

## **“The Road Less Traveled”**

*Mark 8<sup>27</sup>-9<sup>1</sup>*

### **Overview**

In many ways, the first half of Mark is like the preparation for a journey. John the Baptist prepares Jesus’ way; Jesus prepares disciples to join him on the way. With Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the journey of the second half of Mark’s Gospel begins shifting from addressing the question “Who is Jesus?” to understanding “Why did Jesus come?”

Jesus announces that this journey will lead to his suffering and death, and beyond that to resurrection. The disciples are not sure they are ready for such a journey, but they (at least physically) follow as Jesus goes from near Caesarea Philippi in the north (8<sup>27</sup>) to Jerusalem in the south (11<sup>1</sup>).

Along the way, Jesus teaches them more about God’s kingdom, clarifying its nature, its demands, and its rewards. Their literal journey becomes a symbol of discipleship, of following Jesus. The disciples envision it as a journey to glory, but Jesus will keep clarifying that the road to glory goes by way of the cross (8<sup>31</sup>; 9<sup>30-31</sup>; 10<sup>32-34</sup>).

### **Introductory Question**

**Q** – Great success stories (e.g. Olympics, special Olympics) include seasons of hard work and sacrifice that were need to achieve important goals. When and how has this been evident in your life (be specific)?

### **Discussion Questions**

- 1) **Read Mark 8:27 – 38.** If your closest friends were asked to share a word or two that best describes you, what might they say?
- 2) Locate Caesarea Philippi on a map. Given its location and its dedication to Roman rule<sup>1</sup> what reason, or reasons, might Jesus have had for taking his disciples there for this discussion?<sup>2</sup>
- 3) According to the opinion polls of that day, what words or labels were people using to describe Jesus? Why? What words do people today use to describe who Jesus is? Why (i.e. what shapes their opinions)?
- 4) Why is the question, “Who do *you* say I am?” (v.29) so important? Who do you say Jesus is, and how has your answer to that question changed over time?<sup>3</sup>
- 5) What four things does Jesus prophesy about himself in verses 31-32?
- 6) Why do Peter and Jesus each react so strongly?
- 7) How did Peter go from “star pupil” (v.29) to being in the doghouse (v. 33)?
- 8) According to verses 34-38 what is involved in being a follower of Jesus?
- 9) What reasons does Jesus give for why people should follow him down this hard road?
- 10) How has your relationship with Jesus affected your lifestyle? Relationships? Priorities? Politics?

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<sup>1</sup> Caesarea Philippi was a imperial city in a largely Gentile area on the northern boundary of the Holy Land. Named after Herod Philip and the Roman emperor (Caesar), it was dedicated politically and religiously to Roman rule with a temple honoring the emperor as lord and liberator.

<sup>2</sup> Talk of a “messiah” was a hot button issue among Jews (cf. 3<sup>6</sup>) so it may have been a safer place to have this discussion (8:30). It was also a multi-religious context with a larger spectrum of opinion but also lacking this much needed truth.

<sup>3</sup> This is a great opportunity to ask each person to briefly respond to this question and add who & what shaped or changed their understanding of Jesus.