

MARK 8:27-30

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

Peter's Confession of Christ

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" ²⁸ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." ³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. ¹

"Who Do You Say that I am?" — seems like such an innocent question. Yet, it can make a profound difference when it comes to how we live out our lives. I try to imagine myself sitting there as Peter was — with Christ himself — with Christ asking the question of me. When He does, the emotions race through my heart and mind — from fear to delight, from anxiousness to wonder, from sorrow to joy.

As I reflect back on my own faith journey, I wrestle with how the Lord for so long in my life allowed me to respond with indifference. In some ways, I reacted with arrogance and annoyance thinking, "why does my answer even matter?"

Raised in the Jewish faith, I have always walked with the Lord's presence in my life. I never questioned that God was my creator, my maker, the potter of my life, the meaning behind my existence. Every Saturday, I went to shul (synagogue) for worship and then afterward would study the Torah and Talmud.

In Hebrew School and Youth Group, the equivalent of St. Tim's Kids and Cornerstone, we would learn what it meant to be God's chosen people and debate God's Word in the "Old Testament". We would also focus on the culture, philosophy, customs, and history of what it meant to be a Jew.

I was learning what it meant to become a young man of godly character. We would pray for the coming Messiah, "the Anointed One" to usher in the Messianic Age of global peace and the restoration of all God's people.

I can remember friends inviting me in Junior High to their church and hearing the Good News of Jesus for the first time. I remember thinking, boy am I glad I am Jewish — these kids really do need a Savior. How blessed I am to be among the "chosen ones." I remember many friends along the way through High School and into College sharing what it meant to them to be Christian. Early on, I would always think what a great teacher Jesus was, possibly a prophet like many others in the Bible. I would wonder how these students could think He was God.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#), (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), Mk 8:27–30.

As I grew as an adult, found my bride and married Debi, I never saw our faith difference being in conflict with one another. We journeyed through our early marriage raising our girls in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. Many times, I would get annoyed at how often my Christian co-workers, friends and even her family members would tell me that I needed Jesus in my life. That without Jesus, I was condemned to hell and eternal life separated from God.

As I journeyed into my mid-30's I began to feel as though God had more to teach me. My life felt incomplete as though something was missing. Up to this point in life, I was self-confident, very successful, achieved everything I went after in my career, and climbed the corporate ladder with sheer determination. Then following 9/11/2001, my life began to erode – job loss, extended unemployment, and bankruptcy took its toll. I began to battle depression and praying for God to help me understand what was missing from my life. I began to feel distant from my family, my friends, and my God.

During this season, God brought some men into my life that helped me see God's plan of redemption for everyone (Yes even the Jews, Yes even for me). I began to wonder if the Messiah I been praying for was real. I began to wonder if this Messiah would ever come. I began to ask myself – if this Messiah was the void in my life that God is trying to show me. I began to read the New Testament. Through His Word, I realized the sin in my life, wrestled with finding the answers, confessed to God, and engaged with others who disciplined me life-on-life. I began to ask – could this Jesus really be the Messiah?

Let's come back to this question and my journey in a moment... for now – let's turn to you. Let's look more closely at how the Lord might be pressing more deeply into your heart and mind asking you – "Who Do You say that I am?" This may be the most important and piercing question ever asked of you.

When you have faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, you begin to establish a close, personal relationship with Him. Like the disciples themselves, you may not see clearly at first. Nevertheless, as you continue to trust Jesus and respond to Him, your heart will soften, and your vision will grow clearer. You will desire to know the truth and your heart and mind will be drawn to Jesus. God alone will transform you in this journey.

For us to more fully understand what Jesus is asking with this question, we must first take a look at what is unfolding with this passage in Mark. When Christ addresses the disciples, we are now at the pinnacle of their training. Jesus knew these disciples needed to have a deep, personal appreciation of who He is before He could share with them the pathway ahead. Before he could invite them to follow Him and call them to follow a life of devotion and sacrifice.

As we engage this passage, we find ourselves coming to the heart of what it means to be a disciple. Jesus opens the discussion by asking them what the public thinks of Him. The disciples reply that most see Him as a great man—equal to John the Baptist, Elijah or other prophets. Then the Lord deliberately asks the disciples for their personal understanding of who He is.

Not surprisingly, Peter, always the first to engage, promptly declares Jesus to be the Christ, the Messiah, and the Anointed One. Peter had become convinced in his mind that all he had witnessed in walking with Jesus pointed to this as the only possibility and led him to this profound, personal conviction.

Following Peter's journey, life for him could never be the same again. Peter could never be satisfied with his self-centered existence. If Christ was the Messiah, then Peter feels called to profess his belief and draw closer to Christ as a disciple. However, let's look at what happens next in the very next verses of Mark 8:

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." (Mark 8: 31-33)

Throughout God's Word to this point, we have seen Jesus perform miracles, guide his followers to a true understanding of what they should value, and show those He served an unending love and humility. We have seen Him hated by His enemies and misunderstood by His family, friends and followers. Now, He reveals to the disciples plainly that He must suffer; face rejection; face death; and, rise again. For Him the path to glory would lead first to the cross and the grave.

Peter could not accept the idea that Jesus would have to suffer and die; that was contrary to his image of the Messiah. Contrary to all that, he had learned. Jesus sees Satan gaining a foothold in Peter's heart and mind. We begin to see how Satan operates and tries to discourage Christ's followers from obeying and trusting in God. Satan will always tempt us, as he did Peter, to look for the easy way to God's glory.

Doesn't this speak to the heart of most of us? Our desire to be self-saving; to look for a short cut that does not require any sacrifice of us. Is it not true that we naturally like to avoid trial, shame, and rejection? That we turn away from the suffering that may come from doing God's will. In short, would we not prefer to live out our lives in a quiet, unassertive manner.

Peter simply could not understand why Jesus would have to follow this path of sorrow and sacrifice. Had we been there, we might have said or thought something worse. Peter's protest demonstrates his deep human compassion for Christ. He heartily loved Jesus. Now having recognized Him as the Christ, he had to come to terms with the reality of what that would mean.

Jesus continues in verses 34-36 of this passage by calling to the crowd and his disciples: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life^a will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?

Note that Jesus first looks at His disciples, then rebukes Peter, as if to say, "If I do not go to the cross, how can these, my disciples, be saved?" If we say that Jesus is the Christ, are we prepared to deny our selfish impulses? Are we prepared to give up personal comforts, our earthly belongings, our grand ambitions, and surrender all of who we think we are? How can any of us justify our materialism, selfishness, and coldness of our hearts? His words call us to lives of self-denial, surrender, suffering, and sacrifice.

We will always face the temptation to want to save ourselves — to strive for the comfortable life, to provide for our own future, to make our own choices, and to place ourselves at the center of everything.

If we say that Jesus is the Christ, we have to surrender our life as we know it. Christ calls us to pour out our lives for His sake and the sake of the Good News, becoming his head, his heart and his hands. He asks us to live a life of service, laying down our lives, for the sake of the others allowing Him to use us to transform the world.

With this in mind, let me return to my own journey of faith... one night, after months of struggling with this question, "could this Jesus really be the Messiah?" I was exploring the New Testament and reading a devotional, I fell upon a quote from C.S. Lewis about Christ:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. {Wait – that is me!}

That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic... — or else he would be the Devil of Hell... {Wait I've read the truth in His Word – Jesus is not the devil, he is not a lunatic}

Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

— C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

^a The Greek word means either *life* or *soul*; also in verse 36.

I felt the overwhelming presence of God wash over me and another quote jumped from the page of the devotional – this one from Dwight L. Moody:

"I prayed for faith and thought that some day faith would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith did not seem to come. One day I read in the tenth chapter of Romans, 'Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.' I had up to this time closed my Bible and prayed for faith. I now opened my Bible and began to study, and faith has been growing ever since."

In that moment, I looked at my Bible and the Lord took me to Matthew 16:13-19 and I was faced with the question – "But what about you – who do you say that I am?"

Now, the question falls to you. Jesus is clearly sharing that to be His disciple you must put Him in first place among all your relationships, belongings and desires. If you are to be fully devoted to Him, He is asking you to release ownership of everything in your being to Him. Immediately, you have to ask yourself, how could Christ ask so much of me and make this kind of demand on my life? If anyone else in your life demanded such a commitment, you would think they were nuts.

To make such a demand, Jesus cannot be merely a great religious man and a wise teacher. He is not simply sharing nuggets of insight about how we should behave in the world. He could not be a prophet among prophets. A prophet would simply command us to follow God. Jesus calls us to follow Him!

How you respond to the question, "Who do you say that I am?" matters. How you answer makes all the difference in your life. Jesus demands absolute and ultimate surrender and devotion. The kind of devotion that rightly belongs to God alone. If Jesus is not the Lord, not divine in His nature, you must conclude that He is delusional, demented or demonic. Is he a liar, a lunatic or the Lord?

Jesus is asking you, how will you respond? Look to His Word, seek Him in prayer, and pursue counsel from those that know Him to be their Lord. Christ loves you; Christ desires a relationship with you. He knows your heart; He knows your mind. So How will you respond? He is sitting next to you. He is looking in your eyes, piercing your soul. Feel His presence. Feel His arms embrace you as he asks again, "Who do you say that I am?"

Let's pray...