

## Who Do You Say That I Am

Mark 8:27-30

By [Wiley Lowry](#)

If you would turn in your Bibles to the book of Mark, chapter 8. We find Jesus asking a profoundly important question in this passage. We may have many questions that are deep and searching. The first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism gives us one. What is man's chief end? What is the purpose of life? And perhaps you've asked, "Why does God allow suffering?" Maybe you were driving here to church tonight and you thought or asked, "Why does North State Street drive more like the terrain of the Grand Canyon than a city street?" These are tough questions; they're difficult to answer! But no question is more important than the question we find in Mark chapter 8 - "Who do you say Jesus is?" Let's go to the Lord in prayer before we read this passage.

*Our Heavenly Father, we come to You as we turn to Your Word and we look to the gospel of Mark and we ask that we would see Jesus and that You would guide us by Your Holy Spirit and that You would be glorified by Your Word. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.*

Mark chapter 8 starting at verse 27:

And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter asked him, "You are the Christ." And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

This is God's Word.

I want us to look at this passage and these verses really in two parts. I want to look at first, what *they* say. Who do they say that Jesus is? And then secondly, who do *you* say? What do you say that Jesus is?

### I. Who Do They Say that Jesus Is?

First, they say - verses 27 and 28. In verse 27 we see Jesus and His disciples are making their way to the villages of Caesarea Philippi and one of the

distinctive features of Mark's gospel is the pace at which he presents the events in Jesus' life. The action moves quickly. Typically Mark is more concise than the other gospel writers and he's fond of using this word which is translated "immediately." He's moving the action along. He's intent to present Jesus and to get us to the cross and to the resurrection. And our passage tonight is very close to the center of Mark's gospel. And in the preceding sections Jesus has been rejected by the members of His hometown community, He's traveled the region around the Sea of Galilee, He's working wonders, He's healing sicknesses, and He's teaching the crowds; He's teaching His disciples. And in Caesarea Philippi Jesus takes this opportunity away from the crowds, away from the scheduled events for the day to ask them a couple of questions and to force them to confront who He really is.

### **Grace and Truth in the Regular Routine of Life**

Caesarea Philippi was located about twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee. It was near the source of the Jordan River along the slopes of Mount Hermon and it's reported that this area was a very fertile region. It was a beautiful area of the country. And you can almost picture Jesus walking around with His disciples as they go through the city streets, the village streets, and they take note of the weather and they recognize the wildlife and the plants that are around them. It's a scene that you see almost every day in your neighborhoods, in your streets. And some of you may have a more difficult time picturing a group of thirteen men walking the streets as they were doing. But I've been told about a group of many men in our church, that's kind of a famous group, that walks around the city streets together doing this very sort of thing. And I mention that just to highlight what a humble picture we have of Jesus in this passage. Yes, throughout the gospels we see Jesus presented in His power and His authority and His uniqueness, particularly by His miracles and by His teaching ministry, but what we come across here is really an intimate and a casual glimpse of Jesus. He's spending time with His disciples; He's taking advantage of an unscheduled moment in the day to direct His disciples to the truth. And it's in the ordinary flow of life. It's going from one place to the other that Jesus initiates this conversation on who He is.

And that's typically how we come to wisdom and understanding, isn't it? It's in the responsibilities and in the routines and in the trials of life that we come to grasp God's truth. It's in the raising of children and in the business interactions and in illnesses and difficult test results, in the loss of a loved one. Those are the times when God's Word is applied to those circumstances and our faith is deepened. Benjamin Morgan Palmer, he was a longtime pastor at First Presbyterian Church in New Orleans, he said that when his firstborn son was born that that taught him more lessons in theology than any class he ever took in seminary. And Eugene Peterson has written that "God's great love and purposes for us are all worked out in messes in our kitchens and backyards, in storms and blue skies, the daily work and dreams of our common lives. God works with us as we are and not as

we should be or think we should be.” We need to remember not to despise the day of small things but to take advantage and to be on alert for those moments when Jesus is trying to teach us something or when He’s giving us the opportunity to teach someone about Him. Very often that can come when we least expect it. It comes in a down moment on a busy day, a moment when we’d rather maybe disengage and look at our phone or watch TV. It could come to us after a disappointment or following an embarrassment in our lives. It’s in that moment when you’re not very optimistic about ever being able to learn, about ever being able to change. Maybe with another person you’re not very optimistic about ever being heard by them. And yet it’s in those moments that it requires patience. I think moms know that better than anybody - they’re looking for that down moment in the day, those teachable moments as they go about the regular routine of life.

### **The Patience and Longsuffering of Jesus**

That’s what comes through in this passage with Jesus is His patience, His patient commitment to His disciples. That’s so encouraging, isn’t it, because so often we struggle to understand? We hear God’s Word, we witness His goodness and His sovereignty, and yet we repeatedly experience doubt; we worry and we experience anxiety. We waver and we stumble. We often I think can relate to people like William Cowper, the great hymn writer who wrote hymns such as “God Moves In A Mysterious Way.” He could write these beautiful Gospel truths that impact us and are so useful in the church, and yet oftentimes he would doubt that they applied to him and he would suffer from devastating depression and anxiety. Or maybe you think of Thomas Cranmer; he was a reforming presence in the Church of England and stood for truth on a number of occasions but at the end of his life, when he was facing the pressure of death, he recanted of his protestant beliefs and it caused him much shame. And then even after that he recanted of his recantings and he was burned at the stake. But we can relate to those kinds of people who waver back and forth, who experience highs and lows - great joys and even doubts at times. Maybe you think about Peter. We talked about that this morning. We saw the way Peter would do the very same thing.

And it’s such good news that Jesus is patient with us. He’s committed to our growth and our maturity. “He who began a good work in us will complete it at the day of Christ’s return.” And ultimately that commitment is grounded in love for us. It’s a commitment and a love which He doesn’t just put up with our inconsistencies and the messes that we make, but He actually pursues us to death, to the cross, and at the cost of His own life in order to redeem us and make us His. Will we in turn be patient with others? Will we be patient with our spouses? Will we be patient with our children? Will we be patient with others in the church? Will we be patient with the elders and the deacons and the pastors? Christ was patient with His disciples; He’s patient with us. Will we extend that same grace to others even when it appears futile at times? That’s what Jesus is doing as He’s going along with His disciples and He’s entering the village of

Caesarea Philippi.

### **Who Is This Man?: A Case of Confused Identity**

And He comes in there and He's teaching them and He asks them this question - you see it there in verse 27. "Who do people say that I am?" Jesus had become a well-known figure. He could attract a crowd. The report or the news of His itinerary would spread quickly, and this was before the days of Twitter and Instagram. The crowds would find out about where He was going and they would show up to be there, to hear Him and see Him heal the sick. But who was Jesus? Who was it that the crowds thought they were following, that they were coming to hear? The disciples, we see in these verses, they explain that people were undecided on who Jesus was. Some of them said He was John the Baptist; others said He was Elijah; others said He was one of the prophets. There was no consensus on who Jesus was.

Commentator R. T. France says that there's not enough known about Judaism at this time to really know what the disciples and what the crowds would have meant or would have thought about a resurrection. Here they were saying that one of these prophets from the past had been resurrected and was there with them. What did that mean? We're not really sure what it would have meant for the crowds, but for King Herod in Mark chapter 6 we read when he saw Jesus, when he saw what Jesus was saying and what Jesus was doing, he thought He was John the Baptist come back to life. He had beheaded John the Baptist, and so to think that John the Baptist had come back to life it disturbed him. For others, to think that Jesus was Elijah, Elijah was actually a figure of some notoriety in popularity. Remember, Elijah was taken up into heaven. He did not see death. And so the crowds, the people, looked for his coming to pave the way for the Messiah. Others thought He was one of the prophets. Remember the prophets received a mixed reception from the people. When they were performing their ministry so often times they were criticized and ignored and abused. And yet after the fact, after the passage of many years, they were kind of nominally honored and held in prestige.

Whatever the case was, Jesus was viewed with some honor by the crowds but they sought to put Jesus in a category. They wanted to make Jesus a known commodity. They honored Him as a prophet, as a religious figure, but they honored Him as merely a man. It was safer that way, wasn't it? They knew what they were getting into. They knew who they were dealing with by putting Him in one of these categories. That's still the common way that people think about Jesus. In a recent poll, results showed that 90 percent of Americans have a favorable opinion of Jesus. He's second among public figures only to Abraham Lincoln. In that poll, the person who received the highest approval rating was the person being polled. So people have a higher view of themselves than anyone else in history. But we see that Jesus had a high approval ranking in this poll.

## **Who Is This Man?: The Question that Won't Relent**

In the past few years I think that some of the books and movies that have come out bear that truth. There have been several bestselling books written, chart-topping movies produced on the life of Jesus. One author presents Jesus in a series of books on political figures - from Lincoln, Kennedy, to George Patton. Another book presents Jesus as a zealot, a rebel, and a pretender to the Judean throne. When a *New York Times* book reviewer was reviewing that book he said that "The basic premise that Jesus was zealous for the political future of Israel as the kingdom of God on earth is neither new nor controversial." And he's right. It's the same view that we find in this passage. Political figures come and go, prophets appear on the scene for a while and then they're gone, but they're really not all that controversial in the grand scheme of things. And you can appreciate what they've accomplished, you can respectfully listen to what they have to say, but in the end you can dismiss and move on. They don't demand your worship and your adoration and your devotion. But the problem is, the reason that Jesus is controversial, is that He demands those things. He doesn't allow us to view Him with such a historical detachment.

We're faced with the same challenge that C. S. Lewis writes about in *Mere Christianity* when he says, "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 on the level of a man who says he is a poached egg, or he would be the devil of hell. 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."

## **II. Who do You say that Jesus is?**

Instead, what Jesus does is He brings His disciples to the point where they have to dig deeper and to identify who He really and truly is. That's when He comes to them and He says, "That's what they say. They say John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. But who do you say?" Verse 29 Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" If we were to read that verse literally it would say something like, "But you, who do you say me to be?" It's a pointed question. He's targeting it directly to these men, to His disciples. And really there no more important question that He could ask them. Think about it. These are the men He has chosen. He's training them, He's equipping them, and eventually He's going to send them out to tell others about who He is, to build the church, to go and to witness to the ends of the earth. It's absolutely paramount that they know who Jesus is, that they know Jesus' identity. Peter answers. He says, "You are the Christ." You are the Christ - four simple words and yet infinitely significant and profound.

I think we have to almost stop for a second really to let it sink it and to understand how profound this statement is that Peter identifies Jesus as the

Christ. We're all so familiar with Christ as the designation for Jesus that we a lot of times say it almost as one of His names as opposed to being a title for Him. We identify ourselves as Christians. We're very familiar with this term, "Christ," and yet to put ourselves at this moment in history as the disciples are discovering that they are taking part of and are witnesses to the climax in God's plan of redemption. It's a tremendously significant moment in history. Even if they didn't truly understand all that that meant, their actions and their words later on, even in these verses, in this passage of Mark chapter 8, would bear that out.

### **Christ the Anointed One**

But the word Christ still carried significant weight. Christ is the Greek version of the Hebrew word, Messiah. It means "the Anointed One." And it's significant and it goes back to the Old Testament to God's choice of Israel's king. Next week we'll hear about how David was anointed by Samuel. And if we go forward into 2 Samuel chapter 7 we see that the Lord in His covenant with David promised to establish the throne of David's house forever. Psalm 132 picks up on those promises and God says that "out of Zion I will make a horn to sprout for David. I have prepared a lamp for my anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame but on him his crown will shine." It's the promise of a Davidic king with an eternal kingdom. And however much Peter recognized that in making his statement, he definitely made a profound declaration and it stands in direct contrast to the statement and the opinion of the crowds.

And that's exactly the point that Mark's trying to make to us by including this here right in the middle of his gospel, in what commentators say is a watershed moment, the turning point in this book. One commentator William Lane says that "the recognition that Jesus is the Messiah is the point of intersection toward which all of the theological currents of the first half of the gospel converge and from which the dynamic of the second half of the gospel derives." You see, Mark began his gospel, he said, "This is the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." He's been building up to this point. He's been showing us who Jesus is and His power and His authority and His wisdom and His uniqueness.

### **Christ Who Defies All Categories**

And then we've come to Peter's statement here, "You are the Christ," and now he's going to start to tell us - what does that call for, what does that mean that Jesus is the Christ? It means that He's going to suffer, and He'll be rejected, and He's going to die and He'll rise on the third day. That's what it means to be the Christ. The crowds wouldn't have understood that; they couldn't have grasped that. That's why you see in verse 30 there that "He strictly charge them to tell no one about Him." The crowds wanted a Messiah, a Christ, who was going to be a political hero who would establish the kingdom of God on earth in the kingdom of Judea to reign on the throne of David. They couldn't have understood the purposes of God in Jesus, what it meant to be the Christ that God's plans had

promised us.

But who is Jesus? He is completely unique. He doesn't fit into our categories. He doesn't match popular expectations. He's so much greater than anything we could ever conceive. He is the Christ. It's what we sang at the beginning of the service. "Come, Christians join to sing, loud praise to Christ our King. Let all with heart and voice, before His throne rejoice. Praise is His gracious choice. Alleluia! Amen!" That's who Christ is. That's who Jesus is. He is the Christ. And there's no more important question that we could ask tonight than this - Who do you say that Jesus is? It's the question that we ask all the time when somebody comes to join the church, when we come before the Lord's Table, when we administer baptism. We ask the question, "Who do you say that Jesus is?" When you're considering who to marry the first question to ask, "Who do you say that Jesus is?" When we're raising our children it's the first thing in our minds, it's the top priority, and everything we do is to demonstrate and to teach who Jesus is. When we're facing difficulties, going through sufferings and hard trials, going through temptations, who do you say that Jesus is? He's the Christ. He has come. He is the Savior of sinners and the Lord of all. If we can say with Peter in faith, "You are the Christ," then all that we do is in Christ and it's for Christ and it's to His honor and His glory and His grace is sufficient for us to meet every need and to satisfy our deepest desires. Jesus is the Christ is a profoundly important and significant statement.

So I want to close with just a couple of encouragements.

### **An Encouragement to the Reluctant and the Resistant**

And first I want to speak pointedly to children and to youth or maybe to a reluctant spouse in the room tonight. You're here, maybe because of what somebody else says about Jesus, but I want to direct you to Jesus personally to see, to let Jesus' words come to you. Jesus says, "Who do you say that I am?" Who do you say Jesus is? Somebody else has brought you here. They say that Jesus is the Christ. But who do you say? Will you see Him in His greatness and His power and His mercy and His love? Will you trust in Him as the Christ? Will you trust in Him as your Savior and know the joy and the peace and the hope of being a child of God? Will you call on Him and confess Christ's name?

### **A Reminder: Confessing Christ sets us at Odds with the World**

Secondly, to all of us who confess Christ's name, you'll notice in this passage that there are really, the two responses are radically different. So to call on Jesus Christ will set you at disagreement with the ways of the world. At times it will set you at disagreement with your own desires. But Jesus is the Christ and that means that for us to proclaim that, for us to confess that, there should be a

distinctiveness about us. John Stott once said that the worst thing you could say to a Christian is, "But you are no different from anybody else." We should be expecting opposition from the crowds. We should expect to be different from the culture at large. We should be ready to let go of the dreams and desires of our peers outside the church because Jesus is the Christ. He will come again and He will right all wrongs and He will vindicate His people and He will bless us beyond all of our imaginations.

I was struck with the impact of that just this past week. I was walking around the church offices and I saw one of our administrative assistants; she had a picture of her granddaughters on the wallpaper of her computer. It was a picture of a little four year old and two year old daughter and they're standing in front of a very rustic, primitive, mud and brick oven. And they're standing in a rural village in Burkina Faso, Africa. Their family has moved there recently to minister in the village church. And as I saw that and how they've moved away from family and from the comforts of home and they've exposed themselves to such risks and hardships, and the thought that came into my mind was, "How did they do that? How could they make such a sacrifice and such a commitment to this small rural village in Africa?" And you know the answer - it's because Jesus is the Christ. It's because Jesus is the Christ. That sets us apart and it sets us apart so that we will ask others, to bring others to the same question, "Who do you say that Jesus is?"

Let's pray.

*Father, we come to You as Your people confessing You as the Christ, confessing that this is not from our own thoughts but as revealed to us by Your Spirit. And so we would ask that Your Spirit would continue to do that work to show us Christ, reveal Him to us, that we would honor Him and glorify Him in all that we do. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.*

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