

Jesus' Secret

DAVE BAST

When I was a kid growing up, I sometimes watched a TV show called *I've Got a Secret*. A celebrity panel would try to guess someone's secret, which was revealed to the audience, by asking him a series of yes or no questions. Well, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus appears as the ultimate *I've Got a Secret* contestant, with a secret he doesn't seem to want anyone to know until it is time. We will explore this theme today on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, we are now at the third program in a six-part series on Mark. It is just such a wonderful book; it is so full of good things. The shortest of the gospels, but we have decided to kind of work through this thematically, so we began by looking at the Gospel of Mark as a whole—its overall structure—how fast-paced it is—and then, in the last program, we considered the theme of Jesus' misunderstanding and rejection by the people of Israel—the people to whom he came; and today we are going to look at another theme—the secrecy of Jesus about his own identity.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and Dave, in this six-part series...for three of the six programs...we are happy to be joined by Dr. Gary Burge, who taught at Wheaton College for many years, and now for the last several years has been a professor of New Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. So Gary, welcome back.

GARY BURGE

Yes, great; good to be with both of you.

DAVE BAST

So, let's get right into a passage from Mark Chapter 1. We just touched briefly on this in our very first program, to look at the issue of Jesus' authority—his remarkable authority—coming directly from God, so to speak, rather than from a line of rabbis, but here is the context of that from Mark 1:21: So they (being Jesus and his disciples) went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²²The people were amazed at his teaching because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the Law. ²³Just then, a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴“What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are; the Holy One of God.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

“Be quiet,” said Jesus sternly, “Come out of him.” ²⁶The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out with a shriek, ²⁷and the people were all amazed, and they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching; and with authority he gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” ²⁸And news about him spread quickly (or, that is immediately, as we talked about in the first program) over the whole region of Galilee.

So, this is a very dramatic story, but Gary, it is probably the first instance in Mark of something we see, especially in that first half of Mark—the first eight and one half chapters—where when someone publicly identifies Jesus here as the Holy One of God, Jesus says: Shh, shh, shh; be quiet. Don't talk about that. It is called the Messianic secret...

GARY BURGE

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is kind of a motif in Mark. So, talk a little bit about what that is in Mark.

GARY BURGE

Right; it is a distinguishing feature of Mark's Gospel, and you will see this a little bit in Matthew...I don't think at all in Luke, if I am not mistaken...but it is something that is really important to Mark's Gospel. One of the features of Mark that is fascinating is that while Jesus introduces himself to the public, and as he moves through Israel's public domain in the first eight chapters, no one seems to figure out who he is accurately. Even the disciples don't get it, but the demons do get it; and so therefore, right away you have this kind of odd configuration, where the public misunderstands, but demons get it. They are living in the spiritual world...Jesus has come from the spiritual world. They are able to recognize a spiritual being such as Jesus in a way that no one else can. So, they have the eyes for this.

DAVE BAST

Yes; in fact, that is not the only instance of this, where a demon sort of confesses Jesus' divine identity. Here in Chapter 5, beginning at verse 6—Mark 5:6: When he saw Jesus from a distance, the man ran and fell on his knees in front of him...

GARY BURGE

Right.

DAVE BAST

⁷He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name, don't torture me." ⁸For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit."

GARY BURGE

Yes, exactly, Dave...

DAVE BAST

What is going on there?

GARY BURGE

So, notice the demon exactly knows how to identify Jesus accurately; and you are just cheering on the sidelines, hoping someone else will identify Jesus as accurately, but no one can. No one gets it. So, Jesus has a problem. He has a problem of, if he discloses his full identity in public, I would imagine that the average Jewish listener wouldn't even know what to make of it. Let me explain this in a couple of ways. First of all, Jesus has a problem with divinity. Inside of Judaism, there is no notion that the Messiah is going to be divine...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

GARY BURGE

That is an idea that will be disclosed as Jesus' own identity unfolds. So therefore, Jesus really cannot say aloud: Well, I am the Son of God; and by the way, I have descended from the Father. That is just a pill too

large to swallow for your Jewish listener. The demons get that, but therefore, Jesus wants to repress that—he wants to control that—because that revelation is going to take a lot of time. The second problem he has is with the public idea of what the Messiah is supposed to do. The Messiah is supposed to be a political leader; the Messiah is going to defeat the Romans; he is going to cleanse Jerusalem. We have all of this in Jewish writing from the period. So, as soon as somebody says: Well, look; we have found the Messiah, Jesus wants to put a lid even on that title because it will lead to misunderstanding. So, Jesus ultimately wants to disclose that he is, yes, the Messiah; yes, he is the *divine* Messiah sent from God; he is the Son of God; but my goodness, the public is not ready for that revelation. So, he wants to control the moment of its full disclosure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is why also when we get to the third chapter in Mark, we get another story about the impure spirits who have Jesus pegged and figured out long before anybody else; but we read in Mark 3:10: For he healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. ¹¹Whenever the impure spirits saw Jesus, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.” ¹²But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

So, this seems on the surface level to be working at cross purposes. I mean, if...it is like, if you are the savior of the world, why don't you want people to know about it? But, you just said, Gary, if they move to Jesus too quickly, they are going to try to make him an earthly king...

GARY BURGE

That's right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that would not be what he wanted.

GARY BURGE

Well, they would make him an earthly fighter, that is what they would really like to do, because they would like to see the Messiah would be like Moses, who defeats Pharaoh; so likewise, *this* Messiah would defeat Rome.

I like to think of this image when it comes to Jesus and his Messiahship: You know there are those old children's stories about the king who wants to really understand his people; and so, therefore, he goes incognito and he changes his clothes...

DAVE BAST

The Prince and the Pauper.

GARY BURGE

The Prince and the Pauper, exactly. He goes among the people, and there he is. You cannot identify him at all; except there are probably a few people who look at him and wonder: Wait; that has got to be the king! But it would ruin his entire mission if he were disclosed fully in public. He wants to achieve something that his own self-disclosure isn't needed for. So therefore, Jesus wants to let this out gradually, so that only people who have the eyes of faith are going to be able to take it in.

DAVE BAST

But, it is also striking, isn't it, how Jesus is confronting the kingdom of the evil one?

GARY BURGE

Oh, absolutely.

DAVE BAST

Both in his healing of diseases and his exorcisms, really...

GARY BURGE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

I mean, this kind of blows our minds, living in modern Western society, with this whole demon possession thing; but it is really taking on the forces of the enemy, isn't it?

GARY BURGE

It is; in fact, when I think about Mark 1 and 2 and 3, what I think about is that Jesus is addressing the things that were fundamentally giving people fear. You have to just step back and ask: What are they really afraid of? In the ancient world, the idea was disease would kill you. You could die from a broken arm in the 1st Century; and then, they understood that the world was populated with demons under the control of Satan, and therefore, I feel vulnerable, frankly; I feel deeply vulnerable. So therefore, when you have these healings, like Peter's mother-in-law is healed. She has a fever...a fever was considered to be a disease in the 1st Century...Jesus is actually addressing things that are frightening people inside of this world, and he wants them to know that he has the power to correct those things that will hurt them, and that God is standing with them to protect them through this life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I heard someone...I am not sure if this is really correct, but I heard someone say once: Isn't it interesting, particularly in Mark's Gospel, but you see it all throughout, that Jesus encountered so many demon-possessed people...

GARY BURGE

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we generally don't; and somebody said why might that be? And this teacher said one time: Well, it is probably for the same reason that if you go to the emergency room at the hospital, you are going to see a lot of sick and injured people. You go to where you need to get healed, and Jesus was a magnet for these demon-possessed people because he is the one who could deliver them.

DAVE BAST

Well, so, here is this theme that comes out again and again and again in the opening verses of Mark. Jesus silences the demons; but, that was not all that he silenced, and we are going to go on and consider what he said to his own disciples in just a bit.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and our guest today is Dr. Gary Burge, who is joining us for three of six programs that we are doing on the Gospel of Mark; and this is now the third program in our series; and we have been talking about how Jesus kept secret...he kept hidden...his identity; and in the first few chapters of Mark, that was often when demons and the demon possessed identified him as the Son of God, and Jesus told them to be quiet and not tell people that; but, it is not just the demons, but also his disciples are told to keep it under wraps; and Dave and Gary, that leads us right to the center of Mark's Gospel...almost the exact heart of Mark's Gospel...in Mark 8.

DAVE BAST

Right; and Gary, this is a passage that you said was the hinge, in our very first program, on which the whole Gospel turns.

GARY BURGE

Exactly right, Dave. So, as the Gospel is building momentum, you might say...you are moving through the first eight chapters...and what you are anticipating is that at last will somebody please identify Jesus correctly. Then Jesus...get this...takes his disciples to the furthest point you can imagine away from Jerusalem...in other words, here is the suggestion: When you are at the very center of the religious infrastructure of Judaism—the Temple area—no one is going to be able to identify him. So, he goes to Caesarea Philippi at a mountain in the far, far north, and then this is the environment at Caesarea Philippi where he asks them if they recognize him.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

^{27b}“Who do people say I am?” ²⁸And they replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah; still others one of the prophets.” ²⁹“But, what about you?” Jesus asked. “Who do you say I am?” And Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰And Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

DAVE BAST

So, there it is again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and then we know Jesus goes on to say that, yes, he is the Messiah—he is the Son of Man, and that is why he is going to have to suffer and die; and then Peter rebukes him for that because that doesn't fit, what you were saying, Gary, their definition of Messiah as a political fighter; and it is interesting, as you said, they are in Caesarea Philippi...

GARY BURGE

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As I recall, Caesarea...so, think that is like Caesarville, right? That used to be the region of Naphtali, but the Caesar renamed it. So, if there were ever a place where political aspirations were running through the disciples' heads of wanting Jesus to take out Caesar, bring back Naphtali, it would be right here, which is why Peter rebukes Jesus for saying he has to die. That is not going to help...

GARY BURGE

Right, exactly; it is named after Caesar by Philip, one of the sons of Herod. So, yes; you've got him in a secular environment here; and yes, the identification is ironic, and certainly provocative. So, it is an entirely sort of secular environment where this goes down.

DAVE BAST

There was a lot of speculation going on about Jesus' identity, wasn't there...

GARY BURGE

Oh, yes; exactly.

DAVE BAST

As evidenced here?

GARY BURGE

Yes; Herod, who was ruling in western Galilee during this time...he has the notion that maybe John the Baptist, whom Herod killed, had come back from the dead and was haunting him, or something. So, you have

all of this crazy speculation about Jesus. They intuit that there is something remarkable in Jesus, but they are wondering exactly where he comes from.

DAVE BAST

And they are trying to describe him in Old Testament terms.

GARY BURGE

Oh, yes.

DAVE BAST

Something that would be more familiar. Yes, he is an amazing person. He is an amazing prophet; but somebody that, you know, we can put into context.

GARY BURGE

Yes, right, exactly. Okay, so the thing, though, that I want you to notice, which I think is so fascinating: This story of Caesarea Philippi is not just the hinge for the whole Gospel, but there is a turning point where once Jesus' Messiahship now has been identified rightly by Peter, then, from verses 29 to 31, look at that carefully; 29—yes, you have the identity of Jesus as Messiah; 31—now Jesus redefines Messiahship...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

GARY BURGE

Because there is nothing in Judaism that talks about the Messiah having a sacrificial death, not even dying. Some of them think that he has a supernatural kind of characteristic. So therefore, when Jesus redefines Messiahship, he needs...three times in Chapters 8, 9 and 10 he has to say: The Son of Man is going to die; he is going to be raised—he is going to die; he is going to be handed over. Each prediction is more specific. He is trying to drill it into them that Messiahship means loss, it doesn't mean victory; it means sacrificing yourself, it doesn't mean obtaining power.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; which is probably why now we are going to see in the last segment here that once in a while, and we will be seeing it with a person named Bartimaeus, Jesus kind of lets it go; but for the most part, when people identify Jesus publicly as the Son of God, or the Messiah, he says be quiet; and the only time that somebody says that publicly and no one tells him to be quiet is the soldier at the cross: Surely this was the Son of God.

GARY BURGE

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because now it is safe to say it, now that he is dead; now that you see what being the Messiah is, now you can say it and nobody has to say: Shh, keep it quiet. Now you know what is being Messiah.

DAVE BAST

Well, there is another story that comes shortly after...I think it is in the very next chapter...

GARY BURGE

It is...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It's in Mark 9.

DAVE BAST

Of Mark 9...the story of the transfiguration, where Peter, James and John accompany Jesus, and they see him transfigured. So, it is almost juxtaposed with this image of the Messiah going down and suffering, and now they see him glorified.

GARY BURGE

That is exactly right, Dave. So, you have this ironic juxtaposition of Jesus then having to redefine his Messiahship to one who experiences loss and suffering. So, in Chapter 9, they go up onto a mountaintop. I think it is Mount Hermon, which is just above Caesarea Philippi; but there, Moses standing, you know, for the Law, and Elijah standing for the Prophets, they are standing there affirming—validating Jesus' identity; and of course, Peter says: I like this. I want to stay where the power and the glory are...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right.

GARY BURGE

And then Jesus says: Sorry, we have to go down the mountain into the mess of human chaos, and there we are going to help a person who is demon possessed. There you have the picture. You move from the top of the mountain where all of this glory and power are located; you descend, and that is where the Messiah does his work.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And they just don't get it. So, they see this amazing spectacle, and yet, Jesus, as they come down the mountain, gives them strict orders not to tell anybody what they have seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead; and then the disciples say: Risen from the dead...I don't what he means...

DAVE BAST

What does that mean???

SCOTT HOEZEE

What's he talking about? They just don't get it; but as Mark's Gospel goes on, Jesus will begin to reveal more and more and more of what it will mean to be the Messiah, and we will look at that in just a moment.
Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee.

GARY BURGE

And I am Gary Burge.

DAVE BAST

So, it seems to me, Gary, we have been talking about the question of Jesus' identity—the Messianic secret, as it is called—his unwillingness to have people openly say: You are the Son of God and you are the Messiah—until he can frame that discussion in its proper terms...

GARY BURGE

Right.

DAVE BAST

For the kind of Messiah he came to be; but the question that Mark really wants us all to answer for ourselves is who is Jesus, right? And as readers, we know from the beginning, because of the very first sentence...

GARY BURGE

Right, right.

DAVE BAST

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; but, others in the story have to find that out in the right way at the right time.

GARY BURGE

Think about this, Dave: It is interesting that, as Jesus wants to give a gradual disclosure of his identity to the public, Mark is actually doing the very same thing for us as readers. He tips us off in the first verse that this is going to be about the Son of God, but then he lets the story play out, and he also lets these disclosures happen gradually as the story unfolds.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think it is interesting, too...and when I have preached on this, I have pointed this out, that, yes...so, we as readers have every advantage here, and so forth and so on...

GARY BURGE

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But that I think...and here is, I think, one of the things we can ponder in our own lives today in terms of why is this important...why are we talking about this in this program? Well, because I think we shouldn't let ourselves off the hook. We too can foist our own expectations onto Jesus and try to make Jesus into the kind of Messiah we want him to be—the kind of person who would vote the way I vote and shop where I shop and live in my neighborhood. We too can do what the disciples wanted to do, and that is make Jesus into our own image; whereas, we have to let Jesus disclose himself to us, and in humility we accept who Jesus is.

GARY BURGE

And when we find out what Jesus really wants to be and what he wants us to be and what his true identity is, we may not like it. We may reject it...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

GARY BURGE

So therefore, in each of these disclosures where Jesus says *this* Messiah is going to die—*this* Messiah is going to be rejected and suffer, of course their reaction is just our reaction: Wait; I don't like that script for you, thank you very much. I would rather go back, as Peter would have them, go back to the mountaintop and stay up there; but no, you are right, Scott, I think we would reject...and we would struggle...we would fight with Jesus' fullest intentions for what he wants to do in this world.

DAVE BAST

It makes me think of a little Christmas poem by George McDonald: They all were looking for a king to slay their foes and raise them high. He came a little baby thing that made a woman cry.

GARY BURGE

Right.

DAVE BAST

That is the kind of Messiah he came to be; and actually, in Mark, after those three predictions of his suffering that we mentioned, when we come to Chapter 10, Jesus gets at the heart of why he was going to suffer and what that means for his disciples. So, a famous passage, Mark 10:42-45:

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

GARY BURGE

Right, exactly; when Jesus makes all of these predictions about his death, if you are reading Mark’s Gospel as a drama, here you might think this: Jesus has been disclosed fully in Chapter 8, and then you wonder: Okay, he realizes that Judaism will not like this, and therefore, he is going to be a martyr. He is going to go to Jerusalem, show who he truly is to the leadership there; they are just simply going to kill him. This is just a tragedy. We have a martyrdom on our hands. But scholars look at Mark 10:45 and they think it is a pivotal verse, because here for the first time Jesus says: Look, this is not about martyrdom. This will not be an accidental death. This is going to be a purposeful death. Jesus understands when he goes to Jerusalem, his Messianic task is to die for us. This word *ransom*...the Greek word is *lutron*. It means a payment given to either free a slave or to free a captive who is in war. So, it is an exchange. So, Jesus is going to die in order to set free someone else. That removes this whole conversation from the idea that Jesus is simply going to be a martyr for his cause. He is going to be a sacrifice for our lives.

DAVE BAST

And that is really the only theological explanation of Jesus’ death in all the Gospel of Mark, right? This is it?

GARY BURGE

Well, the only other way where Jesus is doing this more graphically is when he is in the upper room, and he breaks the bread, he pours the wine...

DAVE BAST

Okay, there you go.

GARY BURGE

And he says: So, this is my life, which is poured out for you. So therefore, he interprets his coming Passover death as a substitutionary death there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, what you have here...and here again, I think we are tempted to do this today ourselves...what you have here is Jesus saying: Look, I didn’t come to be served, but to serve...I came to die; and again, for the disciples, who are so hoping that Jesus would be a political warrior who could get Rome off the back of the Jews and chase the Caesar out, that all is just a paradox of the Gospel. This all sounds backwards. This all sounds like a nonstarter. You cannot save the world...you cannot save Israel if you’re dead, Jesus. You cannot be humble. Humility is a nonstarter. You cannot save the world through humility and sacrifice; but of course, Jesus came precisely to upend that whole idea. Yes, the world will be saved through humility and sacrifice, as it turns out; and it reminds you a little bit of Paul in 1 Corinthians 1: The Gospel seems foolish, but it is actually very, very strong.

GARY BURGE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with us today on *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and once again our guest today was Dr. Gary Burge. We hope you will join us

again next time as we study the incredible story of Jesus feeding 5,000 with just a few loaves of bread and fish found in Mark 6.

Meanwhile, connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you; or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

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