

Who Do You Say Jesus Is?

Mark 8:27-33

Our lives are filled with questions.

Some of the questions we are faced with are very mundane and routine. For instance, "What shall I wear today?", "Where do you want to eat dinner?", and "What do you want to watch on television?", are not questions that have long term importance in our lives.

Some of life's questions are just plain unanswerable. For instance, "Why do women open their mouths when they put on eye makeup?", "Why do men refuse to stop and ask for directions?", and "What was the best thing before sliced bread?" are questions that really do not matter in the least.

But, some of life's questions are terribly important. Consider the following questions for instance, "Will you marry me?", "What shall we name the baby", and "Doctor, what is my prognosis?", are all questions that have lifelong implications.

In this passage, Jesus asks two questions that are eternal in nature. The first question has to do with what others say about Jesus. Their opinions of Him reveal the condition of their hearts.

The second question is more personal, "Who do you say Jesus is?" what you think of Jesus will determine whether you receive or reject Him as your Savior and Lord. If Jesus truly is the Lord and Savior, and you recognize that and follow Him, then you have a basis for answering all of the other fundamental questions in life.

Your answer to this question will determine where you spend eternity. So, it is of vital importance that you carefully consider how you answer this question.

Let's look at this conversation between Jesus and His disciples. I want to consider the questions Jesus asked His disciples that day, because these two questions continue to be of the utmost of importance in the world today. In fact, they are of the utmost importance in your life and mine.

27 Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?"

28 So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets."

29 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."

30 Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him.

31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

32 He spoke this word openly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

33 But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

I. The Popular Question, "Who do men say that I am?"

We are told that Jesus and His disciples are in the "cities of Caesarea Philippi". This was a predominately Gentile area located some 25 miles north of Bethsaida where Jesus had just healed the blind man, (Mark 8:22-26). It is here that a spring issues forth from Mount Hermon that forms one of the tributaries that becomes the Jordan River.

This was a beautiful area that was steeped in pagan religion. In ancient time, the city had been called "Balinas", because it had been a center of Baal worship. Baal was the Phoenician god of fertility and nature. Later, the name was changed to "Panias", because the Greeks believed that their god Pan was born in a cave in the hills above the city, at the foot of Mount Hermon. Pan was a half-goat, half-man god who was believed to be the guardian of flocks and nature. In fact, the modern name of this ancient city is "Banias", which is a form of "Panias".

Caesarea Philippi also contained a gleaming marble temple, built by Herod Philip, to honor Caesar, the Roman Emperor, who was considered to be a god. The citizens of this city were required to enter this temple, at least once per year, place a pinch of incense on a burning altar and proclaim, "Caesar is Lord!"

It was here, on the way to this city devoted to the worship of idols and manmade gods that Jesus chose as the place to make a fuller revelation of Himself to His disciples.

The Lord's first question is this: **"Who do men say that I am?"** Jesus knew what the people were saying about Him. He wasn't paranoid, nor was He seeking the praise of men. Jesus intended to use the opinions of the people, concerning His identity, to cause the disciples to think about their own opinions of just Who Jesus was.

When Jesus asks this question, His men tell Jesus what they have been hearing others say. They said some people say that you are, "John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets." Let's take a moment to break their response down.

John the Baptist – Jesus certainly resembled John the Baptist in His preaching. Both men preached a message of repentance and righteousness. But, many people had seen Jesus and John together, so this response is kind of strange to me. Of course, Herod Antipas believed that Jesus was none other than John the Baptist raised from the dead, Mark 6:14. That is probably where that theory came from.

Others believed that Jesus was Elijah. Both Jesus and Elijah conducted a ministry that was marked by clear, convicting preaching and convincing miracles. And the prophet Malachi in the Old Testament wrote that Elijah would come before the day of the Lord.

Others believed that Jesus was "One of the prophets". This was a long list that included such luminaries as Moses, Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and others. Like Moses, Jesus declared the Law of God. Like Isaiah, Jesus preached about sacrifice and holiness. Like Daniel, the message of Jesus was a prophetic message of a coming King and His kingdom. Like Jeremiah, Jesus carried out a ministry marked by compassion and brokenness. He was, after all, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief", Isa. 53:3. Like Hosea, Jesus loved the unlovable and was willing to redeem lost, wretched sinners.

That's what some of the people in that day were saying about Jesus. What are they saying about Him in our day? Just as it was in the days when Jesus walked this earth, there are a multitude of opinions about Who He was and is.

Kevin DeYoung describes what people say about Jesus today.

"There's the Republican Jesus—who is against tax increases and activist judges, for family values and owning firearms.

"There's Democrat Jesus—who is against Wall Street and Wal-Mart, for reducing our carbon footprint and printing money.

"There's Therapist Jesus—who helps us cope with life's problems, heals our past, tells us how valuable we are and not to be so hard on ourselves.

"There's Starbucks Jesus—who drinks fair trade coffee, loves spiritual conversations, drives a hybrid, and goes to film festivals.

"There's Open-minded Jesus—who loves everyone all the time no matter what (except for people who are not as open-minded as Himself).

"There's Touchdown Jesus—who helps athletes run faster and jump higher than non-Christians and determines the outcomes of Super Bowls.

"Martyr Jesus—a good man who died a cruel death so we can feel sorry for him.

"There's Gentle Jesus—who was meek and mild, with high cheek bones, flowing hair, and walks around barefoot, wearing a sash (while looking very British).

"There's Hippie Jesus—who teaches everyone to give peace a chance, imagines a world without religion, and helps us remember that 'all you need is love.'

"There's Yuppie Jesus—who encourages us to reach our full potential, reach for the stars, and buy a boat.

"There's Spirituality Jesus—who hates religion, churches, pastors, and doctrine, and would rather have people out in nature, finding 'the god within' while listening to ambiguously spiritual music.

"There's Platitude Jesus—good for Christmas specials, greeting cards, and bad sermons, and inspiring people to believe in themselves.

"There's Revolutionary Jesus—who teaches us to rebel against the status quo, stick it to the man, and blame things on 'the system.'

"There's Guru Jesus—a wise, inspirational teacher who believes in you and helps you find your center.

"There's Boyfriend Jesus—who wraps his arms around us as we sing about his intoxicating love in our secret place.

"There's Good Example Jesus—who shows you how to help people, change the planet, and become a better you.

As you can see, what people say about Jesus tells a lot more about the condition of people's hearts, than it does about the identity of Jesus.

When Jesus asks, "Who do people say that I am?", it's not because he doesn't know who he is. And I don't think it's a form of marketing research—Jesus doesn't seem to be reconsidering His branding at all. He is wanting to teach His

disciples. Jesus was seeking to bring the disciples to a more clear knowledge of who He is: the Messiah (Christ, = "Anointed One") sent by God.

In one sense, they had believed that from the beginning. When Andrew first told his brother Simon about Jesus, he said, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41). But they still were confused about what that meant. Jesus knows they are at the point of outward confession. They are ready to believe that He truly is the Christ, the Son of God. So He makes the question more personal:

II. The Personal Question, "But who do you say that I am?"

Jesus has heard popular opinions, now He wants to hear their personal opinion. He wants to hear their personal confession of faith.

This is the moment of truth! Everything Jesus has taught them and shown them has been leading up to this moment in time. Every miracle was leading to this one moment in time. Every word of truth Jesus spoke was being His men to this great spiritual crossroad. Their response to this question would set the stage for Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem where He would be killed and raised to life.

Jesus simply asks, "**But who do you say that I am?**" It is a simple question, but it is filled with eternal implications. Peter, as was his custom, spoke for the whole group. Peter said, "**You are the Christ**" He got it right!

There in Caesarea Philippi, against that backdrop of paganism and false religion, Peter saw in a humble, homeless carpenter from Nazareth the very essence of God Himself. Peter looked at Jesus and saw the Messiah, the anointed one of God, which is what the word "Christ" means. It is a title and not a name. Peter saw Jesus as the "Son of God." What a statement of faith!

Peter saw Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Not just another prophet. Not just another Rabbi. Not just another wonder-worker. He was the one they had been waiting for: the Son of David and Abraham's chosen seed, the one to deliver us from captivity, the goal of the Mosaic law, Yahweh in the flesh, the one to establish God's reign and rule, the one to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, freedom to the prisoners and proclaim good news to the poor, the lamb of God come to take away the sins of the world."

Everything Jesus had said and done so far had lead to this confession. Jesus was demonstrating to His disciples who He was. Now the test has come: He asks them the question, "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter's answer was clear and sure: "**You are the Christ.**" You are the One we have been looking for. You are not Elijah; you are not Jeremiah, or John the Baptist. You are not one who is looking for another; you are the Other for whom all men have been looking.

This is what Jesus wanted them to know. He had been working with them toward this end. He knew they needed to come to this knowledge, and all He had done up to that point had been designed to lead them to this understanding of who He was.

But now, once they know, he does a strange thing. Mark tells us in verse 30, "**Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him.**" Is that not strange? Wouldn't you think, now that they understand who He is, that this would be the time He would say to them, "Now I want to send you out again. Go into every village and hamlet in Galilee and tell them who I am. This is why I have come, that men might understand." But instead, he strictly warns them not

to tell anyone what they have just learned. This is one of the puzzling developments in the ministry of Jesus.

And yet we can see why he did this, in the light of the story of the blind man we looked at last week. This is that first touch, which opened their eyes to a part of the truth. They saw Him, but not clearly. They saw Him as the Messiah. But they did not understand the meaning of it. So they still require the second touch, and this is what our Lord goes on to give.

III. The Question of Purpose, "be killed, and after three days rise again."

Verse 31 says, "**And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.**" Verse 32 tells us, "**He spoke this word openly.**" The tense of the verb in Verse 32 is such that it should be translated, "he continued saying this plainly."

Now we begin to see why Jesus wanted them to keep quiet about His true identity. The disciples, at this point, had great misapprehensions as to what the kingdom of God was like. And though they had come to a recognition of who Jesus was, they had no idea how he was going to accomplish this work. They did not see him very clearly.

The reason Peter and the other disciples were not ready to share what they knew immediately is that there was something more to learn about their Messiah. What sort of Messiah is he? He is the Savior, the Lord, the one around whom everything else revolves. He is unlike any other spokesman of God. But what sort of Messiah is he?

In verse 31, Jesus calls himself the Son of Man. It's clear here that Jesus considered "the Son of Man" to be a messianic title. Jesus was agreeing that He is the Christ. But He is not the kind of Messiah that the people were expecting. The people expected their Messiah to relieve suffering, but Jesus said that the Son of Man must himself suffer. The people expected the Messiah to kill his enemies, but Jesus said He Himself must be killed.

What kind of Messiah is this? What good is a messiah who dies? Peter was the only one with courage to say what other disciples thought, and he rebuked Jesus. "What kind of Messiah are you? The world is a mess. Unless you do something, it will be even more of a mess. You shouldn't suffer; you should relieve suffering. You shouldn't undergo rejection in Jerusalem. You shouldn't die; you should heal those who are dying."

Peter just can't take it. Because it isn't right. It doesn't make sense. The Anointed One of God is not supposed to die. That's not the deal. That's not how it works.

And suddenly the star pupil is the class troublemaker as Jesus turns his back on Peter and says, "**Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men**"

See, even though Peter got the right title for Jesus—maybe *because* he got the right title for Jesus—he didn't really get it right. Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One, and Peter doesn't get to define the terms of that any more than we do.

Now please, don't ever doubt that Peter loved the Lord - of course he loved the Lord, maybe with a passion that we don't know as yet - but it was Peter's misguided love for the Lord that took him outside the will of the Lord in his outburst. We also can have great love for the Lord but go in the wrong direction, or not discern the Lord's will and be fools. Warren Wiersbe puts it like this: 'One

minute Peter was a rock, and the next he was a stumbling block'. Campbell Morgan put it like this: 'The man who loves Jesus but shuns God's method is a stumbling block to Him'. You see, you can love the Lord but not recognize His way of doing things, and you can actually be a stumbling block to His will.

The Lord says to Simon Peter, "You are thinking the way men think, Peter, not the way God thinks. You are concerned about the kind of salvation you would bring if you were God. You would throw off the Roman yoke and install new priests in Jerusalem. You would make sure the good people were happy and the bad people would suffer. You would do all of that with a wave of your arm."

But acting as if we were God does not fix anything. We are terrible at being God. The way our Lord brings righteousness is by interior revolution. Jesus must suffer so that we can be free to receive life from God. He offers us self-denial, a cross, and a Messiah to follow. Jesus is not the kind of messiah people expected, but he is the Messiah of God. He is the Messiah who gives life, the One in whom we may hope.

The disciples were in sympathy with Peter, which is why Jesus addressed His rebuke so they all could hear (Mark 8:33). And that explains His strict prohibition that they tell no one that He was the Christ (8:30). Both the disciples and the Jewish people were looking for a political Messiah who would put a chicken in every pot and a donkey in every stable. But Jesus wasn't sent by the Father to make everyone happy, so that they could go on living self-centered lives. He came to deal with the fundamental problem of the human race: sin. The essence of sin is our stubborn self-will that says to God, "I'll run my own life, God. Just help me feel good when I need You." The cross, where the Lord of Glory took the penalty we deserved, was the only divine solution for our sin problem.

The issue today is, what do you believe about Jesus? You will make a judgment concerning Him today. You will either receive Him or reject Him, but you will make a judgment concerning Jesus Christ today.

What's your answer to Jesus question: "Who do you say that I am?" You may be standing with the multitude, saying, "Jesus is a fine example, a great teacher. But He is not the Sovereign Lord of my life." That is a terribly mistaken answer. You may be standing with Peter, saying correctly, "You are the Christ," but not understanding the sort of Christ He really is. That's an improvement over the first answer, but it is inadequate. You must stand with Jesus who came as God's Anointed to bear your sins, who was raised in triumph over sin and death, who calls us to follow Him in obedience to the will of the Father. As Peter later preached, "God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). If you stand there, ready to do God's will no matter what the cost, you have correctly answered the most important question in the world: Who do you say Jesus is?

If Jesus were to look you in the eye today and say "Who do you say that I am"; what would your answer be?