to think of? The position of these words encourages me to think of the foreshadowing of Jesus’ glorious return by events within the lifetime of his hearers, namely the Transfiguration in the immediate future and the Resurrection in the fairly near future. Jesus is saying that his glory will soon be revealed, although the full and final revelation of his glory is for a time which his followers cannot know in advance.

**Conclusion** So what about us? It is important for us to know who Jesus is, and why God sent him. It is important for us to be able to declare this knowledge in words to those who don’t yet know. It is important for us also to understand the implications of this for how we live, so that our lives declare us to be followers of Jesus, Jesus our Saviour and Lord, who died for our sins and rose victorious over death.