

## Jesus Clarifies His Mission

Mark 8:27-38 (05/24/15)

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Who do people think Jesus is? The book *Truth Matters* refers to Bart Ehrman. Ehrman grew up in a liberal Protestant church, claimed to get saved at a youth group in a good church, attended Moody Bible Institute, then Wheaton College, and finally Princeton University. Somewhere in there he departed from the faith and is now at Duke University where he is dedicated to destroying the faith of his students. According to Professor Ehrman, we really can't know who Jesus is.

He's not the only scholar who debunks the New Testament witness to Christ. This question appears like clockwork on PBS or in Time Magazine about every decade or so: Searching for Jesus or What Can We Really Know About Jesus? Scholars can't find just one Jesus. They talk about many Jesuses from all the differing traditions. I love what John MacArthur said about all this. All this scholarly searching for Jesus is a satanic operation and a veiled attack on the Bible and Christianity. Jesus is not hard to find! Open your Bible and start reading the Gospels! He's right there.

We've been following Him week by week in Mark, listening to Him and watching Him heal people. We've seen Him cast out demons, multiply bread and fish to feed thousands, raise people from the dead, and not only quiet raging storms on Galilee, but actually walk on the water! So who is He?

This morning we come to the watershed in Christ's ministry. For the first time clearly and forcefully Jesus will teach His disciples what lies in store for Him and them. He wants to give them clarity as the next months unfold leading to Jerusalem and the cross. God wants you to be crystal clear about four issues in this passage: Who is Christ, really? What's His mission? What does it mean to follow Him? What are you going to do about Him in your own life?

**#1 Make sure you are clear about who Christ is - vv. 27-30** There is no room for error here.

*27 Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" 28 They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets." 29 And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." 30 And He warned them to tell no one about Him.*

Jesus and his disciples are 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, in present day Golan Heights. Then it was called Caesarea-Philippi, named in honor of Caesar Augustus and Herod Philip, son of Herod the Great. It's a pagan area with a magnificent marble temple and lots of idolatry, far from Jerusalem and Jesus' antagonists.

As Jesus walks along the way with his disciples, He is teaching them in the Greek peripatetic fashion, using the Socratic method of teaching by asking questions. He asks His students (disciples means learners) the most important question every, "Who do people say I am?" These guys had their ears open to the social media of the day and bring out some of the pop views of Jesus: John the Baptist, whom Herod thought had risen from the dead, Elijah, who had gone up to heaven in a fiery whirlwind, or one of the prophets – Matthew's account includes Jeremiah!

### THE WORLD'S CONFUSION

The world is completely confused about who Christ is. The scholars keep searching for Him but can't find Him. The cults for the most part say He was a created being. The Muslims say he was a prophet who ascended to Allah and is coming back as a Muslim evangelist to correct and convert all Christians to Islam and abolish Christianity. Atheists like Richard Dawkins think the whole idea of Christianity is "barking mad." Liberals think he was a good leader who died in the cause of social justice. The average Joe thinks He was a wonderful person, and maybe God who gave us some really helpful thoughts like in the Sermon on the Mount. Many simply admit, "I don't know and I don't care. Just let me live my life, ok?"

C. S. Lewis gave talks over the BBC during WW2 which later became the book *Mere Christianity*. That's where Lewis famously said you can't say Jesus was a great moral teacher but not God. "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." Lewis concludes in *Mere Christianity*, "I have to accept the view that He was and is God."

#### THE TRUE CONFESSION

Now watch this. As Jesus looks straight into their hearts He brings the question home to them, "And **you**, who do you say that I am!" The tension here is electrical. Think of all they had seen and heard from Him. Without hesitation Peter just blurts it right out there, "**YOU ARE THE CHRIST.**" Christ means Messiah, the anointed one. Peter didn't come up with that answer by himself. In Matthew Jesus says God revealed this to him. You may mentally know Jesus is the Christ, but to believe it with a conviction in your heart that controls your whole life comes from God. We're not talking about simply a mental assent; this was a God-given heart conviction response from Peter. **YOU ARE THE CHRIST!**

It's now becoming clear to the disciples. Crystal clear. They are recognizing Jesus as the One whom God had promised ever since Genesis 3 when the seed of the woman would smash the head of the serpent. They are now looking with great hope at Him, the one who would bring victory and prosperity and world-wide dominion to Israel.

Do you feel Peter's heart pounding as the adrenaline pumps nervous energy into his system, "You are the Messiah!" But Jesus puts a lid on this knowledge. He strongly admonishes them, "Don't you dare tell anyone. Keep this under the radar." Jesus knows the Father's plan and He doesn't want them stirring up the masses. He has an important reason.

So, are you clear about who Jesus is? Are you convicted in your heart like Peter? We know so much more now than Peter did then: John 1:18 – He came to reveal the Father, Colossians 1:16 – He is the image of the invisible God, Hebrews 1:3 – He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His character. And for Peter and the disciples at this time, He is the Messiah!

#### **#2 Make sure you are clear about why Christ came – vv. 31-33**

*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 was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. 33 But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."*

#### THE JEWISH VIEW OF THE MESSIAH

These men had the Jewish view of the Messiah. Finally God would destroy Israel's enemies and establish the throne of David in Jerusalem. Jesus would set up the kingdom, teach from Jerusalem, and the nations would stream into Jerusalem to learn at His feet. The glory of God would cover the earth like the waters cover the sea! "You are the Messiah!" Finally, after being oppressed by Babylon, Persia, Greece, and now Rome, all those glorious Old Testament promises would be fulfilled. Like Isaiah 9:6-7, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this."

And Daniel 7:13-14, "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."

These were the thoughts racing through the minds of these men. They were wide-eyed and ready. What's next? We're right here, ready to go! But they have the surprise of their lives ahead of them.

#### THE "MUST" OF MESSIAH'S SUFFERINGS

Jesus knows it's time to fully unload on these guys what it means to be the Messiah. The Jews seem to have missed Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22 and other places in their Old Testament. So Jesus now gives them a thumbnail sketch of their future. And notice that great little word "must." If Jesus is going to serve as Israel's Christ and Israel's Messiah, there is something that must happen. He must submit to the leaders. He must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and then rise again. This fell like a thunderbolt on the ears of the twelve. Impossible! They were all aghast! From the exhilaration of Messianic glory to the humiliation of death? No, no, no! This cannot be.

And so Peter immediately takes Jesus by the arm, pulls him aside, and assures Him, "We will not let this happen. We will protect you. We will guard you. We will never let them do this to you. We believe you are the Messiah and we'll go with you to march on Jerusalem. We'll be with you as you destroy the Roman armies and set up your headquarters in Jerusalem and begin to take dominion over the earth." Kent Hughes notes, "Peter had become the unwitting carrier of demonic doctrine."

Upon hearing Peter's words, Jesus wheels around, realizes the disciples are all ears, and severely rebukes Peter! Peter did so well identifying Jesus, but has completely blown it here. And Jesus in strongest terms takes us straight to the spiritual warfare going on. Satan had tried to tempt Jesus to take over the world by worshiping him in the wilderness, "You don't need the suffering of the cross." Now he has returned through the voice of a well-meaning friend.

There are times when we need a strong rebuke. Especially when we think we are right but are stone cold wrong. Peter is thinking on a human level, not God's level. Man's way of thinking is glory, wealth, comfort, success, winning, healing, pain-free living, empty parking spaces. But the way to Messianic glory is through suffering! That's what they missed. And without the suffering and paying for sin, there would be no kingdom! We have to ask ourselves, am I thinking God's way here, or man's way? Every day we have that choice. God's way isn't the easy way, but it's the right way. Man's way leads to death; God's way to life.

#### **#3 Make sure you are clear about what it means to be a real Christian – v. 34**

*And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."*

So Jesus clarifies for everyone what it really means to follow the Messiah who is going to suffer and die and rise again. It's not taking arms and going down there and killing the infidels. No, following Christ is not a glory ride, at least at first. It's a path of suffering. And Jesus lays it out so clearly here. Here is the difference between the faith of demons who tremble, and the true faith and repentance that brings salvation. This isn't salvation by works. This is salvation by faith alone, but the kind of faith that radically transforms your life. Jesus really describes for us what true repentance and faith look like.

First, you must deny yourself. You don't come to Christ bringing yourself with you. You deny your own life, your own goals and ambitions and pride and ego and yourself. He doesn't mean denying yourself things, like Reeses Peanut Butter Cups for a week. Denying yourself means no longer living for you. Coming to Christ is leaving your old narcissistic life behind.

Second, you must take up your cross. Coming to Christ means dying to yourself every day. Luke 9:23 says take up that cross daily! It may mean literally dying for Christ and the gospel, but Jesus leads a long procession of cross-bearers! The cross means death to your old way of living. The cross is painful, but leads to joy and glory. Ryle said, "If we will not carry the cross, we will never wear the crown." It's no longer about you and your rights and your thing and your pleasure and everyone serving you! Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live. Christ lives in me. The life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Third, "Follow Me." There you go, leaving your old self-serving life behind, getting in step right behind Christ, trusting Him, learning from Him, identifying with Him, confessing Him, loving Him, obeying Him! I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back!

Are you going? Is following Christ worth it? That's the last issue:

#### **#4 Make sure you are clear about the value of your soul – vv. 35-38**

*35 For whoever wishes to 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 will a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."*

Let's imagine Christ coming in to your family room, sitting down across from you, and asking you these questions.

#### **For – what you save or lose.**

Verse 35 "Do you want to save your life? Live for yourself? You'll lose it! Will you deny yourself, lose your life, and follow Me and the gospel? You'll save it! Which will it be?"

#### **For – what you gain or forfeit.**

Verse 36 "What if you gained the whole world? What will it profit you? If that's all you have, when you come to the end of your earthly life, it will evaporate. You'll have nothing. You'll forfeit your soul! Is that what you want?"

#### **For – what you give in exchange.**

Verse 37 "What do you have that you could use to purchase eternal life? Nothing! You could have all the gold of Lonely Mountain. It won't buy you eternity. The one thing you need is Me and the blood I will shed on the cross for sinners. Will you cling to your stuff and then face judgment with nothing in your hands?"

#### **For – what you confess or deny.**

Verse 38 "Will you claim My name, or will you be ashamed of Me in this adulterous and sinful world where I am rejected and mocked and killed. If you are ashamed of me in this world, rest assured, I'll be ashamed of you when I come back and bring you to judgment!"

Are you clear about the value of your soul and eternity? What do you value, yourself or Christ? This world or God's will? What will you invest your life in, this world or Christ's kingdom? You must choose. You must either go your own way, save your own life, cling to your own stuff, or you must deny your own life, die to your old way of living, and go ahead and follow Christ. Which will it be?