

The Meaning of Jesus' Identity and Mission in Mark 8:31-38: A Reflection for God's People

Marthin Steven Lumingkewas

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Moriah, Tangerang, Indonesia

Bobby Kurnia Putrawan

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Moriah, Tangerang, Indonesia
bkputrawan@gmail.com

Susanti Embong Bulan

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi William Carey, Medan, Indonesia

Article History:

Received: May 25, 2021	Accepted: November 24, 2021
Revised: September 15, 2021 & October 03, 2021	

Abstract

This article aims to find the meaning of Jesus' identity and mission in Mark 8:31-38, which is reflected in the lives of God's people today. The method used is through the reading of Mark's narrative theology. According to Mark, the kingdom of God is the only domain where peace and justice are abundantly available to all because the identity and work of Jesus are the true Son of God, and not Caesar. Becoming part of this kingdom requires imposing the identity and mission of Jesus into the readers of Mark's text. Thus, it is reflected and applied to God's people today. This study shows that the identity and mission of Jesus is the duty and responsibility of God's people to suffer from doing the work of the Father and be resurrected after death.

Keywords: *Identity, Mission, Jesus, God's People, Mark*

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan menemukan makna identitas dan misi Yesus dalam Markus 8:31-38 yang direfleksikan pada kehidupan umat Tuhan masa sekarang. Metode yang digunakan melalui pembacaan teologi naratif Markus. Menurut Markus, kerajaan Allah adalah satu-satunya kerajaan di mana perdamaian dan keadilan tersedia berlimpah bagi semua karena identitas dan karya Yesus adalah Anak Allah yang sejati, dan bukan Kaisar. Menjadi bagian dari kerajaan ini membutuhkan pengenaan apa yang menjadi identitas dan misi Yesus ke dalam pembaca teks Markus. Hal ini direfleksikan dan diaplikasikan kepada umat Tuhan pada masa kini. Hasil dari studi ini menunjukkan bahwa identitas dan misi Yesus yang menjadi tugas dan tanggung jawab umat Tuhan adalah sebagai anak manusia untuk berani menanggung penderitaan, ditolak, dan dibunuh, karena melakukan pekerjaan Bapa, serta dibangkitkan setelah kematian.

Kata Kunci: *Identitas, Misi, Yesus, Umat Tuhan, Markus*

INTRODUCTION

The identity and mission of Jesus determine the purpose of identity and mission for those who follow Him. If a man regards Jesus primarily as a good teacher, he may seek to learn all that one can learn from Him, but that is how far people will go with Him. If a man regards Jesus primarily as a healer or restorer who made people feel positive, good things about that person, then man can spend time with Him, but only if it makes him feel good. Even if God's people think of Jesus primarily as Savior, God's people may go a step further by being grateful that God's people do not have to suffer the

punishment of hell. However, God's people can still try to live as comfortably as possible in the here and now.¹

The above is also related to the emergence of the Prosperity Gospel Movement (voiced by EW Kenyon, Oral Robert, and Kenneth Haggin) that taught that the identity of Jesus and following Him in the kingdom of God are the prosperity of His people. This movement influenced the teachings of later preachers and pastors, such as TL Osborn, Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, and others.² In this context, the identity of Jesus is to promise material blessings to His people. Besides, Jesus taught God's people to live a life of suffering without prosperity. As Ajith Fernando explains, it begins with the presupposition that persecution, suffering, and poverty produce deeper faith.³

Several discussions about Mark 8 have been carried out. For example, John Q. Doe in his *Peter's Confession at Caesarea Philippi* and Gareth Lee Cockerill in his *The Invitation-Structure and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*. Doe emphasises the identity of the suffered Jesus as the Son of God,⁴ while Cockerill explains Mark 8 as discipleship

¹ Ernest van Eck, "Mission, Identity and Ethics in Mark: Jesus, the Patron for Outsiders," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2013): Art. #2003, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v69i1.2003>.

² Jude J. Ongong'a and Stephen I. Akaranga, "Prosperity Gospel in Kenyan Urban Centres: Come, See, Pay and Receive Your Miracles and Healing," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 5, no. 10 (2015): 199–208, <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/view/22896>; Constantine Mwikamba and Stephen Akaranga Ifedha, "Blessed Are the Rich and Prosperous For Theirs Is the Kingdom of the World: The Kenyan Challenge," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 5, no. 14 (2015): 138–42, <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/view/24555>; David Edwin Harrell Jr., *All Things Are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/45766>.

³ Thomas Schirrmacher, "Suffering and Prosperity: Equal Challenges to Faith," Lausanne Movement, August 2, 2010, <https://lausanne.org/content/suffering-and-prosperity-equal-challenges-to-faith>.

⁴ John Q. Doe, "Peter's Confession at Caesarea Philippi: An Exegesis of Mark 8:27–38" (Hattiesburg, Mississippi, US, University of Southern Mississippi, 2016), <https://drkoine.com/pdf/home/NOBTSPapersT8.pdf>.

where Jesus as Christ becomes an example for His followers.⁵ This article synthesizes the two studies above by exposing Jesus to His identity and mission.

Mark 8:31-38 explains that Jesus called His followers to identify and mission Himself from their various perspectives. If He is the Son of Man and the Son of God, then His followers are also adopted as sons of God, and they have experience with Him. If He was a servant who suffered, was rejected, died, and rose again, then we must embrace suffering, rejection, and death in this life, knowing that we will be resurrected at the end of time in the same way He did.⁶

When God's people see and understand Jesus, the same thing happened when the disciples saw and understood Jesus in Mark 8:31-38. There are various answers that Jesus asked, 'who am I?' Thus, the identity and mission of Jesus become essential and influential in everyone's life. As Fee and Stuart say that an interpretation has two tasks, namely exegesis (hermeneutics) and application,⁷ the study of Mark 8:31-39 seeks to discover the meaning of Jesus' identity and mission, as well as to reflect on Jesus' identity and mission in the lives of the people at present.

⁵ Gareth L. Cockerill, "The Invitation-Structure and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark," *The Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies* 3, no. 1 (2016): 28-43, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/jibs/vol3/iss1/4>.

⁶ Sharyn Echols Dowd, *Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2000), 83; Brad East, "An Undefensive Presence: The Mission and Identity of the Church in Kathryn Tanner and John Howard Yoder," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68, no. 3 (2015): 327-44, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930615000137>.

⁷ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Fourth edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014).

RESEARCH METHOD

The method of writing this article is by reading Mark's narrative imagination theology.⁸ The point is to analyze Mark 8:31-38 through the narrative lens with the interpreter's imagination. What is meant by narrative imagination theology is the reflective imagination of religious claims embedded in stories and considers this significant theological approach as an alternative to theology.⁹ Narrative imagination theology grew out of the deep belief that the interpreter describes the text in a temporal narrative on the substance of personal human identity. Thus, it aims at interpreting the story of human life. This introductory narrative condition of what it means to be human can also be described as an ontological condition for human stories of any kind: without them, there would be no literature, no history, no philosophy, and of course, no religion.¹⁰

⁸ Gabriel Fackre, "Narrative Theology: An Overview," *Interpretation* 37, no. 4 (1983): 340–52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096438303700402>; Gary L. Comstock, "Two Types of Narrative Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LV, no. 4 (1987): 687–717, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/LV.4.687>; David R. Johnson, "The Mark of the Beast, Reception History, and Early Pentecostal Literature," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 25, no. 2 (2016): 184–202, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-02502003>; Wentzel van Huyssteen, "Narrative Theology: An Adequate Paradigm for Theological Reflection?," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 45, no. 4 (1989): 767–77, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v45i4.2327>; Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 144–66.

⁹ Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 144–66; van Huyssteen, "Narrative Theology"; Comstock, "Two Types of Narrative Theology."

¹⁰ Paul Ricoeur questions the apparent difference between the dynamic and immeasurable realm of imagination and the closed system of biblical texts. However, as in all of his works, Ricoeur does not intend to state the relationships he wants or thinks about only for the sake of established theological thought. The goal is more to engage in a dialogue that questions the presuppositions of the two poles. When discussing polar relations, Ricoeur clarified that he wanted "not to see [the poles] disappear into a simple identity, or allow [the two poles] to harden into an unconnected antinomy." He thus begins his discussion of the imagination and the Bible by identifying the presuppositions (imagination) that promote polarity, but are processed through the course of the essay, to advance the notion of structured imagination and freedom of interpretation. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 144–66; Comstock, "Two Types of Narrative Theology"; Annette Thornburg, "Narrative's Revelatory Power: Toward an Understanding of Narrative Theology," *Denison Journal of Religion* 5, no. 1 (2017): Article 3, <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/religion/vol5/iss1/3>; van Huyssteen, "Narrative Theology."

Narrative theology takes this basic narrative seriously to consider the nature of religious knowledge.

In the following section, the author describes an analysis of the context of events from the text of Mark 8. This explanation tries to understand the events behind the text and its purpose. Then, the writer analyses the text of Mark 8:31-38 by basing the narrative on Mark's thoughts from the previous paragraph, 8:27-30. This narrative analysis of the subtexts of Mark 8:31-38, namely verses 31-32, 33-34, and 35-38, then ends with a synthesis of the entire text. From several analyses of this narrative theology, the author also provides several intertextual comparisons to emphasize the strengthening of the theological meaning. Then from the analysis results, the writer reflects on the importance of the text of Mark 8:31-38 for God's people.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning and Purpose of Mark 8:31-38

Event Context Analysis

The fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD caused many groups within Judaism to compete for authority.¹¹ Mark uses rhetoric to create portrayals of Jewish leaders to undermine the authority of competing Jewish leaders.¹² Although Mark is not anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic, the author's rhetoric of Mark's Gospel contributes to these things. In the Gospels, simple analogies between Jewish leaders and

¹¹ William den Hollander, "Jesus, Josephus, and the Fall of Jerusalem: On Doing History with Scripture," *HTS Theologische Studien / Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2015): a2942, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i1.2942>.

¹²The issue of the authorship of Mark's Gospel, while connected with the early church tradition centered on Rome and the Apostle Peter, is not the focus for this article. Thus, the subsequent use of the term "Mark" would refer to the Gospels themselves, not to the tradition of authorship by a disciple of Peter in Rome named Mark. The term "evangelist" will be used to refer to the writer of the Gospel of Mark.

contemporary history reinforce anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. A better strategy uncovers the effects of Mark's rhetoric and examines how readers continue to do what Mark did, namely portray other people, while offering the possibility to repent and move toward a more world-like way of relating to others.¹³

The three synoptic gospels (Matthew 16:13-27, Luke 9:18-27, and Mark 8:27-38) record Peter's statement that Jesus is the Messiah. In Mark and Matthew, Peter protests Jesus' prophecy, and Jesus rebukes him, while Luke removes Peter's rebuke. In addition, Matthew adds details about Peter receiving the key and becoming the Rock. Mark adds the fact that Jesus "said this very openly" (Mark 8:32). Then he continued with Jesus' warning not to spread the news of his messiahship, prophecies of his death, and future resurrection, as well as offering teachings about carrying the cross.¹⁴

Narrative Theological Analysis

Mark 8:31-38 is in the middle of the narrative of Mark 8:22-10:52. In the previous section 8:27-30, Jesus asked His disciples what the crowd thought of Him and, more importantly, who they thought He was. When Peter answered that Jesus was the Christ, He confirmed his response but firmly ordered them not to spread the word. The reason is that Peter did not understand what the word meant. In the same way, Jesus would correct Peter's understanding of who He was. He would also correct their understanding of what it

¹³ Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 87; Francis J. Moloney, "Constructing Jesus' and the Son of Man," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (2013): 719-38, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43728295>.

¹⁴ John Q. Doe, "Peter's Confession at Caesarea Philippi: An Exegesis of Mark 8:27-38"; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 174-75; van Eck, "Mission, Identity and Ethics in Mark."

means to follow Him (*akoloutheo*).¹⁵ Meanwhile, Mark 9:1-10:52 states the change of Jesus' divine form, accompanied by the revelation of Jesus as the beloved Son, followed by the miraculous healing event.

Mark 8:31-32 is the first of three prophecies of Jesus that He will bear in the Gospel of Mark (See also 9:31-32 and 10:32-34). A misunderstanding follows every prophecy in Mark by the disciples, including Peter (8:32-33), the disciples (9:33-34); and James and John (10:35-40). Jesus rebuked Peter by calling him the Devil in Mark 1:12-13.¹⁶ In this case, Jesus' teachings had just taken a new direction and disturbed the disciples. Beavis points out that "Messiah's meaning is characteristic in first-century Judaism, but does not include the one who suffers, dies, and rises." In this passage, too, Mark reminds his readers directly that following Jesus includes the way (*hodos*) of the cross."¹⁷

After placing Peter (the Devil) in his place, Jesus begins paradoxical teaching that is vital to his identity and mission toward those who will become His disciples. "For those who wish to save their lives will lose it, and those who lose their lives for my sake, and the sake of the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35; Matt. 16:25; Luke 17:33).¹⁸ The severity of Peter's rebuke is appropriate given the importance of the teaching that followed. To try to prevent Jesus from surrendering his life entirely to God, regardless of the risk or

¹⁵ Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 85; Marcus J Borg, *Meeting Jesus in Mark: Conversations with Scripture* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge Publishing, 2011), 73–74; John Q. Doe, "Peter's Confession at Caesarea Philippi: An Exegesis of Mark 8:27–38."

¹⁶ Cockerill, "The Invitation-Structure and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark."

¹⁷ Mary Ann Beavis, *Mark*, Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011), 13–134; Daniel L Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Mark* (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Reference, 2014), 173–74.

¹⁸ Quoted in all three synoptic gospels, a version of that also appears in John 12:25. Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 245; The big theme of Mark 8:27-9:29 is the way (*hodos*) of Christian discipleship. Mary Healy and Peter S. Williamson, *The Gospel of Mark*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 168–69.

sacrifice, is to align himself with the forces that oppose him.¹⁹ For Cockerill, Mark 8:31-38 shows the disciples' inability to understand the new riddle Jesus put before them—the necessity of His suffering as the Christ and its implications for His disciples.²⁰

The word “life” (Greek: *psyche*) appears four times in three verses (Mark 8:35-38), which means life is the soul itself. The term “life” in Hebrew means *nephesh*, as is found in the following sentence: “God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living being (*nephesh*)” (Genesis 2:7). People’s lives are gifts that arise because people are shaped in God’s image, each unique expression from that picture.²¹

To lose one’s life does not mean to be ‘lost’ to others, and it also does not mean to seek martyrdom or become a sacrifice to please God. What is missing from the people is the notion that the people’s lives are their own, while at the same time, their lives are a gift from God. While it may mean experiencing discomfort, risk, and sacrifice along the path of discipleship, it does not mean giving up the present and unique identity of the people. Instead, such a defeat is a way to find them.²²

Commenting on John’s version of the Gospel on this subject, Lincoln says, “To save, find, or save a life is to try to live life as if it has it, and this is a doomed endeavor because life is a gift from God. On the other hand, to lose one’s life is to give up efforts to save lives

¹⁹ Hans F. Bayer, *A Theology of Mark: The Dynamic between Christology and Authentic Discipleship*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2012), 89–98; Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 174–75; van Eck, “Mission, Identity and Ethics in Mark.”

²⁰ Cockerill, “The Invitation-Structure and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark.”

²¹ Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 88; Healy and Williamson, *The Gospel of Mark*, 169–70; David J. Lull, “Reading the Gospel of Mark within Three Horizons,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 44, no. 4 (2017): 4–6, <https://currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/article/view/83>.

²² Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 175–77; The big theme of Mark 8:27-9:29 is the way (hodos) of Christian discipleship. See Healy and Williamson, *The Gospel of Mark*, 159.

for themselves and, conversely, spend them serving God and others. Those who lose their lives in this way find that they receive life back from God.”²³ Resurrection of life is living in the presence of the “living God.”²⁴

The resurrection comes after death. The teachings of Jesus in the stories of today’s people tease with the Resurrection of Jesus (Easter) but also remind that the way to Easter is through the cross.” When Jesus commanded the disciples to take up their crosses, he said that the way to a new life was through the cross.²⁵

Several resolutions appear amid the narrative about the motives of the misunderstanding (Mark 8:27-30). As soon as Peter confesses to Jesus as the Messiah, Mark dramatically returns to the motive of conflict. In Mark 8:32-33, Jesus told His disciples that the opposition to Him had reached such a height that it would end in His death. Mark answered questions his listeners might have asked by giving voice to his implied readers through Peter’s words and, in effect, rebuking Jesus. Readers know that Jesus is the Son of God; how, then, could he be killed? Peter questioned the same thing and asked Jesus.²⁶

Jesus’ response further shows how central the motives of loyalty, conflict, and misunderstanding were to Mark. Jesus rebuked Peter and sternly said, “get away ‘from before me’ Devil.”²⁷ For Peter does not set your mind on the things of God, but on the things of

²³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2013), 350.

²⁴ Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 88; East, “An Undefensive Presence.”

²⁵ Moloney, “‘Constructing Jesus’ and the Son of Man”; Cockerill, “The Invitation-Structure and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark.”

²⁶ Deven K. MacDonald and Ernest van Eck, “Witnesses to the Truth: Mark’s Point of View,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2016): a3350, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i1.3350>; Healy and Williamson, *The Gospel of Mark*, 164-66.

²⁷ Ben Witherington adds the translation meaning “stand behind me” which means that the student’s faithfulness and obedience follow behind his teacher. See Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 243; Susan R. Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 76-82.

men (Mark 8:33). Here, Mark, through the words of Jesus, makes it clear that the question of faithfulness is more complex than one might think. In Jesus' prophecy, it seems that there is something still unclear about his Resurrection (Mark 8:31). It suggests that the good news is not tied to avoiding the protagonist's death. In his rebuke of Peter, Jesus went a step further and explained, to continue the metaphor, that being on 'the Lord's side' or acting out of faithfulness may look different than initially thought.²⁸

Peter's desire to protect or stop the murder of Jesus was against God's plan and placed him on the side of the enemy, Satan. The theme of fidelity, then, is not to be found in thinking along the lines of 'human things' but in 'things of God' working in a way that does not yet have character, and likely, the reader cannot comprehend it. To be infidelity to Jesus means to properly understand Jesus' impending death from God's point of view.

After prophesying his death, Jesus taught about the nature of discipleship and the need to 'deny himself' (Mark 8:34-38). Jesus argued that faithfulness means opposing the 'faithless and sinful generation. In fact, 'to gain the world' means to stand against Jesus or, more accurately, to make Jesus stand against them ('the Son of Man will be ashamed'; Mk 8:28).²⁹

There is an interesting parallel between Mark 8:35-37 and Psalm 49:7-9. The psalmist speaks of how incapable humanity is of paying the ransom for their own lives. In the same way, Jesus emphasized that humankind cannot save itself through any material gain or even

²⁸ MacDonald and van Eck, "Witnesses to the Truth"; Bayer, *A Theology of Mark*, 100–104.

²⁹ Akin, Platt, and Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 175–77; Gert Breed, "Diakonia: In Conversation with John N. Collins," *Ecclesiology* 13, no. 3 (2017): 349–68, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455316-01303005>.

the sacrifice of another sinner. Humanity could only be redeemed through the blood of the perfect sacrifice, Jesus.³⁰

Mark's narrative emphasizes an oral tradition about Jesus that the other two Gospels undermine or ignore. Mark's focus is on the identity and mission of Jesus. Using the theme of messianic secrets, Mark paints a negative portrait of the disciples. Not only did Jesus' enemies misunderstand Him, but his disciples also misunderstood Him. Concerning Jesus' true identity and mission, then, Mark explains that Jesus' confession as the Messiah became a problem for Jesus during his ministry. Why? What is constituted by an adequate acknowledgment of Jesus as the "Son of God"? More importantly, Jesus' true identity and mission for true discipleship imply for those who profess to follow Jesus, the "Son of God"? Furthermore, what is meant by true discipleship in the face of persecution?³¹

Such questions are essential in the historical setting of the Roman fires in AD 64 and the aftermath of Nero's persecution of Christians.³² If this fire was Mark's setting, then Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi recorded in Mark 8:27-38 immediately became a problem for the early readers of the Gospels. This passage will also prove to be a narrative fulcrum that changes Mark's plot dramatically towards the conclusion of Jesus' ministry, which resulted in his suffering and death. In other words, the key to Jesus' identity and mission is this suffering, death, and resurrection.³³

³⁰ Ronald J. Allen, "Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 8:27-38," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 44, no. 4 (2017): 31-36, <https://currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/article/view/88>.

³¹ John Q. Doe, "Peter's Confession at Caesarea Philippi: An Exegesis of Mark 8:27-38," 12-15; Lull, "Reading the Gospel of Mark within Three Horizons."

³² For History and the city of Jerusalem apart from the writings of Josephus Flavius, it can also be compared with the writings of Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem: The Biography* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2012), https://archive.org/details/isbn_9780307280503.

³³ Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel*, 74; Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 245; Lull, "Reading the Gospel of Mark within Three Horizons."

The theme of the Son of Man (Aramaic: *bar enasy* or *bar anasya*)³⁴ whose divine mission is suffering, atoning death, and resurrection to save those who believe in him and follow him, is at the heart of Mark's story. This prophecy leads to the crucifixion of Jesus as a revelation of his identity as the Son of God. It was also the epicenter of the disaster in Jerusalem for the disciples who utterly failed in their attempts to follow Jesus. The nadir of the passion narrative is 2:50 pm referring to Jesus' disciples at a time of crisis: "all fled."³⁵

Peter's denial (14:66-72) personalizes this failure even for the one who seems destined to lead the group after Jesus. At the same time, the centurion's confession (15:39) verbally points to the irony of Peter's confession failure. The disciples' failure resulted from a misunderstanding of the messianic nature of Jesus, which in contemporary terms, the disciples "did not understand". Failure is a possibility after Resurrection in Mark's storyline. The women who came to the empty tomb failed to heed the Lord's command to go and tell (16:7). On the other hand, "they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid" (16:8), and there Mark's story ends abruptly.

It could be possible, which is where Mark wants to leave his readers in Rome, for he guesses that they are. Faced with the desperate actions of a despicable ruler, what is the response of true discipleship, and what are the consequences? Even after the Resurrection, recognizing who Jesus was had to play out in contemporary discipleship. So Jesus' question to Peter at Caesarea Philippi resonates with readers of Mark's Gospel: "But who do you think I am?" and Jesus' call to "take up your cross and follow me"

³⁴Specifically means just me and no one else.

³⁵ John Q. Doe, "Peter's Confession at Caesarea Philippi: An Exegesis of Mark 8:27-38"; Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel*, 82; Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 241-42.

brings home an essential point for persecuted believers.³⁶ The identity and mission of Jesus were an example and stated that he experienced suffering, death, and Resurrection as Christ.

Reflection on Jesus' Identity and Mission

Mark's Gospel is excellent news for all humankind, especially God's people, if God's people respond appropriately. If God's people respond with unbelief or ordinary "belief" that does not manifest in their actions, then the Gospel of Jesus' Resurrection, reign, and return are bad news. There is no such thing as an "ordinary follower" of Jesus. If God's people give their lives to follow Jesus, the results would be no different from God's people than for Him who had suffering, rejection, death before resurrection, and glory. The correct response, then, is to accept the grief and denial in this world for the sake of Jesus, and by doing so, God's people will reap eternal grace.³⁷ Peter's erroneous thinking about the Messiah may have its roots in the Old Testament, but if so, he only saw part of the story. In Daniel 7, the Son of Man is presented in glory with an eternal kingdom. It will indeed happen, but only after Jesus has fulfilled His duty as faithful Israel, the Suffering Servant of God (Isa. 52:13-53:12).³⁸

Theologically, discipleship is rooted in the fellowship of God's people with Jesus. God's people must follow Jesus' pattern of life if they follow Him, but God's people must follow His pattern because God's people have been united with Him (Romans 6). So Jesus took up His cross for the salvation of the world, God's people did the

³⁶ Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 83; Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 245; Allen, "Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost."

³⁷ Joshua E. Leim, "In the Glory of His Father: Intertextuality and the Apocalyptic Son of Man in the Gospel of Mark," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7, no. 2 (2013): 213-32, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26421567>.

³⁸ Leim.

same, not that God's people's "cross" can effectively atone for human sins, but God's people's "cross" is what makes the spread of the Gospel possible among all people.³⁹

Self-denial or death shows God's people a helpful way to understand Jesus' words in this article. God's people can also remember Paul's words when he wrote that "for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against governments, against powers, against the rulers of this dark world, against the evil spirits of the air."⁴⁰ God's people will not imitate and carry out His commands if they do not live in the Spirit He sent.⁴¹

From a contemplative point of view, these rulers or cosmic forces of darkness are demons lurking within God's people, working hard to convince people that people are separate from God, other people, and ourselves. This spiritual battle seems simple because even though it depends on making one choice, making the right choice can seem very difficult.

It is a battle fought within each of God's people and in every moment, fought between the heart's beats, in the space between thoughts, in the pauses between breaths. It is a struggle to choose between submitting to God's will or relying on one's own will. It is the mission of God's people in their lives.⁴² Ultimately, choosing

³⁹ Akin, Platt, and Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 175–77; Breed, "Diakonia."

⁴⁰ Breed, "Diakonia."

⁴¹ Disobeying and refusing guidance to the Holy Spirit has the meaning of rejecting the example and command of Jesus, in which the Holy Spirit was sent by Jesus to guide and guide God's people according to God's will. Sri Wahyuni and Susanti Embong Bulan, "Membaca Lukas 12:10 Dan Makna Teologi Menghujat Roh Kudus (Reading Luke 12:10 and the Theology Meaning of Blasphemes Against the Holy Spirit)," *Quaerens: Journal of Theology and Christianity Studies* 2, no. 1 (2020): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.46362/quaerens.v2i1.1>; Bobby Kurnia Putrawan, "Pengantar Teologi Pentakosta (Introduction to Pentecostal Theology)," *Quaerens: Journal of Theology and Christianity Studies* 1, no. 1 (2019): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.46362/quaerens.v1i1.2>.

⁴² Hyunwoo Koo, "Missionaries and Colonialism: The Nineteenth Century British and Contemporary Korean Missionaries in Zambia," *Mahabbah: Journal of Religion and Education* 1, no. 2 (2020): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.47135/mahabbah.v1i1.2>.

surrender brings every person to rest in God's Kingdom's eternal life. Still, it also requires a radical rejection of all worldly attachments, including attachment to the worldly identity that is created and maintained.

To avoid this self-denial, each of God's people often succumbs to the many distractions this world has to offer, including the stories that play inside their heads. The human ego will do anything, even subvert the very nature of battle itself, to avoid being dissolved in union with God's infinite love. Moreover, the human ego dislikes losing, especially in a human culture where winning is everything. Therefore it seems impossible to wage wars where the only way to win is to lose.⁴³

Jesus talked about how to take up the cross and follow Him. Many of God's people do this symbolically during Lent. This symbolism represents something more significant and much more beyond our control; Peter discovered himself in Jesus' teachings and ultimately in Jesus' death - again, Peter could not choose what died. And the people are not a church either. The Church cannot determine what dies in any cultural change that creates these painful times as humanity enters the 21st century together - moments that make people cry and wonder about the faith of their children and children from generations to come.⁴⁴

What about us as God's people? God's people cannot choose, but what else can we learn from the meaning of this text? Firmly, Jesus rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind you, Devil! Because we are setting his mind not on divine things but on human things. Why was Jesus so strong in His language? What about Peter's rebuke that got him placed behind? We think it might have something to do with

⁴³ Leim, "In the Glory of His Father."

⁴⁴ van Eck, "Mission, Identity and Ethics in Mark."

feeling that Peter's rebuke refuted Jesus' *hot-off-the-press teaching* that "after three days (the Son of Man will) rise again."⁴⁵

This act of deep self-denial, especially early in our journey, is almost always excruciating. Making the right choices in our spiritual battles can indeed cause us great suffering. Without the gift of courage, we may, like Peter, reject the necessity of a painful death to ourselves before we rise with Christ in the resurrection. It gives hope that the becoming of God's people will not end in vain but will be raised from the dead, like what happened to Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Mark does not invite God's people to speculate about the identity of Jesus or the nature of following him. The question posed by the Bible is not the abstract question "Who is Jesus?" The question asked by Jesus was, "Who do you say I am?" (8:29). Mark's Gospel brings people face to face with the person of Jesus by enabling us to identify with the disciples he first called and thereby confronting us with Jesus' invitation to follow Him.

The Identity and Mission of Jesus in Mark 8:31-38 leave a strong meaning that this is a strong picture for the people to look in the mirror by wearing the identity and mission of Jesus to God's people today. This imposition teaches that people have the duty and responsibility to share in the suffering and dying in faithfulness as disciples of Jesus who are behind Him. Does this stop here? God answers that people will get their lives by Resurrection in and with Jesus.

⁴⁵ Breed, "Diakonia"; compare with Maik Arnold, "Missionary Self-Perception and Meaning-Making in Cross-Cultural Mission: A Cultural Psychological Analysis of the Narrative Identity of German Protestants," *Transformation* 32, no. 4 (2015): 240-55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378814558446>.

REFERENCES

- Akin, Daniel L, David Platt, and Tony Merida. *Exalting Jesus in Mark*. Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Reference, 2014.
- Allen, Ronald J. "Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 8:27-38." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 44, no. 4 (2017): 31-36. <https://currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/article/view/88>.
- Arnold, Maik. "Missionary Self-Perception and Meaning-Making in Cross-Cultural Mission: A Cultural Psychological Analysis of the Narrative Identity of German Protestants." *Transformation* 32, no. 4 (2015): 240-55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378814558446>.
- Bayer, Hans F. *A Theology of Mark: The Dynamic between Christology and Authentic Discipleship*. Explorations in Biblical Theology. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2012.
- Beavis, Mary Ann. *Mark*. Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011.
- Borg, Marcus J. *Meeting Jesus in Mark: Conversations with Scripture*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge Publishing, 2011.
- Breed, Gert. "Diakonia: In Conversation with John N. Collins." *Ecclesiology* 13, no. 3 (2017): 349-68. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455316-01303005>.
- Cockerill, Gareth L. "The Invitation-Structure and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark." *The Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies* 3, no. 1 (2016): 28-43. <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/jibs/vol3/iss1/4>.
- Comstock, Gary L. "Two Types of Narrative Theology." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LV, no. 4 (1987): 687-717. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/LV.4.687>.

- Dowd, Sharyn Echols. *Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel*. Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2000.
- East, Brad. "An Undefensive Presence: The Mission and Identity of the Church in Kathryn Tanner and John Howard Yoder." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68, no. 3 (2015): 327-44. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930615000137>.
- Eck, Ernest van. "Mission, Identity and Ethics in Mark: Jesus, the Patron for Outsiders." *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2013): Art. #2003. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v69i1.2003>.
- Fackre, Gabriel. "Narrative Theology: An Overview." *Interpretation* 37, no. 4 (1983): 340-52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096438303700402>.
- Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas K. Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Fourth edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014.
- Garrett, Susan R. *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.
- Harrell Jr., David Edwin. *All Things Are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/45766>.
- Healy, Mary, and Peter S. Williamson. *The Gospel of Mark*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Hollander, William den. "Jesus, Josephus, and the Fall of Jerusalem: On Doing History with Scripture." *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2015): a2942. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i1.2942>.
- Huyssteen, Wentzel van. "Narrative Theology: An Adequate Paradigm for Theological Reflection?" *HTS Teologiese Studies /*

- Theological Studies* 45, no. 4 (1989): 767–77.
<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v45i4.2327>.
- John Q. Doe. “Peter’s Confession at Caesarea Philippi: An Exegesis of Mark 8:27–38.” University of Southern Mississippi, 2016.
<https://drkoine.com/pdf/home/NOBTSPapersT8.pdf>.
- Johnson, David R. “The Mark of the Beast, Reception History, and Early Pentecostal Literature.” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 25, no. 2 (2016): 184–202. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-02502003>.
- Koo, Hyunwoo. “Missionaries and Colonialism: The Nineteenth Century British and Contemporary Korean Missionaries in Zambia.” *Mahabbah: Journal of Religion and Education* 1, no. 2 (2020): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.47135/mahabbah.v1i1.2>.
- Leim, Joshua E. “In the Glory of His Father: Intertextuality and the Apocalyptic Son of Man in the Gospel of Mark.” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7, no. 2 (2013): 213–32. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26421567>.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. *The Gospel According to Saint John*. Black’s New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Lull, David J. “Reading the Gospel of Mark within Three Horizons.” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 44, no. 4 (2017): 4–6. <https://currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/article/view/83>.
- MacDonald, Deven K., and Ernest van Eck. “Witnesses to the Truth: Mark’s Point of View.” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2016): a3350. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i1.3350>.
- Moloney, Francis J. “‘Constructing Jesus’ and the Son of Man.” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (2013): 719–38. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43728295>.

- — —. *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002.
- Montefiore, Simon Sebag. *Jerusalem: The Biography*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2012.
https://archive.org/details/isbn_9780307280503.
- Mwikamba, Constantine, and Stephen Akaranga Ifedha. "Blessed Are the Rich and Prosperous For Theirs Is the Kingdom of the World: The Kenyan Challenge." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 5, no. 14 (2015): 138–42.
<https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/view/24555>.
- Ongong'a, Jude J., and Stephen I. Akaranga. "Prosperity Gospel in Kenyan Urban Centres: Come, See, Pay and Receive Your Miracles and Healing." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 5, no. 10 (2015): 199–208.
<https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/view/22896>.
- Putrawan, Bobby Kurnia. "Pengantar Teologi Pentakosta (Introduction to Pentecostal Theology)." *Quaerens: Journal of Theology and Christianity Studies* 1, no. 1 (2019): 1–7.
<https://doi.org/10.46362/quaerens.v1i1.2>.
- Ricœur, Paul. *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.
- Schirmacher, Thomas. "Suffering and Prosperity: Equal Challenges to Faith." Lausanne Movement, August 2, 2010.
<https://lausanne.org/content/suffering-and-prosperity-equal-challenges-to-faith>.
- Thornburg, Annette. "Narrative's Revelatory Power: Toward an Understanding of Narrative Theology." *Denison Journal of Religion* 5, no. 1 (2017): Article 3.
<https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/religion/vol5/iss1/3>.

Marthin Steven Lumingkewas, Bobby Kurnia Putrawan & Susanti Embong Bulan

Wahyuni, Sri, and Susanti Embong Bulan. "Membaca Lukas 12:10 Dan Makna Teologi Menghujat Roh Kudus (Reading Luke 12:10 and the Theology Meaning of Blasphemes Against the Holy Spirit)." *Quaerens: Journal of Theology and Christianity Studies* 2, no. 1 (2020): 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.46362/quaerens.v2i1.1>.

Witherington, Ben. *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.