

The Messianic Secret in the Gospel of Mark
First Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, NC September 21, 2025

The identity of Jesus is a mystery that gradually unfolds throughout the Gospel of Mark. As the Gospel opens, the reader/listener is given the full identity of Jesus: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1:1)". Throughout much of the Gospel, this is known only to the listener/reader and the demonic powers. At his baptism, the heavens are torn open and Jesus hears a voice declare, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased (1:10)."

In his first miracle, Jesus enters the Synagogue and heals a man with an unclean spirit. The spirit cries out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God (1:24)." His fame spreads and crowds come to him. Yet, neither the people nor the disciples realize his full identity.

When Jesus declares that the sins of the paralytic are forgiven, the scribes accuse him of blasphemy as God alone can forgive sins. In healing the paralytic, Jesus demonstrates his power to forgive sin and declares that the "Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins (2:10)". When Jesus names himself as the Son of Man is it simply a poetic way of speaking of himself as a human being or is it a reference from the Book of Daniel to the Son of Man who descends with the clouds as to whom is given everlasting dominion (Dan. 7:3-14)? Jesus casts out demons, heals the deaf, restores sight to the blind, return the dead to life, cleanses the leper, feeds the hungry and performs other acts associated with the Servant of the Lord or the coming Messiah. Still the disciples, the crowds and the leaders of the people do not fully grasp his identity.

A turning point occurs when Jesus goes with the disciples to Caesarea Philippi and he questions their understanding of his identity.

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.

But there is a twist:

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."

Jesus announces his passion a second time: (9:30-32)

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it, ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." ³² But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Not comprehending what he means, the disciples argue about which among them will be the greatest in the kingdom of God.

Jesus announces his passion a third time: (10:32-34)

³² They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³ saying, "Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the gentiles; ³⁴ they will mock him and spit upon him and flog him and kill him, and after three days he will rise again."

Not comprehending the significance of what he means, James and John ask to be seated at places of honor on the right and left of Jesus when he comes into his glory.

Jesus combines the Jewish expectation of the Messiah with the Suffering Servant in Isaiah (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). The Messiah will not come as a triumphant military ruler, but as the servant who will suffer and die for the salvation of the people.

As Jesus enters the City of David, Blind Bartimaeus sees what the disciples cannot yet see when he cries out, "Son of David, have mercy on me (10:48)"

It is only when the Roman Centurion sees the crucified Jesus taking his last breath that the identity of Jesus is proclaimed for all to hear and believe.

³⁹ Now when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way Jesus breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (15:39)