

# What Is The Purpose Of The Messianic Secret?

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## Jesus Did Not Want His Identity Known

In the very first chapter of Mark, when Jesus was already performing healings and driving away demons, although the unclean spirits knew who he was [as the Holy One of God], he did not permit them to speak because they knew him [Mark 1:34]. He continues on driving out unclean spirits from people, who would fall down before him and shout, "You are the Son of God." But Jesus warned them sternly not to make him known [Mark 3:12]. Then we have the raising from the dead of Jairus' daughter [Mark 5:43]. Here again, Jesus gave strict orders that no one should know this. Another incident of this 'secrecy' is in relation to the healing of the Blind Man of Bethsaida. After healing the blind man, Jesus sent him home and said, "Do not even go into the village." [Mark 8:26]

## The Messianic Secret Is Part Of The Way Mark Constructs His Gospel

Biblical scholars tell us that the pivotal and key passage of the gospel of Mark is the confession of Peter in Mark 8:27-33. Before Peter confesses here that Jesus is the Messiah, Mark leaves us in a state of mystery as to what the identity of Jesus was. It was this key passage at Caesarea Philippi that clearly confirms that Jesus is the Messiah. But we should also note that even though the identity of Jesus was clearly confirmed among his band of apostles, he still warns them not to tell anyone about him. And we will soon understand as the gospel slowly unfolds why Jesus wanted his identity not to be fully known yet. First, it was because his being a Messiah is not according to what the apostles and the people know a Messiah should be. Yes, indeed he was the Messiah, but his being a Messiah involved suffering and great hardship. And this, even Peter could not understand and was therefore rebuked by Jesus because he was thinking not as God does but as humans do. The Messianic secret therefore is a Markan construct so that readers of the gospel can see gradually who Jesus is and what his being a Messiah really involves and entails.

## The Messianic Secret Partly Revealed In Peter's Confession Is Further Revealed By Jesus' Three Predictions Of His Passion And His Teaching On Discipleship

Jesus slowly reveals that his being a Messiah is really a call to be the suffering servant of God. Therefore, from the confession of Peter, Jesus announced three times, in Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:32-34, how he must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. Three predictions of the passion were given after that pivotal and key passage of the confession of Peter. We can see that there is a development of the meaning of Jesus being the Messiah: from the concept known by the people of Israel to the real meaning of Messiah as the suffering servant of God. Since Jesus taught that his being a Messiah involved great suffering and rejection from the people, he teaches that those who follow him need to take up the conditions of discipleship: which involves service, self-denial, taking up one's cross and giving one's life to gain life. Just as Jesus will suffer and die, so those who follow him must be ready to also suffer and die for the sake of the kingdom.

## The Messianic Secret Is Totally Lifted At The End Of The Gospel

During the account of the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, the titles 'Christ', 'Son of God', and 'Son of Man' are brought together and we are really getting to the full revelation of what this Messianic secret is. However, the real climax and full revelation of this Messianic secret is when the centurion who stood facing him at the cross saw how he breathed his last and said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" [Mark 15:39]

This confession by the centurion is the full revelation of who Jesus is. We remember that in the pivotal and key passage of Peter's confession that Peter under the inspiration of the Father, confessed that Jesus is the Messiah. This confession by Peter was not yet the full truth of Jesus' identity as the Messiah. It had to take Jesus to predict three times about his passion and death

and to teach the conditions of discipleship for the apostles to slowly understand about the reality of his being a Messiah.

However, even with all the sayings and teachings, they still did not understand because of the preconceptions they have of what a Messiah should be according to the concept of their Jewish faith - the Messiah as a glorious king.

But as Jesus entered into his passion and death, it was the centurion's confession that Mark used to show his readers that Jesus is the Son of God and that his being a Messiah is not according to the concept of the faith of Israel but his being a Messiah is entirely in his suffering and death. He was the suffering servant of God.

### **What Does The Messianic Secret Have To Do With Our Christian Living?**

Oftentimes, in our Christian lives, we take for granted that Jesus is the glorious Son of God who delivers us from all our ills and problems and hardships and difficulties. We forget that he did this at a great cost - through his suffering and death on the cross.

If we are to follow Jesus and to imitate him in his ministry of helping people and caring for them, we must not forget that we too will encounter the cross in our lives. Like Jesus, by our commitment to serve in his kingdom, we shall suffer rebuke, scorn, sufferings, hardships, and the difficulties of our calling. It is not a consoling picture but it is a fact and a reality that we have to face.

The apostles themselves did not understand what Jesus was telling them about his passion and the conditions for discipleship. They slowly realized and learned about it when they themselves were already following Jesus' teachings and bringing the good news to people all over the world. However, even with this harsh reality we are facing, we should not forget to place it in the more positive context of the resurrection - that suffering and death is not the end.

Life is the end. And if Jesus is the Son of God who suffered and died and rose again from the death, we too shall share in His Sonship - that even if we suffer and die as a result of being Christian, we shall rise again to eternal life and share in Christ's glory.