

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME TWO

STUDY TWELVE

Crucial Contrasts

Mark 8:27–38

Counsel from even well-meaning folks may be fallacious or erroneous, even though said in love. But we can always count on the Scriptures to be our inerrant guide in faith and practice.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

It matters whom we ask for directions. One person tells us to go left, while another points the opposite way and says, “Turn right.” Crucial contrasts. Which way do we go?

If opposing viewpoints dealt only with finding a location, we might not suffer much. We could always backtrack and eventually arrive at our destination. But what if we need directions for choosing a friend or a spouse? Or we’re standing at a crossroads trying to choose a career? What if life gets tough and we need godly wisdom?

Day and night, loud voices compel us to prove our worth with the latest styles and gadgets, to take the road that leads to fame and power, or to focus on ourselves and the now. Although we know Jesus as our Savior and have chosen to follow Him as our Master, we often struggle to understand His way, hear His whisper, and emulate His walk. We can’t afford to lend our ears to just anyone.

In the days of Jesus’ earthly ministry, many did not know who He was. Even His disciples struggled to fully grasp His identity, asking one another after He calmed the storm, “Who is this man?” (Mark 4:41). They didn’t comprehend His mission either. Like all Jews in their day, they thought the Messiah would lead a revolt against Rome. They failed to recognize that the Messiah’s primary mission was redemption, not revolution—to “[bear] the sins of many,” as Isaiah prophesied (Isaiah 53:12).

So, Jesus needed to help His disciples tune out all voices except His and follow Him alone. They needed to ignore whatever directions the world gave them and navigate their lives by His compass—the one that leads to the cross.



INSIGHT FOR LIVING



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Chuck’s message.

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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES



PREPARE YOUR HEART

*I have not departed from his commands,
but have treasured his words more than daily food. (Job 23:12)*

In your own words, express your gratitude to the Lord for His precious Word as Job did amid his severe afflictions. Acknowledge the wisdom and guidance you’ve obtained from God’s commands. Tell Him of your reliance on His grace and your enthusiasm to hear His voice as you lend your ears to the One who has left us the invaluable treasure of His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The concluding verses of Mark 8 are the midpoint in Mark’s gospel, and they signal a shift in Jesus’ ministry. From here on, Jesus will spend less time preaching to the public and more time teaching the disciples in private. With His eyes set on the cross, He will leave Galilee for Judea, where He will suffer at the hands of His enemies, offer His life in atonement for our sin, and rise from the grave—the goal of His mission.

To prepare His disciples for what lay ahead, Jesus left Bethsaida and probably stopped at Capernaum before journeying to Caesarea Philippi. Locate this city in your Bible maps or Bible atlas, or consult the online map titled “*Ministry of Jesus*” at insight.org.

Pastor Chuck gives an inside look at Caesarea Philippi and its significance:

Caesar Augustus had given the city to Herod the Great as a reward for his loyalty. To show his gratitude, Herod constructed a magnificent temple of white stone in Caesar Augustus’s honor. . . .

In addition to the temple honoring Caesar Augustus, the city also boasted another temple. An underground spring bubbled up from a nearby cave and fed the Jordan River. In Old Testament times, pagans gathered on this site to worship Baal-gad, who was also known as Baal-hermon (cf. Josh. 11:17; Judg. 3:3; 1 Chr. 5:23). Later, the Greeks made the temple a shrine to Pan and nymphs.¹

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To this center of imperial power and pagan worship came Jesus—the King of Kings and the one true God. On the way, Jesus asked His disciples the most important question every person must answer, “Who do you say I am?” (Mark 8:29). Enter this scene and witness the contrasting responses, even from one of His most devoted followers.



Observation: Jesus Asks His Disciples About His Identity

Discover what [Mark 8:27–38](#) says by reading it several times and in different translations. Observing the text comes before trying to decipher its meaning.² So, take time to see what’s in front of you.

The Identity of Jesus—Mark 8:27–30

Hear the conversation between Jesus and His disciples on their way to Caesarea Philippi. What do you notice about Jesus’ first question to them in Mark 8:27? What does their answer in 8:28 say about how the public viewed Jesus after all the time He had been teaching them and performing miracles?

How did Jesus change the question in 8:29? Why was this shift significant? What was Peter’s response? What did Jesus say to him? Why?

The Mission of Jesus—Mark 8:31–33

Feel the emotions of the disciples in Mark 8:31–33. What did Jesus begin to teach? How did Peter react? What did Jesus do and say to Peter so everyone could hear?

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The Challenge of Jesus—Mark 8:34–38

Now with all this tension in the air, Jesus turned to the crowd and His disciples and issued a challenge in Mark 8:34–38. What main components can you identify in His message?

Self-denial, taking up one's cross, following Jesus. Now why would He ask that? Look at "for." That's the particle that explains what has just been said, "Because whoever wishes to save his life will lose it." Losers are keepers.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Contrasting Responses to Jesus' Identity and Mission

Three contrasts appear in our passage.

1. **Jesus' Identity:** the people's view of Jesus' identity *versus* Peter's view (Mark 8:27–30)
2. **Jesus' Mission:** Peter's perspective of Jesus' mission *versus* Jesus' perspective (8:31–33)
3. **Jesus' Challenge:** saving one's life and losing it *versus* losing one's life for Christ's sake and saving it (8:34–38)

Peter declared Jesus Messiah, or Christ, the “anointed one.” Look up the Greek term *Christos*, translated “Christ,” in the Greek dictionary at biblehub.com. What is the meaning and significance of the title to ancient readers?

Every Jewish boy and girl learned in their synagogue school while growing up that the one who would come would be what we would call a superhuman figure, crashing into history to vindicate God's people. He would be the Jewish conqueror, smashing the gentiles into submission, renovating Jerusalem, and establishing His own kingdom of righteousness and peace.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Jesus' mission, however, was spiritual, not political. He came to defeat sin, not Rome, and He shocked His disciples by saying that He "would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead" (Mark 8:31). Peter probably spoke for the others when he tried to correct Jesus. Why did Jesus react so strongly to Peter and His disciples? How was Satan the ultimate source for Peter's words?

Why react so strongly to Peter? Because He heard Satan's counsel in Peter's vocal cords. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Read Jesus' call to discipleship in [Mark 8:34–38](#) in the MSG and the J. B. Phillips translations. Then, explore this interesting article "[What Did Jesus Mean When He Said, 'Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me'?](#)" In your own words, explain Jesus' challenge to His followers then and now.

*Rather than being self-promoting, deny yourself. Rather than pursuing your dream, take up your cross. And rather than following your own game plan and taking charge of your life, submit to the will of God for your life.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



Correlation: God's Way Versus the World's Way

Jesus' birth, life, and death emphasize how God's way significantly differs from the world's way. Stand by the manger where He was born. See the towel in His hands drying the feet of Peter. And watch Him on the cross between two criminals. What crucial contrasts do passages like [John 13:1–17](#) and [Philippians 2:1–11](#) reveal?

Losers are keepers. Isn't that an amazing thought? You won't hear that from today's world. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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How do [Isaiah 53:3–6](#) and [1 Peter 3:18](#) align in their depiction of Jesus' identity and mission? What truths can we learn from the disciples' commitment to make Christ and His mission known to the ends of the earth as we compare our passage with [Acts 4:16–31](#) and [20:17–24](#)?



Application: Watch Your Ears and Release Your Grip

Pastor Chuck suggests a couple of ways to help us internalize this passage. First, *pay attention to whom you listen*. Peter's counsel to Jesus was well-intentioned but wrong! What wise guidelines can you apply when you ask for counsel?

Be sure it is guided by the Scriptures. Be sure you can verify the counsel from the Word of God. Don't let a relationship nullify the print on the page of Scripture. If it contradicts what God has written, say no to it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Second, *release what you're clinging to*. What has the Holy Spirit pinpointed for you that you need to release your grip on? What steps can you take to demonstrate your obedience? Why not request the Lord's help as you learn to hold everything loosely?

If you were asked who Jesus is (His identity) and what He did (His mission), what would be your responses? As you wrap up your study, what words of gratitude can you express to Jesus?

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A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your inerrant and infallible compass. Help me to make Your truths my guide in faith and practice. May I watch my ears and release my grip. In the name of the Anointed One, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Mark*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 2 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 223–24.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*" at insight.org.

For the 2026–2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2011, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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