

Who Do You Say That I Am?
Mark 8:27-38

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I grew up in a Christian home. When we went out to a restaurant, it was a normal practice for us to stop and pray for the meal. As a young child, I didn't think much of this because that's just what we did. But as I became more aware of the world around me, I started to watch other people. I noticed their reactions to our praying.

I remember one time when a woman frowned at my Dad as he prayed. Now you may ask, "How did I know she frowned if we were praying and I was supposed to have my eyes closed?" Well, by this time, I had picked up that most people did not pray before a meal while they were in a restaurant. I began to feel a bit self-conscious in having people look at us. So I adopted the "shielding your eyes from your parents strategy" during prayer. I put my hand over my eyes so they couldn't see if my eyes were open or closed. Then it looked like my parents were asleep at the table while I still had my eyes open.

Or sometimes I would do the headache prayer. You adopt the stance of looking like you have a headache. Then people will sympathize with you instead of mocking you. On this day, this woman stared and then kind of scowled at my Dad. Even after he was done praying, she frowned and kind of looked away in disgust.

I remember getting my back up a bit. Like "what's your problem lady. It's a free country. We're still allowed to pray in a restaurant if we want to." Yet it was one of my first introductions being shamed for faith in Christ. I struggled with this throughout my school years, into University and even into seminary. I sometimes failed to stand up for Christ. It was like I was Peter denying I even knew Christ in certain situations or at least acting like I didn't know Him.

A lot has changed in our culture since that meal in that store restaurant over 40 years ago. We now live in a culture that has moved from somewhat Christian to post Christian to anti-Christian. I wonder. How are you doing when it comes to identifying yourself as a Christ follower today when you are out in the world?

The Christ I am talking about is the one revealed in Scripture, not the watered down Jesus that some have made Him out to be; nor the tolerant Jesus who affirms anything we want to do or anyway we want to live; not the triumphant Jesus who supposedly promises that everyone who comes to Him can be a winner and experience the best of life.

I am talking about the Jesus revealed in the Bible – the one who said "No one comes to the Father except through me." There's no other way to God. I'm talking about the Jesus who taught about Hell. I'm talking about the Jesus who

showed great compassion but, also affirmed the reality of God's. I'm talking about the Jesus who commands His followers not just to receive the Gospel but obey His teaching.

How are we doing when it comes following that Christ? Sometimes we may struggle with this. When we do, we follow a long line of strugglers. Even when Jesus walked the earth. We have seen that Jesus own family struggled to understand who He was and what He was doing. But there was another group who struggled mightily in grasping Jesus full identity. This group did not oppose Jesus or mock Him. They were His disciples. Yet even they had a lot to learn or maybe unlearn to understand Jesus, His mission and how He would complete it.

Today we will see Jesus begin to teach and correct His disciple's about understanding of His mission. He will correct the disciple's expectations of the benefits and responsibilities of His followers. I pray that God will use this text to help us further grasp Jesus' identity as revealed from the Bible. Then I pray we will see more clearly the responsibilities and benefits that come with following this Christ. But most of all, I pray we will be emboldened to identify ourselves as Christ followers in our world today regardless of the cost.

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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?" ²⁸ And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." ³⁰ And he strictly charged them to 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 the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Jesus and the disciples go to a region far up north centered on a city called Caesarea Philippi. It was on the border between Jewish Upper Galilee and Gentile lands. Somewhere on this journey Jesus asks His disciples the question "who do people say I am?" They reply with the three most popular designations for Jesus that they have heard. Some say "John

the Baptist, some say Elijah and others say one of the prophets.” So this is actually pretty good press for Jesus compared to what others said about Him.

Remember the scribe from Jerusalem who accused Jesus of being a pawn of Satan? Jesus’ own family thought he was out of his mind. His fellow citizens in Nazareth dismiss Him as a hometown boy. But the crowds see something unique in Jesus. Maybe he was John the Baptist; respected as a messenger from God. Maybe Elijah who was one of Israel’s great prophets during a time when Israel had largely abandoned worshipping God. The prophets were all respected of spokesmen of God.

But then He asks another question. **“But who do you say I am?”** Peter answers **“You are the Christ.”** Now to us, this may not seem like that big of a deal. We know about the name Jesus Christ. But the way Peter frames his response reveals that “Christ” is not Jesus’ last name. He was not the son of Joseph and Mary Christ. Peter declares Jesus is “the Christ.”

So what is the Christ? Christ is a Greek translation of the Hebrew “Messiah” meaning “anointed” or “anointed one.” Anointing with oil in the Old Testament set apart a person for service to God whether that be a priest, a prophet or a king. There was an Israelite king called David. God promised him that someone from His line would rule forever. But eventually, the Israelite kingdom fractured into two nations. Then both declined and were eventually destroyed as an independent countries.

Then the Old Testament prophets began to predict that one day God would fulfill His promise to David by raising up a king who would reign forever in justice and righteousness. We find one example of this in Jeremiah 23:5-6. “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David, a righteous Branch and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days, Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’” So according to the prophets, **the Messiah would be someone raised up by God to reign as king forever with justice and righteousness.** Jeremiah ministered about 580 years before Christ. He was just one of the prophets who talked or predicted that this anointed one was coming. Then for about 400 years there was no prophetic voice.

Then in 63 BC, the Romans conquer the region they impose a military occupation on the people. Under this oppression the thirst and hunger for Messiah, the Christ reaches a fever pitch. So if you were a Jew in the first century and you knew

about the Messianic hope, what would you expect the Messiah had to fulfill His role? Well He would have to overthrow the Romans. He would have to overthrow the Jewish religious leadership who oppressed the people. He would have to have some sort of power. He would need to maybe lead an uprising or maybe supernaturally overthrow Israel's enemies. Then He would begin His rule as king from Jerusalem over this free and just society. So in the first century, most Jews including the disciples believed **the Messiah would be a royal figure, the offspring of David, whom God would empower to deliver Israel from her foes.**

This is the kind of Christ Peter thinks about when he says to Jesus "You are the Christ." Peter has good reason to make this declaration. Jesus has shown authority over demons, nature, sickness and even death. Jesus has taken on the corrupt religious leaders and continually beaten them in debate. The disciples believe that all Jesus needs to do now is somehow declare His kingdom and overthrow the oppressors.

But Peter and the disciples are in for a shock. It begins in verse 30. Verse 30 – "And He (Jesus) strictly charged them to tell no one about him." Well why not? If you're going to be a successful king, you've got to get out there and rule. You've got to show that you've got power. You've got to get the people behind you. The people already think Jesus was sent from God somehow.

But Jesus will not allow them to tell others that He is the Christ? Why? It could be because the disciples needed a reframing of their understanding of the Christ. It could also be that if people heard the term "Messiah" associated with Jesus, they would immediately conclude He would overthrow the authorities. So Jesus strictly charges them not to tell anyone about this.

Then Jesus drops a bombshell that must have stunned and upset the disciples. **Jesus more plainly reveals what "the Christ" calling means for Him.** Verse 31 – "And He began to teach them." So they had learned that there was another side to "the Christ" that they had not picked up. They needed to learn it. "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man (him) must **1) Suffer many things.** Wait a second. That does not really go with the picture of conquering king. They don't suffer. They make the bad people suffer. The Son of Man must **2) Be rejected** by the most powerful people in their nation – the Elders, the Chief Priests and the Scribes. Well that's bad. I know that some of them don't like you. But you've got to have some powerful people on your side. The Son of Man must also **3) Be killed.** That would kind of stop your hope

for an eternal kingdom. How is a dead Messiah supposed to overthrow the Romans? But there's good news. The Son of Man will **4) After 3 days rise again.**

This is the first mention in Mark of the suffering and death piece of Jesus' ministry. This is the turning point of this Gospel. Before this moment, Jesus demonstrates His incredible authority and wisdom. But from this section, Jesus will talk more of His coming weakness and humiliation. The disciples have no category to include this in their Messianic expectations. But notice Mark emphasizes that there could be no doubt about what Jesus meant in His Words. Verse 32. "And he said this plainly." This was a not a parable. There was not some hidden meaning that the disciples had to discern. It was plain and clear. Yet there's hope because after 3 days he will rise again.

But "rising again" makes no difference to Peter. He has just had his idea of "the Christ" shattered. His belief, along with probably every other disciple, was of a triumphant, delivering, conqueror. He has witnessed Jesus all-powerful authority. This suffering, rejection, death approach doesn't make any sense. No human would think that path was a way to bring in a kingdom of righteousness which is a pretty good indication that it came from God.

So Peter, at the end of verse 32, takes Jesus aside and begins to rebuke him. Peter will not have any of this "suffering, rejection and being killed" talk. And that's probably not what he signed up for either. He expected to help Jesus bring hope, deliverance and justice. And it didn't hurt that Jesus fame spread throughout Galilee so that large crowds gathered round them. Crowds can be pretty intoxicating.

But while this rebuke from Peter is happening, Mark tells us that Jesus turned and saw the rest of the disciples. Why is that important? It could be that they all shared Peter's perspective. Or they may have overheard Peter's remark and Jesus wants to ensure that they are not swayed by His rebuke.

So Jesus responds with one of His strongest statements in Scripture. Remember last week we talked about how Jesus sometimes calls people names to reveal truth about them or provoke a response from them? Well how'd you like Jesus to respond to you like He did to Peter? Verse 33 – He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." "Jesus, aren't you being a little hard on Peter. He just expressed what everyone else thought. And this is the first time you taught them about this." Yes. But Peter needed some serious redirection of his expectations about "the Christ." And could there be anything more satanic than trying to prevent the Christ from going to the cross?

This does not mean Jesus rejects Peter. He rebukes Peter. Our problem in this super easily offended culture is that we equate rebuking with personal rejection. We equate constructive criticism with personal attack. Do you think the disciples and Peter would have gotten the message if Jesus said something like “Peter, I want to affirm your opinion here. I think that you’ve come up with an interesting possibility. That’s an idea I am going to keep in my mental filing cabinet as a potential course of action. But for now, I am going to keep on going with what my Father, the all-powerful God of the Universe, instructed me to do, but I affirm your opinion.” Do you think that approach would have stopped Peter and the disciples from trying to change Jesus’ mind? In fact, even though Jesus rebuked Peter here, the disciples struggled to understand this up to and including the actual crucifixion of Jesus. Yet after the resurrection this rebuke would finally make sense to them.

Then Jesus calls a crowd that is somewhere nearby along with His disciples. Now **the plainly revealed Christ will list what He commands from His followers.** Verse 34 – “If anyone would come after me, let him **1) Deny your “self.”** A follower of Christ is willing to deny their self of everything it wants that is not of Christ. So this is not a command to deny something for a short period of time to honor God. So it’s not you’ve got to give up chocolate for Christ. It is a denial of what “self” wants when it conflicts with what “the Christ” wants of us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote “To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us.” These words hold power coming from someone who denied himself, risked his pastoral career, future marriage and life to stand up to the evils of Nazism. He denied his “self” to the point that he was executed by the Nazis at age 39 in April of 1945.

One Bible commentator on Mark puts it is like this. “Every day we must open ourselves up to God’s initiatives and control. Self-denial takes shape in many ways. For some, it may mean leaving job and family as the disciples did. For the proud, it means renouncing the desire for status and honor. For the greedy, it means renouncing an appetite for wealth. For the complacent it means renouncing the love of comfort. For the fainthearted it means to abandon the craving for security. The violent will have to reject their desire for revenge.

As I thought about this, I asked myself, “What does my “self” like to do that is contrary to what Chris may want me to do?” My self likes to avoid tough conversations; get approval or acceptance from others even at the expense of identifying as a Christ follower; avoid correction from others; avoid accountability and testing; take the easy way; indulge my “self;”

practice personal autonomy which means make my own laws that cater to my “self.” But Jesus says “if anyone would come after me, let him deny him or her self.”

Since Christ commands us to deny ourselves, we must deny our “self” by the strength God supplies. We cannot do this on our own strength or by our own will power. We need to ask for the Lord’s help to live like that – every day. 1 Peter 4:10-11 – “As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks as one who speaks of the oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” So serving, by definition, is a denial of self. To serve others means you’re not serving your “self.” So to deny “self” which is very hard to do consistently, we need the strength God supplies. We need it every day and all the time.

The plainly revealed Christ also commands us to **2) Take up our cross.** What does that mean? Well it’s probably not the regular difficulties and challenges of life. If something difficult can happen to either a Christian or non-Christian, it’s not a cross. Taking up our cross is more about self-sacrifice for the sake of Christ. It is bearing with the oppression caused by others who reject Christ and probably the enemy who opposes Christ. As Christ suffered many things while taking up His cross, we will also suffer for taking up ours.

The plainly revealed Christ also commands us to **3) Follow Him.** This seems a little redundant for Jesus starts verse 34 with “If anyone would come after me, he must follow me. But it is a reminder that Christ is in the lead of our lives not us. And Peter got in the way of Jesus for a few moments during his rebuke. So Jesus said “Get behind me Satan.” Get back to following me not trying to take control of my mission.”

Now if you were looking for a better life, would you naturally sign up to follow this Jesus guy with His demands? Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Follow Me. It’s not a very appealing invitation is it? But Jesus immediately addresses reasons why this is what we must do. .

But why would anyone want to follow Jesus with these demands? 1) If we save our lives we lose them. But if we lose our lives we save them. Verse 35 – “For whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it.” To try to save your life means to live for self now. It means to live selfishly and jealously guard all that you have. But you will lose it all when you die. But to lose our lives today means we don’t live for “self” like most of the world does. We go against the flow. It seems like we’re losing. But losing our lives in the cause of Christ and

the gospel actually results in saving our lives. We discover the joy that comes in a life of serving others. When we die, we reap the rewards of eternal life with the Lord.

That's one reason why someone might follow this plainly revealed Christ. **2) It is the most cost effective way to spend your life.** Jesus uses the language of trade or commerce in verses 36 and 37. "What does it *profit* a man to *gain* the whole world but *forfeit* his soul?" The answer is nothing. So if you want to waste your life, go after gaining the whole world. But you'll lose your soul and end up with nothing. Or verse 37. More money terms. "Or what can a man *give in return* for his soul?" The answer again is nothing. Once a person has forfeited their soul, they cannot buy it back. They can't look at God on Judgment Day and say "I know I didn't live my life to love you and others. But I have a million bucks in my bank account. I'll give it to you in exchange for a good place in the next life." But no one can pay the price for his or her life to save oneself in that moment. Only those who have trusted in what Christ paid on the cross for them will be saved.

One final reason why someone might follow the plainly revealed Christ. **3) Jesus will not be ashamed of us when He returns.** Lest anyone think that Jesus is becoming a weakling by suffering, being rejected and killed, He reminds everyone that He will one day come in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. He will then bring about Judgment Day. Those who were ashamed of Jesus, His suffering and His teaching will experience Jesus shaming of them. But those who follow the plainly revealed Christ will hear "well done, good and faithful servant."

One commentator writes "the result of the decision to renounce all and follow Christ is the great paradox of the Christian life. By giving up our physical lives for Jesus and the Gospel, we gain true spiritual life." So let's go back to the question we started with today. How are we doing when it comes to identifying ourselves as a follower of "the Christ?" What is the Christ calling forth from us today? To deny our "self" in some area where we haven't been? To take up the cross and face that mocking or that suffering that may come because of our faith. Or to keep on following Him? Let us come to Jesus the Christ now.