

MY NOTES:

A Continual Unfolding in Mark

Middle Chapters of a Story

The Confession of Peter (Mark 8:27-30)

The Mission and Method of Jesus (Mark 8:31-38)

The Mission of Jesus

The Method of Jesus

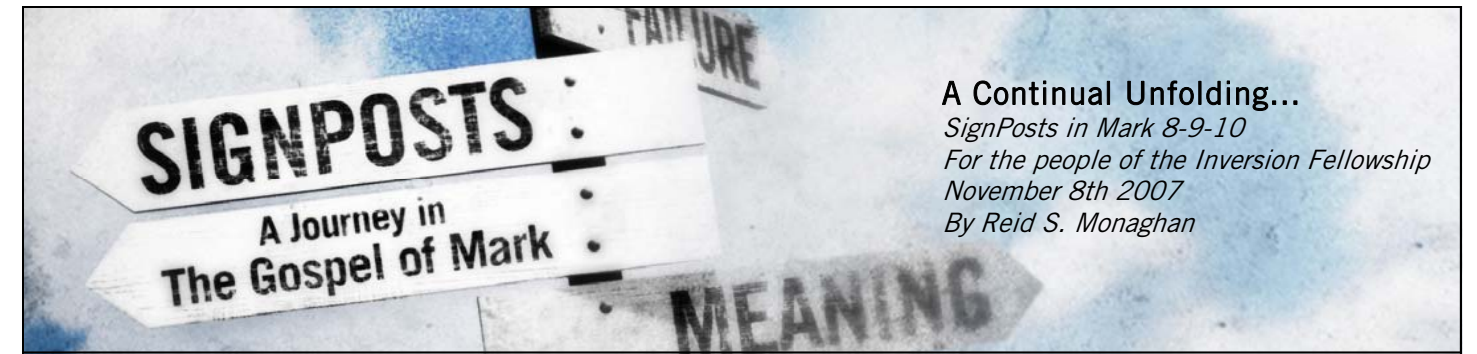
⁴²And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Mark 10:42-45 ESV

The Affirmation of the Father (Mark 9:1-9)



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Part I—Mark 8:27-30 (ESV)

²⁷And 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?” ²⁸And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” ³⁰And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

Part II—Mark 8:31-38 (ESV)

³¹And he began to teach them that 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. ³²And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and seeing his disciples, he 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.” ³⁴And he called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? ³⁷For what can a man give in return for his life? ³⁸For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Part III—Mark 9:1-9 (ESV)

¹And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.” ²And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁶For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” ⁸And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. ⁹And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

KEY SIGHTINGS FOR TONIGHT

THE CONFESSION OF PETER

The tension of the drama of Mark’s gospel surrounding the true identity of Jesus is finally broken with the open realization and confession of Peter. We the readers were given his complete identity in chapter one as Jesus is given the title, Christ, the Son of God. Yet the disciples and those who lived the story were given a gradual unfolding of this reality. They saw his authority over unclean spirits. They witnessed his control of the natural world as he commanded the winds and walked upon water. They saw miracles come from his hand but yet the question of his identity lingers until this high point in the gospel where Jesus asked his disciples directly “Who do you say that I am?” At this Peter openly states “You are the Christ” and Jesus then reveals to them the true nature of his mission.

THE REALITY OF JESUS’ MISSION

Rather than political domination and the forceful liberation of Jerusalem from the power of Rome, Jesus’ mission on the earth had a different nature. His purpose was to be betrayed, to suffer and to die at the hands of the chief priests, the elders and the scribes. The religious and the powerful would reject God, turn him over to be crucified for the redemption of all people. This was hard for his followers to hear. How could the powerful, miracle working, authoritative Messiah be turned over to die as a common criminal on a Roman Cross? This however was the long prophesied mission of Jesus—to die for the sins of the world. This mission would be carried on by followers who joyfully take up a cross to follow this Jesus in their worlds.

REAFFIRMATION OF THE FATHER

Jesus’ divine glory is revealed on the top of a mountain to some of the disciples. At this revealing of glory, the Father again speaks to reaffirm the mission and message of the Son sent into the world to teach, live, die and be raised from death to purchase people for God from every tribe tongue and nation.

PETER—APOSTLE, PREACHER...POPE?

Our passage in Mark 8 and its more robust parallel in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew's gospel has been the source of some historical controversy between Protestants, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics. It is taken by the latter to be biblical warrant for the institution of the Roman papacy, the Pope as the father of the church and its supreme teacher in regards to faith and morals. I will quote the Matthew passage here:

¹⁶Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

While this brief essay cannot treat these issues with the rigor which is needed, I do hope it might illuminate the differences between Roman and Protestant/Eastern Orthodox views of the Christian faith. I will lay out a few points of argument made by each side in regards to the issue of the papacy.

Catholic Arguments for the Primacy of the Bishop of Rome (The Pope)

There are many arguments that the Roman church makes in favor of the primacy and leadership of the Pope and the hierarchy of cardinal, bishop and priest which is under him. The argument usually takes two lines—one from the sacred tradition of the church and the other from Holy Scripture.¹ On the tradition front, there is a section in the classic work of the 2nd century church father Irenaeus to which Roman Christians point to as favoring papacy. Irenaeus was bishop of Lyon which was located in what is now modern day France. He wrote extensively confronting several heretical teachings of his day. He is quoted often in various contexts—in this case, in favor of the primacy of Rome.

Since, however, it would be very tedious, in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the Churches, we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner, whether by an evil self-pleasing, by vainglory, or by blindness and perverse opinion, assemble in unauthorized meetings; [we do this, I say,] by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its pre- eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolical tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere.²

Additionally, the ecumenical council of Nicea in AD 325 listed four major patriarchates/sees (seats of authority) being Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem with Rome given the place of highest honor. In the late fourth century Constantinople was inserted making the list of honor—Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, though the rivalry of Rome and Constantinople would continue until the east/west split in AD 1054. One of the issues was papal authority which the Eastern Orthodox churches still reject until this day. Finally, the text from Matthew quoted above is used extensively in the argument for the papacy. The keys of the kingdom were given to Peter, who was the first bishop of Rome, the first pope. His successors maintain the highest authority in the church. The succession of bishops or overseers of the church in Rome is not the issue, the issue is this man's rule over the church as the supreme representative of Jesus on the earth today.

Arguments Against the Papacy

There are many long standing arguments against the papal authority in church history. They too interpret both tradition and Scripture to make the argument. Again, this is necessarily brief and therefore incomplete. First, it is argued that Peter is but one of a plurality of leaders in the early church. All traditions attribute great honor and leadership to Peter, but he was by no means infallible. During the life of Jesus we see Peter's evolution into a great leader through his many failures. Yet even post resurrection we see the apostle Paul rebuke Peter for his inconsistent and hypocritical actions in relating to Jew and Gentile in a way contrary to the gospel (See Galatians 2:11-14). Second, the text in Matthew 16 does not imply the papacy and certainly nothing like papal infallibility. Many interpretations have been offered which give primacy to Peter and his role in the establishment of the church, but none of this need imply the papacy which evolved in the Roman church during the middle ages. Third, the historical honoring of Rome by councils does not warrant the papacy. Rome is honored as a great historical church in the councils of Nicea and Constantinople, but the other great churches and their patriarchates were not subjected to her—in fact, this was not the case with Constantinople and continued to be an issue for hundreds of years and persists until today. There also has been a reality in history which stated that councils should decide matters of dispute, not one bishop. This was the case through the first seven ecumenical councils and was argued by the Conciliar movement in the late middle ages. Additionally, the apostolic succession of Pope's and their infallibility seems historically dubious. First, one particular pope, Honorius 1, was declared posthumously to be a heretic and false teacher in AD 681 for advocating something called Monothelism. How could he be considered infallible? Second from AD 1378 to 1417 there were actually two popes in the Western church, one in Rome one in France seated at Avignon. The Council of Pisa in 1409 disposed both popes and appointed another, but both did not step down leaving the church with three popes for a brief time. The issues were resolved with the Council of Constance (1414-17) but raised the question of whether a council could rule over the pope for the council had removed the two popes and elected Martin V to power.³ One last historical issue is of note, although the Roman church claims it was always the case, papal infallibility was not made Roman teaching until Vatican I in 1870.



In conclusion it must also be said that the story of the papal institution has been haunted by grabs for power, accumulation of wealth, immorality and sin. Though the Catholic church claims that the Pope has not erred and has never taught in contradiction to Scripture I think history is replete with examples of both action and teaching which do not reflect infallibility. This only means that Popes are people and are in no way infallible. The highest authority for the church has never been the succession in Rome, but the apostolic teaching of Scripture being faithfully entrusted and passed on through the ages. We trust not hierarchy or power to maintain the church, but the Spirit and the Word of God. There are errors on all sides...Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic. Yet our disputes are resolved in humility, standing under, not over the very Word of God in Scripture. History and our lives are messy, we no doubt move forward with truth and error. But much as Luther echoed long ago under great pressure to recant his views—Our consciences are chained to the Word of God...here we stand, we can do no other.

INCARNATION AND PLURALISM

It is an amazing thing which happened in the region of Caesarea Philippi when Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God almost two millennia ago. Caesarea Philippi was a city dedicated to the worship of the emperor at the time of Jesus and in previous generations was a place dedicated to the pagan god Pan and to the idolatrous worship of Baal. It was in this place where Jesus' identity is openly confessed. In our world today we often speak of pluralism, the idea that there are many gods and many ways to worship. We think this is a new situation in the world brought on somehow by the diversification of viewpoints in contemporary America. Yet this reality is nothing new at all for people have been building alters from the dawn of humanity. People have always created and worshipped gods, yet the radical confession of Peter is that there was one God and that they were walking with him on the earth.

The claim of Monotheism was the teaching of the ancient Jewish people⁴ among nations who believed in many, many deities. The ancient philosophers were coming to monotheistic conclusions⁵ as they wrestled with metaphysical questions of ultimate reality and truth. Yet monotheism has an undeniable edge to it. If there is one and only one creator God, then all other pretenders to the throne are no gods at all.⁶ Those who stand for religious pluralism today and throughout history see this very clearly as a problem. Mary Lefkowitz, professor emerita at Wellesley College recently wrote the following in an op-ed piece in the Los Angeles Times.

Prominent secular and atheist commentators have argued lately that religion "poisons" human life and causes endless violence and suffering. But the poison isn't religion; it's monotheism.⁷

Of course she is following the drivel of the so called "new atheists" who place all the problems of the world on religion. The thesis is that monotheism, belief in one God, necessitates killing those who disagree. This of course is hardly what you find in the life of Jesus. Yes, some Christians in history have murdered and conquered others in the name of Jesus, but in doing so they acted in contradiction to his very life and teaching. Yet we must not dodge the reality found in the incarnation, in the biblical teaching that the one creator God, became flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The implications are that this person is the most important figure on the horizons of history and the coming contours of the future. He is not one teacher among many, nor one way to many gods.

The teaching of God incarnate in Jesus the Messiah is radical, humbling and life changing for in the gospel we do not see God coming to oppress humanity. In stark contrast to the totalitarian visions of human utopias, offered by king, caliph, or communist, God came to earth to die for and redeem a people for himself from every nation on the earth. There will be a kingdom on the earth some day which will be one of righteousness, love and peace. It will not come by force of man or technological heroism. It will come with the same Jesus at his return to the earth.

All people from every ideology, religion, ethnicity and background are welcome at the foot of the cross of Christ. It is a great heresy to teach that all from every nation are saved, but a beautiful biblical truth that some from every nation will be saved by grace. In every age, from the time of Jesus until the end of the world, Christians will proclaim the wonderful news of God incarnate in Jesus Christ dying for sinners. It was and will be an unpopular message to declare Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Yet this will be the song of all people at the close of history. We now have the great joy and privilege of knowing him and sharing him with all. In following Jesus in this world, living his mission and declaring his message, there will always be those who shout "crucify him!" and we must take up this cross. Yet there will be those, to whom the Father reveals Jesus, who will look at him as did doubting Thomas and exclaim—my Lord and my God...

Notes

1. It should be noted that in the Roman religion that Scripture and the teaching Tradition of the church are equal forms of authority which are seen as complementary and never contradictory. Protestants hold that Scripture is the supreme authority and is the corrective and judge of all human teaching in the church.
2. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.2—<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.iv.iv.html>
3. For a good summary of church history during this era see Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Vol 1* (New York: HarperOne, 1984) - See particularly the chapter on the Medieval Papacy.
4. See Deuteronomy 6:4,5.
5. The looming historical figures of Plato and Aristotle, though in very different ways, were coming to this conclusion.
6. For a good look at Jesus among world religions see Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods* (Nashville, Word, 2000)
7. Mary Lefkowitz, *Bring back the Greek gods—Mere mortals had a better life when more than one ruler presided from on high*, LA Times, October 23, 2007. <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/sunday/commentary/la-oe-lefkowitz23oct23,0,5427284.story?coll=la-sunday-commentary>

