

45 Mark 8:27-30

Christ at the Center

Text

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.

Introduction

We began this series in Mark asking the question "who is Jesus?" There are all kinds of answers given to that question. The answers varied among his contemporaries, they have varied through history, and they remain varied still today.

The answers given bear testimony to the worldview of the day. The answers given by Jesus' contemporaries are not the same answers given today. In his day we see a strong belief in the afterlife and in resurrection. Almost all the answers identify Jesus as a person who has long since died. In today's postmodern world that bravely endorses Nihilism or Naturalism and decries any belief in the supernatural, the answers are that Jesus was a good moral teacher. John Dominic Crossan suggests that Jesus was a magician and performed magic. Some say that Jesus was a revolutionary. The answers in this increasingly secular world all suggest mere human roles for Jesus with no transcendence.

Mark has structured his gospel to put this confession at the center of it. There is no more important thing to know and embrace than the identity of Jesus.

The Place

27 And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi.

Cesarea Philippi was first named Panea after the Greek god Pan. Pan was the shepherd god with horns and the back half of a goat like a faun. This region was given to Herod the Great by Caesar Augustus. Herod Phillip took over this portion of his fathers land. He renovated Panea and renamed it in honor of Caesar Augustus. He added his own name to the city to distinguish it from the other Caesar.

Cesarea Philippi is located 25 miles to the northeast of the Sea of Galilee. It is near mount Hermon, which is the largest mountain in the region at over 9000 feet tall. This is close to where the tribe of Dan relocated during the period of the Judges. This region, by virtue of being a border region, struggled greatly with paganism. It is in this region that Peter gives this great confession of Jesus as the Christ.

The Examination

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."

Jesus uses the travel time to examine his disciples. Jesus was not asking for information. He knew what people thought. Even if he didn't, Jesus is not curious about the opinions of men. Jesus often used questions to lead into a time of teaching. His question here is not an end in itself.

The disciples give Jesus all the buzz about him among the people. All of their answers assign to Jesus a very important place. Of the millions and millions of people who have lived within Israel, only a select few have ever been recorded. Of these fewer still have had any real impact, and of these Jesus is ranking at the top. The prophets are people who changed the landscape of Israel, for good or for bad. Elijah was the most important of the prophets from an eschatology perspective. Although none of these answers are correct, Jesus is being confused with people who could signal a massive change in redemptive history. This is a testimony to what a powerful ministry Jesus has had so far.

29 And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Jesus, after asking the opinions of the masses gets to the real point. Who do you say that I am? The first question was intended only as a way to provide contrast. The emphasis is quite strong here. Literally Jesus says, "But you, who do you say that I am?" He wants to draw a strong distinction between what the masses say and what Peter is about to confess.

Peter answered him, "You are the Christ."

Peter, speaking on behalf of the twelve answers. So often he puts his foot in his mouth, but this time he nails it. Matthew records his confession more fully as, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." All the other answers assign to Jesus only a preparatory role. A very important one, but preparatory none-the-less. They stop short of assigning to him the ultimate place of redemptive history. But the forerunner has already come. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

This confession changes everything. Jesus moves continually south from this point. His aim is Jerusalem and the cross. We were introduced to the term Christ in the very beginning of chapter 1, but there has been no recognition of that office until now. Up to this point there has been miracle after miracle. There has been demonic submission and confession, there has been teaching with an astounding level of authority, but no mention of Christ.

Now that Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, as the anointed one of God, there is a definite change in focus. The crowds fade into the background and Jesus spends more time on just the disciples. While there may have been vague references to suffering such as the significance of John's unjust imprisonment and murder, now there is no more subtlety. Jesus will openly and plainly tell them exactly what is going to happen. He will speak clearly of his suffering his death

and his resurrection on the third day. He speaks of the role of the Scribes and Pharisees. He speaks of his betrayal, of his being handed over to the Gentiles, of his flogging, of the spitting upon him. Because although the disciples have rightly recognized him as the Christ, their literalistic understanding of that role forbids them from seeing the Anointed One of God in the right light.

30 And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

Because of this misunderstanding, Jesus forbids them to speak about him. When he has been crucified, and resurrected, only then will the disciples see him rightly. And at that point there is no holding them back. At that point Jesus commissions them. At that point Jesus gives them the Holy Spirit to empower them. At that point Jesus promises to be with them to the end of the age. Once his role is understood, it may and must be proclaimed.

Application

John MacArthur catalogs some of the opinions that people have had regarding Jesus:

Since Jesus' day, much of the world has similarly wanted to speak highly of Him without recognizing His deity and lordship. Pilate said, "I find no guilt in this man" (Luke 23:4). Napoleon said, "I know men, and Jesus was no mere man." Diderot referred to Jesus as "the unsurpassed," Strauss, the German rationalist, as "the highest model of religion," John Stuart Mill as "the guide of humanity" the French atheist Renan as "the greatest among the sons of men," Theodore Parker as "a youth with God in His heart," and Robert Owens as "the irreproachable one." Some in our own day have called Him the ultimate Superstar. But all those titles and descriptions fall short of identifying Jesus as He fully is—the Messiah, God in human flesh.¹

This is the single greatest recognition that anyone could make. We must see Jesus for who he really is. We must acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. Given the pivotal place that Mark has assigned to this confession, we must not pass over it too quickly.

Consider the Effect of Sin

J.I. Packer defines sin this way, "Sin may be comprehensively defined as lack of conformity to the law of God in act, habit, attitude, outlook, disposition, motivation, and mode of existence."² We are creatures born in sin. We are not sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners. This sinfulness goes to the very root of our being. Our sin includes the vile acts of murder and rape and theft, but it also comes in lesser forms.

We lie on our income taxes. We play solitaire at work. We engage in a number things that we know are wrong but that we don't believe that the victims are put out much. The sins that don't have dire consequences or effects are justified in our mind as permissible.

The sins of omission are the most subtle. Perhaps you are not as diligent as you should be. Perhaps you are not as gracious as you should be. Perhaps you are not as studious as you should be. These are questions of degree to which we don't give any credence. You are really getting

down on me for not being more industrious? Again, we don't pay any attention to these sins (and they are sins) because we don't see any immediate consequences. But what if your lack diligence in inspections results in the collapse of a crane atop a high rise which ends up killing 4 people. Suddenly we see it then don't we? But what is the difference? Two inspectors do the same shotty investigation, and one of them happens to luck out. They are both equally culpable. Your sinful actions are still sinful actions carrying the same moral weight regardless of whether you happen to "luck" out by not seeing any immediate consequences. Absent from our whole analysis is God.

Consider also, not just your personal sins, but the effects of sin. Creation groans awaiting its redemption. Things are not as they should. Richard Dawkins in his book "The God Delusion" asks us to

Imagine no suicide bombers, no 9/11, no 7/7, no Crusades, no witch-hunts, no Gunpowder Plot, no Indian Partition, no Israeli/Palestinian wars, no Serb/Croat/Muslim massacres, no persecution of Jews as 'Christ-killers', no Northern Ireland 'troubles', no 'honour killings', no shiny-suited bouffant-haired televangelists fleecing gullible people of their money ('God wants you to give till it hurts'). Imagine no Taliban to blow up ancient statues, no public beheading of blasphemers, no flogging of female skin for showing an inch of it.³

Although he intends a different point by this catalog of atrocities, that they are a very real part of this world remains a troubling fact. We may further imagine that there are no earthquakes, no tornadoes ripping through communities, no tsunamis flattening and washing away entire cities. Imagine no disease, no famine, no pestilence. Imagine no more starvation, no power failures leaving people to freeze to death without heat. Imagine a perfectly functioning body with no blindness, no leprosy, no ceasures. Imagine perfect harmony in the created order. All animals perfectly fulfilling their design. Humans working together, building advancing, and creating. Wonderful works of art, breathtaking gardens, mind blowing architecture. All of this potential was lost in the fall. Or sins daily keep this a reality.

Consider God

Now consider God. A being of infinite perfection. He continually sustains the entire creation. Consider a Being who though near, sits enthroned on high as Lord over all. This Being burns intensely in His holiness. The weight of His glory is crushing and the purity of His being is blinding. Even the angels who serve in His presence cover their faces and their feet with their wings to shield their eyes and to conceal their creaturliness.

This is the God of Isaiah. The train of his robe fills the temple with glory. The seraphim sing the trice hagian, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty!" Gerhardes Vos notes, "In Jehovah's holiness his divinity as it were concentrates itself. It involves not merely that his nature is stainless, empirically free from sin, but means that he is exalted above the possibility of sin—in him as the absolutely good evil cannot enter (if owing to this the sinless seraphim hide themselves while proclaiming him holy, how should sinful man endure?)."

The answer is, "He cannot." We have chosen to rebel against this God, we have chosen to declare ourselves as king. We worship ourselves and insult the Lord of glory. We are guilty everyday of what Sproul calls cosmic treason. We shake our spiritual fist at Him and say you will not rule me! And if you dare say, "not me, I have never uttered such words" I ask you which

is better? Perhaps you never utter such words, but at least those words acknowledge that this kingship is a contest. Shall we think better of the person who does not so much as even give God a nod? Shall we think better of a person who, in exceedingly great arrogance, merely assumes the position of sovereignty? No indeed! Not only are you guilty of cosmic treason, but you are guilty in the most arrogant manner.

This sin has incurred the wrath of God. His anger now burns. His fury will not abate. Can you fathom enduring the wrath of an infinite God? His bow is bent, the tip is sharp, and the shaft is true, and justice demands that the string be released that your soul may give an accounting. Our imaginary world of no pestellance is imaginary because of our sin. We brought upon this creation the curse. We plunged it into futility through our sins!

Now Consider Christ

You have no hope. You cannot change your ways. Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard change his spots? So also can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil. You cannot change, I cannot change, no one can change, and creation is subject to futility through our sins so we will find no hope there. Your part alone, your sin alone has eternal significance to it. An infinite punishment is due on account of your sins.

But do you see now that this is all so much bigger than you? That the entire comos is in need of redemption? Do you now see Christ with any greater appreciation? Do you not see the glory of Jesus being the Christ, the Messiah? This is not about politics, this is not about education reform, this is about eternity. The work of Christ will bring about a new heaven and new earth. All that we imagined earlier will be restored, renewed and improved. "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."

Jesus is at the center of history, and this confession of Peter's that Jesus is the Christ is the turning point in the book of Mark. There is nothing more important for you to see than Jesus as the Christ, the redeemer of God's people. If you never have, place your faith in him. Eternity hangs in the balance, and I am not speaking in hyperbole. Rest in Him alone!

1 MacArthur, Commentary on Matthew 16:14.

2 J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*

3 Richard Dwakins, *The God Delusion*.