

NCBC Youth Group
January 12, 2020 | Communion Sunday

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?
MARK 8:27-33

Introduction

Imagine if you had to take an exam with only one question. You will fail the exam if you answer this question incorrectly. Imagine having to answer the most important question you will ever answer in your life. Answering incorrectly will not only cause you to fail one exam or one class, but how you answer has eternal implications.

We see that question today in verse 29. Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Every single person—those who have died, those who are living, and those who are yet to be born—must answer that question. Who do you say Jesus is?

People give many answers, but there is only one right answer. Some say that He is a good person, a good teacher, and a prophet; others say He is a liar, and a lunatic. He is certainly a good person. The best person that ever lived. He is certainly a good teacher. The best that ever lived. But those answers are only partially correct, and there is no partial credit given to this question. You either answer correctly or incorrectly.

Confessing Christ

This passage opens in verse 27 with Jesus and His disciples traveling north to the villages of Caesarea Philippi,¹ which is north of the Sea of Galilee. This is Gentile territory. On the way, He first asked them “Who do people say that I am?” (27), and then He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” (29). This is sort of the culmination of their training. They had been with Jesus for two years, and the cross is less than a year away. They witnessed many miracles and heard Him teach many times. Now it’s time for them to answer the most important question: “Who do you say that I am?” Am I just a good person? Am I just a good teacher? Am I just a great prophet?

Before He asked them that, He asked them in verse 27, “Who do people say that I am?” The opinion of the crowd differed. In verse 28 we find that some thought He was John the Baptist, other thought He was Elijah, Jeremiah,² or one of the prophets. By the way, John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah were all dead by this point, so they thought He was

¹ Not to be confused with the “Caesarea” (or Caesarea Maritima) southwest of Galilee on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

² Matt. 16:14 adds “Jeremiah.”

one of the great men risen from the dead.³ No doubt, these were great men and great prophets. They were not normal people, and some had been given divine power, much like what they saw in Jesus. So, they didn't deny His miraculous works, nor did they deny His divine power.

While it's a nice gesture that they thought He was someone special, it doesn't go far enough. On a side note, at least the crowd wasn't openly hostile like the Pharisees, who said Jesus was demon-possessed (Mark 3:22). But whether you say He was simply a good man or that He was demon-possessed, the answer is still wrong. Nice gestures toward Jesus does not make the wrong answer any more correct.

John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, and other prophets were not the correct answer. Jesus asked them in verse 29, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." In Matthew's account, Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:15). Now, Peter is the spokesperson for the disciples—we see him asking and answering questions for the group⁴—so it's not just Peter who got it right but the disciples also.

Christ is the Greek word for Messiah, and Messiah means "anointed one." The Jews expected and anticipated the coming of the Messiah, who would be a great deliverer and ruler.⁵ ⁶ By confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, they properly identified Him as who He truly is. Sure, the disciples will have moments of weakness and moments of doubt, but one thing is for sure: There was no doubt they knew who Jesus was.

How did they come to this conclusion? How did they know the right answer? The crowd, the Pharisees, and the disciples all heard Jesus' teachings and witnessed many miracles. How did they get it wrong? Same Jesus, same miracles, same teachings, but different conclusions as to who He was.

Matthew gives us some insight in Matthew 16:17: "And Jesus said to him [Peter], 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" The ability to recognize and properly identify Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, was given by God. The disciples were not more enlightened than others, they were not more educated, nor were they more religious. Think

³ Luke 9:19, "... one of the prophets of old has risen again."

⁴ cf. Matt. 15:15; 19:27; John 6:68.

⁵ John MacArthur, *Mark 1-6 The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 416.

⁶ cf. Daniel 9:25-26; Isaiah 9:1-7; 11:1-5; 61:1.

about it: From a human perspective, the Pharisees should have been the ones to identify Christ, because they were the religious leaders.

But it wasn't because of human effort that they recognized Christ. God drew them and the Holy Spirit opened their eyes to the spiritual understanding of the truth.⁷ John 6:44 says, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." That's why Jesus said, "Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." They could take no credit for confessing Jesus as Christ, the Son of the living God.

Undoubtedly, after answering the question correctly, they wanted to tell others about Jesus, but Jesus issued a stern warning⁸ in verse 30, "He warned them to tell no one about Him." The reason they are not to tell anyone is because Jesus' death and resurrection is yet to occur. The gospel is not yet complete without Jesus' death and resurrection. Soon, they will go and tell everyone about Jesus, but now is not the time.

Peter Rebuked

No sooner had Peter answered the most important question correctly than he was rebuked by Jesus. Peter went from all-time high to all-time low. The disciples, also, went from high to low. Verse 31, "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."

Think about the abrupt transition that took place. They acknowledged Him as Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. In their minds, they probably still held on to the thought that the Messiah, the great ruler and deliverer, would free them from Roman rule and establish His kingdom. All of a sudden, Jesus tells them that the Messiah is going to suffer, be rejected, be killed, and rise again.

That is a hard pill to swallow, and the thought never crossed their mind that the Messiah would be persecuted and killed at the hands of the very people He came to save. They understood what Jesus was saying, because in verse 32, it says that Jesus stated the matter plainly. He didn't use parables or veil the truth.⁹

Peter, who was just commended for answering the most important question correctly, spoke up again in verse 32: "Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him."

⁷ cf. Matt. 11:27; 1 Cor. 2:10-14; 2 Cor. 3:15-18.

⁸ Greek word translates as "stern warning."

⁹ In Matt 12:40 and John 2:19, Jesus veils the truth of His resurrection by using language such as the "sign of Jonah" or rebuilding the temple. Here, He stated it plainly.

Matthew records Peter's words, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." Jesus turns around and rebukes Peter by saying, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Peter went from being a spokesman for God to being a spokesman of the devil. From high to low. From commendation to rebuke. Now, Peter didn't know he was speaking as a messenger of the devil. I think Peter said it out of love for Christ, but in the grand scheme of things, if Jesus never went on the cross, we would never have salvation. The devil would like nothing more than to thwart the plans of God for the salvation of man, so in that sense, Peter was acting as a spokesman for the devil.

I want you to know that Peter was not demon-possessed, but that his message was the message of the devil. The devil would try to prevent Jesus from going to the cross. In the words of verse 33, Peter was fixated on man's interests, not God's. Peter probably wanted Jesus to be the Messiah to overthrow Roman rule and establish an earthly kingdom, but God's plan was different.

Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. [9] 'For as the heavens is higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.'"

God's plan, God's wisdom, God's thoughts, and God's ways are so much higher than ours. Though we cannot comprehend why God chooses to do things a certain way, we trust that He is far greater and far wiser. Listen, Christianity stands so far off from every other religion in the world. That's because we worship the only One true and living God, who is far greater and wiser than any of us. No one can possibly make up Christianity.

What religion is there that requires absolute righteousness and perfection to enter heaven? Every religion man makes has some provision for man to earn salvation. Why? Because it is made by man. If I were to create a religion, why would I create one where I can't attain heaven?

What religion is there where god comes down to save man by dying a tortuous and shameful death? Oh there are many religions where gods became man. Look at Greek mythology. The Greek gods often roamed the earth, but were any of them perfect, like Christ? No, those gods had the same shortcomings as man, because they are man-made. The Greek gods and goddesses are lustful, deceitful, greedy, not much unlike the people who created them.

You can't make up Christianity; there is absolutely no way it is man-made because it is so far from what man can contrive. If Christianity was man-made, Jesus would probably not go to the cross. Jesus would probably be a great conqueror, greater than Alexander the Great or Caesar. He would come and overthrow the Roman empire and set up an earthly kingdom. Instead, Jesus came—God took on flesh—to live the righteous life that no man can live, and to die a death that man deserves. He came to save us from our sins, and His righteousness is imputed to us.

There is no way Christianity is man-made. It is so distinct from every other man-made religion, and it is so contrary to man's natural inclinations. The Bible has to be God-given. And because the Bible is the Word of the living God, I trust with absolute certainty that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. These gospel accounts are not fictional stories. They are factual accounts of events that actually occurred.

Conclusion

We all have to answer the question, who do you say Jesus is? How you answer has eternal consequences. We must properly confess Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God. And as we confess Him with our mouth, we must also obey Him by our actions. There are many people who will give lip service and call Him Lord, but there are not many who obey and follow Him. Many will call Him, "Lord, Lord," and they will do many things in His name. Many people will be church goers. They serve at church in some capacity, perhaps even as elders, deacons, and pastors, yet they are not truly converted. They claim to be Christians and do many things Christians do, but they are never saved. They will hear the Lord say, "I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23).

If we confess Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, we must fully submit to Him and obey Him. Let us not be the ones who claim to be Christians but are never saved. Let us not be self-deceived. Jesus tells His disciples in verse 34, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." We must abandon all self-righteousness, all self-reliance, and rely totally on Christ.

Who do you say Jesus is? A good person, a good teacher, a great prophet? He is far more than that: He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.