

Why did Jesus tell people not to tell people about Him? * Q's from the Pews
Mark 1:4-45, 5:40-43, 7:32-36, 8:28-30, 9:7-9 * July 17, 2022 * Langford Church * Graham Gladstone

This morning we have a really interesting question to wrestle with –

Why did Jesus tell people to not tell people about Him?

At first glance, that may seem like a counterintuitive question. Didn't Jesus say 'Go therefore into all the world and make disciples of all the nations, telling them about Me and teaching them to obey'?

Yes, He did, *after* His death and resurrection, but *before* His death and resurrection, there are about a dozen times when Jesus does something amazing and then says 'Don't tell anyone what you just saw.'

Why would He do that? Why would He tell people to not tell people about Him?

As it turns out, this question is actually a field of study in biblical scholarship that biblical scholars call 'the Messianic secret.' Jesus KNEW He was the Messiah and was committed to being that Messiah and yet for some reason, prior to His death, Jesus wanted to keep that fact a secret. Our job this morning is to figure out why.

So join me in the Gospel of Mark and we're going to look at a handful of passages where Jesus tells people to stay mum and we'll see if we can't figure out why. (Just as an aside, this happens in Matthew and Luke too but Mark has the most so that's where we'll focus our attention). So Mark 1, starting in verse 40.

Now Jesus is just beginning His public ministry and you'd think He'd like to stir up some word-of-mouth; get people to know about what it is He is doing. And yet, this happens:

40 A man with leprosy came to him and [fell on his knees and] begged him ~~on his knees~~, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

41 Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"

42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.

Now that's how to make a big splash! If you want people to know that you're an amazing person, you do amazing things, like healing a man of leprosy. And yet –

43 Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning:

44 "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."

Jesus heals the man and yet He wants not credit for it. He is more concerned with this man's ritual purity than His own reputation. And yet, guess what the man with leprosy did?

45 Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Jesus told him not to tell anyone. He went out and told everyone!

And I think the result is one of the reasons that Jesus told people not to tell people about Him. It's an entirely practical one. If people don't know who Jesus is, He can go around without attracting attention and accomplish all the things that He knows He HAS to do. And yet, if everybody knows who He is and everybody knows what He's capable of, they're all going to want a piece of Him and He won't get anything done!

I heard a story this week about why Michael Jordan began shaving his head. (Not sure if it's apocryphal or not but it makes the point). Apparently at one point he had a deal with a barber that he'd come down to the shop and get his hair cut in peace and quiet. The barber got to meet Michael Jordan; Michael Jordan got a trim in private and that was that. Until, word got out that Michael Jordan came down to this barber and all of a sudden, MJ couldn't even get a haircut without a crowd milling around. Good for the barber, not so much for the basketball player. And so, as a result, he started shaving his head, all because everyone knew who He was.

I think that's what happened with Jesus too. He knew that His mission was not just performing miracles, and He knew that if people knew He was the Messiah, they'd never stop coming to Him and slowing Him down. So I think, one of the reasons that Jesus told people to not tell people about Him, was to preserve a degree of anonymity to enable Him to get around.

I don't think that's the only reason though, so let's look at a couple more instances. Flip over to Mark 5:40-43.

There in chapter 5, Jesus meets a synagogue ruler whose daughter is dying. Jesus is on the way to see her and gets waylaid by a lady with a bleeding problem. Jesus heals her but by the time He gets to the ruler's house, his daughter has already died. And yet Jesus says 'Why are you all weeping and wailing? She's not dead, just asleep.' And they laughed at Him.

Nonetheless Jesus took the mom and dad and a couple disciples up to see this girl. And He takes her by the hand and says '*Talitha kum*' (Get up little one) and up she gets. The dead girl came back to life. The disciples were astonished; the parents were astonished; and yet what does Jesus say? 'Say nothing about what you have seen.' Verse 43 – He gave strict orders to not let anyone know about this.

Why? Why would He want to keep that a secret? I mean, the parents were going to have to dance around the subject of how it was that the little girl that everybody "KNEW" was dead was now alive. And yet Jesus gave STRICT orders not to say anything.

Same thing over in Mark 7.

Mark 7:32-36. Mark 7, some people bring a deaf man to Jesus and say 'Please, heal him. He can hardly talk and he's entirely deaf. Please heal him.'

Jesus takes the man aside, puts His fingers in his ears, spits on the ground and touches the man's tongue and then says '*Ephphatha*' – 'be opened!' And just like that, the man could speak.

And again, verse 36 - 36 Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it.

What a nuisance eh? Jesus says 'don't say anything' and they say even more! It does make me wonder if maybe Jesus was doing a little reverse-psychology on these people – "Don't tell anyone; ok, we'll tell everyone." I wonder if maybe there's something to that. But I'd like to point out something that we've seen in each of these stories.

Look at Mark 7:36. What does He say? Specifically. "Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about IT" (Mar 7:36 NIV). I.e. the healing.

Go back to 5, verse 43. What does it say? "He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this" (not Him, 'this.')

Look at 1:44: "See that you don't tell *this* to anyone" (Mar 1:44 NIV).

Jesus is not telling people to not talk about HIM; He's telling people to not talk about the miracles. He's telling people to keep these miraculous displays of power to themselves because that's not what Jesus wants to be known for. His mission is not simply to do miracles, but to seek and save the lost, doing miracles to prove that He's seeking and saving the last by the power of God.

That comes through in the next couple of passages we'll look at – Mark 8 and 9.

Mark 8:28-30 –

Jesus is out with His disciples and He asks them 'Who do people say I am?' and the disciples rattle off 'Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah' and then Jesus says 'who do YOU say I am?' And Peter replies – 'You are the Christ, you are the Messiah!'

Right answer, but look at Jesus' response: 30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. (Mar 8:30 NIV). And then He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected and killed and after three days rise again. What's that all about? Peter knows Jesus' truly glorious identity and yet Jesus doesn't just say – 'keep that a secret;' He says that 'as that glorious Messiah, He has to suffer?' What?

Something very similar happens in the very next chapter – Mark 9:7-9, the Transfiguration – Peter, James and John are up on a mountain with Jesus and all of a sudden, He's transformed: dazzling white, radiant in glory, walking around and talking with Moses and Elijah and then, verse 9, coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

What's going on here? Why does Jesus keep downplaying His identity as the Messiah?

Well, here's the thing. The people of Israel in Jesus' day were looking for a Messiah: a powerful ruler who would come and fix all their problems and heal all their diseases and triumph over all of their enemies. If word got out that Jesus, who healed the deaf and raised the dead and walked on glorious mountains with the heroes old, was the Messiah, people would have immediately grabbed Him to make Him their own.

In fact, some people actually DID do that. John 6:15 says that some people tried to come and take Jesus and make Him their king and conqueror by force.

But that's not the kind of Messiah that Jesus came to be. Jesus didn't come to be a miracle working Messiah; He came to be a suffering Messiah, a redeeming Messiah, whose miracles proved that He was sent by God. That's what all that talk about suffering and dying and rising again is about in Mark 8. Peter correctly identifies Jesus as the Messiah and then Jesus says – 'Yes I am the Messiah and yet counter to your expectation, as the Messiah, I will suffer and die for the forgiveness of sins.' Jesus says – 'I'm not the kind of Messiah that you expect me to be – a worldly one who fixes all your problems; I'm a saving Messiah who fixes the big problems - who conquers death by dying and restores you to God.'

THAT is why Jesus told people not to say anything about Him before His death; He feared that people would miss the point and take Him for a conquering Messiah, rather than a saving one. He knew that He needed to suffer and die and rise again to redeem His people and so He didn't want anyone to know that He was the Messiah until it was clear what kind of Messiah He was – a suffering saviour, not a conquering ruler.

The Messianic secret though always had an expiry date. If you look back at Mark 9, verse 9, Jesus told His disciples not to tell anyone about His Transfiguration until AFTER His death and resurrection. Well, we're past that date, which means the gloves are off. The game has changed and the game plan has too. Now it's not 'Don't tell anyone;' it's 'Tell everyone!'

And this is where this question intersects with our lives. Yes, before His death and resurrection, Jesus kept His identity as the Messiah a secret, but now, after His death and resurrection, the secret's out. He's the Messiah who takes away the sins of the world, who conquers death and heals the broken-hearted. And we who are Christians all have first-hand experience of His love and salvation; our task now is to let as many people as possible know who this glorious Messiah is.

As the majority of commentators I read this week point out, that's a secret that's too good to keep! Grant Osborne, for example, writes: "This is Mark's point. When Christ has changed your life, you must go public with the incredible joy that you feel" (Teach the Text, 33). Think about it – you go to a good restaurant, you see a good movie; what's your instinct? I gotta tell somebody about this! How much more then should we be eager to share the news of a Messiah who has conquered death and restored us to God, all because of His compassion for us? That's news we need to share!

One caveat though. The Messianic Secret, I think, encourages us to think carefully about who it is that we are sharing with others. Pre-Easter, Jesus wanted His Messianic identity to be a secret, because He didn't want people to think of Him simply as a miracle worker who would come in and fix all their problems and vanquish all their enemies. He had bigger issues to deal with.

Same for us, if we're telling people that Jesus will fix all their problems like a heavenly handyman, then we're missing the point. Yes, this Messiah cares about our everyday problems and helps us deal with those everyday problems but job number one for Him is our spiritual condition. We need to introduce people to Jesus, not for what they can get out of Him, but for what He gives to them – salvation and belonging and eternal life. 'Come for the miracles but stay for the Gospel.'

Jesus is a glorious Messiah, who laid down His life to restore us to God, to show us His love for us and to conquer death; no wonder then that Jesus said – Go therefore into all the nations and let them know about Me.

BENEDICTION

1 Corinthians 15:58 - Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.