

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	Mark		Pastor/Teacher
Text	Mark 1:9-28		Mason Depew
Date:	March 1, 2026		

THE MESSIANIC SECRET

In Mark's Gospel, you will notice as you read that Jesus repeatedly tries to *cover up* his miracles.¹ This naturally stands out to people as one of the strangest features of any of the four Gospels. Why perform miracles if he is going to hide them? More than this, Jesus explicitly tells people not to tell others who he really is! It almost gives the impression that he has a kind of secret identity, which contrasts with how popular he quickly becomes. This appears to be an intentional feature of Mark's Gospel in particular, and scholars have taken to calling it the "Messianic Secret." The obvious question is: why suppress this? Isn't his identity as the promised Messiah the centerpiece of the Gospel he came to preach?

1. Reasons for Secrecy

- a. Misplaced Expectations - There were a variety of expectations for the Messiah in the centuries leading up to Christ's birth, but the most popular by far focused on him as a conquering liberator. Like Moses leading the people out of Egypt, or David defeating the Philistines, the Jews understandably longed for a hero to save them from the Romans.
 - i. This was not a crazy desire, since the Old Testament does promise that the Messiah will be a conquering king like David. Psalm 2, for example, portrays the Messiah as the Son of God who wields overwhelming divine power to crush all the nations that threaten his people.²
 - ii. The problem is that the Old Testament doesn't promise that this will be the Messiah's first or only priority. Therefore people who fixated on these promises failed on two counts: 1) picking and choosing rather than taking all the Scriptures God had given them into consideration, and 2) Assuming the Lord must defeat a particular enemy in a particular way, rather than waiting on the Lord to see what he will do in his own timing.
 - iii. If Jesus had been more open about his identity as the Messiah in this context, the situation likely would have gotten much uglier much sooner. People likely would have tried to crown him or revolt before he ever had the opportunity to preach as much as he did. Keeping his Messianic identity on the down-low, therefore, allows Jesus to define the role himself and show how he fulfills more of the Old Testament than they would have guessed.

¹ He does this in other Gospels, as well, but not nearly as often as in Mark.

² "I will tell of the decree:

The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.

You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'" - Psalm 2:7-9

- b. A Test to Demonstrate Faith - Keeping people guessing about Jesus also gives the opportunity to show what true faith looks like. Faith only stands out when the truth is veiled in some way, not when it is plain and obvious for everyone to see!
- i. You can see this in the Old Testament prophecies that predict the Lord will speak to his people in ways they don't understand. Isaiah is commanded to do this just after his calling in chapter 6, for example,³ and Psalm 78:2 says something very similar.⁴ Matthew 13:10-17 clarifies that this is the whole reason Jesus teaches in parables, rather than plainly and directly.⁵
 - ii. Mark's Gospel doesn't have as many parables as Matthew or Luke, so he communicates this test aspect of Jesus's ministry more through his miracles. For example, after he cleanses a leper at the end of the first chapter, Jesus tells him to say nothing to anyone at all!⁶
 - iii. This test has worked so well, in fact, that it still works today! You can see it, for example, in so many scholars who insist that Mark presents a "lower" view of Christ than John. That is, they think Mark presents Jesus just as a remarkable teacher, whereas John views him as divine. These scholars, for all their insight in other areas, are failing the test of faith just as many Jews did during Jesus's day. They are placing their own expectations on Christ rather than sitting humbly to learn from him.
2. What signs are they missing? In our text this morning, there are three main signs: Jesus's baptism as the inauguration of his ministry, his teaching on his own authority, and casting out demons.
- a. Jesus's Baptism reveals his uniqueness because no one else in all of Scripture was so publicly shown to have such complete intimacy with God the Father and Holy Spirit. Other famous biblical figures had auspicious births or beginnings to their public work, like Moses, Samson, and David, but none of them ever displayed such perfect harmony and closeness with God as this baptism scene.
 - i. There are a couple of important places in the Books of Moses where the Holy Spirit is described in a bird-like manner. First, in Genesis 1:2, where Moses says the Spirit was "hovering" over the primordial waters, none of his original audience would have pictured a hovercraft, of course. That "hovering" would sound to them

³ "And he said, 'Go, and say to this people:
'Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'
Make the heart of this people dull,
and their ears heavy,
and blind their eyes;
lest they see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed.'" - Isaiah 6:9-10

⁴ "I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old,"

⁵ "Then the disciples came and said to him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' And he answered them, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.'" - Matthew 13:10-13

⁶ "And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, and said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.'" - Mark 1:43-44

like a bird flying low, perhaps to feed its young.⁷ Second, in Deuteronomy 32:11, Moses again uses this same word, but this time to describe the Lord protecting Israel in the midst of the desert like an eagle protects its young. He even uses the same word, usually pronounced *tohu*, for both the waters in Genesis 1 and the desert wilderness in Deuteronomy 32.⁸ These are powerful and fascinating links between the beginning and ending of the Torah which imply that Israel's birth as a nation is like a new creation. It is a sort of new start for humanity, where they will again be tested in a paradise-like environment to see whether they will obey God's commands or be sent into exile.

- ii. The Spirit's birdlike presence here at Christ's baptism, then, suggests that this event, too, has something to do with the beginning of a new creation.⁹ It is a monumental sign that did not attend the beginning of any other biblical king or prophet's work.
- b. In addition to his baptism, there is the fact that this man, Jesus of Nazareth teaches unlike any other teacher the people have ever heard.
- i. This is not just because Jesus is more self-confident than others. No devout Jew has any reason to listen to the words of a mere man when they have the divinely inspired Scriptures, direct from God himself. This is why the synagogue at Capernaum is "astonished" at his teaching, because it is so different from the scribes that they were used to hearing. Think also of the way the prophets used to begin with, "Thus says the Lord..." but in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says over and over again, "I say to you..." He doesn't need to cite the LORD because he *is* the LORD!
 - ii. This is one reason that the controversies over the Son's eternal subordination to the Father are so important. If we misunderstand the significance of passages like these, it will open the door for future generations to return to Arianism, i.e. the belief that the Son is inferior to the Father. Douglas Wilson's teaching that the Father is authority and the Son is obedience is one of the more recent examples of this error.¹⁰ This is repugnant to the glory of the Son because one of the main points that the Gospels make about Christ, and which the early church fathers

⁷ "The reference contains a veiled allusion to Gen. 1:2, where the brooding of the Spirit over the waters at creation suggested to Ben Zoma (ca. A.D. 90) the action of a dove." - William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 56.

⁸ "That Moses in his use of the verb *rhph* in Deuteronomy 32:11 is instituting a comparison between God's presence as Israel's divine aegis in the wilderness and God's presence over creation in Genesis 1:2b is put beyond doubt by the fact that he calls that wilderness a *tōhū* (Deut. 32:10). For this is the word he uses in Genesis 1:2a to describe the state of the earth over which the Spirit hovered at creation, and this noun *tōhū*, like the verb *rhph*, is used by Moses nowhere else. The comparison drawn in Deuteronomy 32:10f. between the exodus event and the creation is extensively elaborated in the Mosaic historiography. Within the broad parallelism that emerges we find that at the exodus reenactment of creation history the divine pillar of cloud and fire was present, like the Spirit of God at the beginning, to bring light into the darkness (and indeed to regulate the day-night sequence), to divide the waters and make dry land appear in the midst of the deep, and to lead on to the Sabbath in the holy paradise land." - Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 14–15.

⁹ "In the exodus re-creation, the Glory-cloud, described by Moses by means of the imagery of Genesis 1:2, as we have seen, stood as pillar witness to the covenant that defined the legal nature of this redemptive action of God. At the beginning of the new creation, at the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit descending over the waters in avian form, as in Genesis 1:2, was a divine testimony to the Son, the Son who was given as God's covenant to the people. At the consummation of the new covenant with its new exodus-creation, the Glory-figure, apocalyptically revealed in Revelation 10:1ff., is seen clothed with a cloud, rainbow haloed, with face like the sun and feet like pillars of fire, standing astride creation with his hand raised in oath to heaven, swearing by him who on the seventh day finished his creating of the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all their hosts that in the days of the seventh trumpet the mystery of God will be finished." - Kline, 19.

¹⁰ "So Fatherhood is ultimate, and Fatherhood is *ad intra*. The Fatherhood of the Father did not come into existence after the decision to create the world. It is not in any way dependent upon the decision to create the world. And so there should be no more difficulty in saying that the Son is eternally obedient than there is in saying that He is eternally begotten. His existence is obedience — eternal obedience, obedience that could not be otherwise. The Father's existence is authority." - Douglas Wilson, "Triune Botherations," on *Blog & Mablog*, dated June 28th, 2016.

noticed as a key part of their doctrine, is that he has *inherent authority equal to the Father*. If Wilson were right, Christ would have to cite the Father for everything he says, but we see that he does not. In this way Jesus is utterly distinct from all the past prophets and teachers God had ever sent into the world before.

- c. Finally, we see Jesus's unique identity in the way he casts out demons. This, also, is unusual among the many miracles that the Bible records. No one before Christ ever did such direct battle with Satan's servants and won so easily.
 - i. The presence of demons in Israel highlights the profound spiritual sickness of God's people at this time. In all the Bible, demons never overtake and possess a believer who has been born again. It is most likely that demons are so prevalent in Judea at this time because people are actually practicing superstitious rituals to try and control spirits and then some of them find they have made a literal "deal with the devil." We will have more occasion to see this as we continue through Mark's Gospel, which features more demons than any other book of the Bible.
 - ii. Regardless of why they appear to be so common, the way Jesus casts them out is a glorious display of his divine power. This shows he has absolute authority over both the seen *and unseen* realms, which no prophet up until now has ever claimed. The only one who ever commands Satan or his demons in this way is God himself, in Genesis 3:14-15 and Job 1-2. Even Michael the archangel, when he rebuked Satan, said, "The LORD rebuke you."¹¹ This apparently simple man from Nazareth, on the other hand, rebukes the demons on his own authority.
 - iii. The conclusion this brings us to is that although Mark does not say as explicitly as John that Jesus is God, Mark clearly shows Jesus wielding divine power and attributes like it is perfectly natural to him. He stands in God's place of authority with respect to others, he wields God's power over both the physical and spiritual realms of creation, and he shares a kind of perfect intimacy with the Father that only a Son with the Father's same nature can claim.
3. All of this leads us to the conclusion that in Mark 1, God's Son has come to earth for a mission infinitely grander than what most Jews would or could have expected. He has not come to destroy the Romans, *per se*, because he is aiming higher at a **much** bigger target. He has come to defeat the Prince of this world, who actually rules the Romans and everyone else from the shadows through lies and temptation as he has done from the beginning.
 - a. Through his atoning death on the Cross, Jesus will deal the perfect coup de grace against Satan's death-grip on humanity. Not because he pays the ransom *to Satan*, as some have said, but because once he has reconciled us to God and given us his life-giving Spirit, the devil can never hope to break that bond.
 - b. This is particularly important for us to know and remember in an age where superstition is increasing, and people are interacting more and more with pagan forms of spirituality. It would not be surprising at all to find more ordinary people aware of, and perhaps controlled by demons. Many Christians, I expect, will be more and more interested in elaborate rituals to protect themselves, while missing that they already have the best possible Advocate.
 - c. This is why the Heidelberg Catechism says that our **only** comfort in life and in death includes the fact that "He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil."

¹¹ "But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'"