

# THE MESSIANIC SECRET

## MARK 3:7-12

Meeting Jesus in the Gospels

### OPENING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit of God, open my heart to receive God's word to me today. Help me to hear your still small voice amidst the noise of my life, and to see and walk in your ways. Amen.

### EXEGESIS

Talk about a sting in the tail! "He gave them strict orders not to tell who he was". What? Why did Jesus hide his identity, telling the evil spirits not to let on? This is not a one-off, either. The demons are also commanded to silence in Mark 1.34, and at many points people are told to remain silent (e.g. Mark 1.44, 5.43, 7.36, 8.30, 9.9) - generally after they have seen just the sort of miracles which would make you want to shout from the rooftops. This so-called 'Messianic Secret' has perplexed scholars for a century or more.

We think that it is obvious that Jesus would want people to hear that he was the Son of God. Surely, his mission was to 'spread the word' - why would he command silence? After all, the evil spirits were only saying publicly what God himself had said privately to Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1.11).

People often surmise that Jesus commanded silence for his own protection. The huge crowds would inevitably be a cause of concern for the authorities. If you were to add in rumours that he was being proclaimed as 'Son of God', perhaps they would have tried to stop him, or worse. However, Jesus in general doesn't seem to mind generating a lot of public interest. If you want to keep a low profile, you are probably best not casting out lots of evil spirits in the first place!

Perhaps the point is that 'Son of God' is actually a vague term. It sounds important, but what does it mean? Jesus himself calls peacemakers 'sons of God' (Matthew 5.9); Israel is called 'God's son' in Hosea 11.1; and David's son is called the son of God in 2 Samuel 7.14. Evil spirits shouting "you are the Son of God" as they are cast out suggests that being 'Son of God' is all about miracles and supernatural power - Jesus the divine warrior, destroying all that opposes God. Perhaps Jesus tried to suppress this view of him because it is such a distortion. It is exactly the version of being 'God's Son' that Jesus was tempted with in the desert (Matthew 4.1-11).

### REFLECTION

Have you ever used the right words, but in the wrong way? Or said one thing but somehow given the opposite impression? Communication is often about so much more than words, and

words often don't communicate what we intend. Titles are often very blunt instruments, conveying a sense of power and importance and not a lot else. I am a vicar but do the people I meet each day know what that means? They probably know it has something to do with church, but not much else.

Jesus realises this. Titles being shouted about him isn't going to help people understand him. But have we learnt this lesson? Do we often try to communicate about Jesus by using titles and phrases which, to be honest, don't mean much to anyone? Do we think that pointing to God's miraculous activity is going to help people reach him? Often people say 'If I saw a miracle I would believe', but in fact many people see miraculous things, which they might even interpret as miraculous for a while, but it doesn't really change how they live long-term.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you got beyond thinking of Jesus as 'son of God' and being amazed at his miracles, to actually knowing his character, knowing what he is like?
2. Do you think 'Son of God' means anything to your neighbours and colleagues?
3. What is the most important aspect of Jesus to communicate to your neighbours and friends?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I pray that you would reveal yourself to me. Take me beyond a surface knowledge of you, to grasp your true nature and your heart for your world. Amen.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Duff, J., *Peter's Preaching: The Message of Mark's Gospel*, Bible Reading Fellowship, 2015.
- Williams, Rowan, *Meeting God in Mark*, SPCK, 2014.