

But who do you say that I Am?

by Christine Momjian

One of the blessings during this covid period, with most social activities being canceled, was that we were able to work on some projects around the house. I'm sure you had some projects yourself. One of ours was when Bruce and I started going through the boxes that had been sitting in our unfinished attic.

In one of the boxes I found a piece of paper. It was in my handwriting... in Armenian of an Armenian message. As I read, memories of it flashed back. You see, during my father's ministry here, between the years of 1980-1988, each year, on one of the Sunday's in the month of June, it was youth Sunday, and the CYF took responsibility of the service, under his guidance. On one of those years, I was given the part of giving the Armenian message. That brought back some memories.....so I thank you for this opportunity, some 40 years later, to look at God's word together.

When I was asked to give the message this morning, I thought it would be best to give the message from the lectionary, and by God's goodness, one of the selections was the Mark passage. You see, I had spent time in Mark with AMCC's Bible study, so it was a book I was more familiar with. I thank God for His kindness.

Let us pray.

Today's message comes from our Gospel reading. Please open your Bibles to Mark chapter 8, starting at verse 27.

The Gospel of Mark is the first Gospel written. There is an urgency throughout the book. At this point in the book, we are nearing the end of Jesus' life and earthly ministry. The disciples have been with Him for a few years, and so by now they **should** have an understanding of who Jesus is.

Jesus is preparing the disciples for His departure. In the short Gospel of Mark, Jesus talks about His suffering, death, and resurrection 3x in chapters 8, 9, and 10. You sense that Jesus is repeating Himself

so that the disciples understand. So they know when He is crucified, that He **knew** this would happen, but that He would rise again.

In this passage there are five points that I would like us to look at. Let's look at them together.

The first one is Jesus' question to the disciples "But who do you say that I am?"

Second, Peter's answer on behalf of the 12.

The third, the disciples' understanding of what the Messiah would be like.

Next, Jesus' explanation that the Messiah would suffer, and if we are to follow Him, that means we suffer. We could also call that the cost of discipleship.

And lastly, the paradox of what you seek you don't get, and the vice versa.

Let's unpack these points by looking at the text.

In Mark 8:27-29 we read: *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?"*

It's an unusual question for Jesus to ask – is it not? Jesus often asked questions that on the surface seemed simple, but as we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us, the simple question can take on deeper layers.

- Why is Jesus asking that question? He is God, He already knows the answer. He even knows what they will answer.
- It almost feels like He cares what they say, does He care?
- Is that question only to the disciples? Or is He asking each one of us, individually that question?
- Have you allowed Jesus to ask **you** that question? "But who do you say that I am?"

- And what is your answer? The answer we give individually makes all the difference.

Instead of only asking His disciples what they thought, Jesus first asks what others are saying about Him. I believe He wants the disciples to stop and think about what people are saying, and for them to recognize what they think of that. Are they in agreement with the crowd? What is their answer? We should ask ourselves, are we in agreement with the crowd? Or are we firm in our answer. Do we waver in our answer based on whom we are with?

We also notice that Jesus asks for their thoughts about His identity with that question, instead of just **telling** them who He is. Jesus often used questions in His teaching to stir up faith in His students. He seemed less interested in pounding in knowledge as He was in stimulating thought and belief.

The text says, *Peter answered him, "You are the Christ."* ³⁰ *And he, (meaning Jesus) strictly charged them to tell no one about him.* The disciples had been with Jesus for 3 years now, and as a response, so typical of Peter, he becomes the spokesman for the 12. He says, "You are the Christ". This **is** a bold statement for Peter to make, because, "Christ" is the Greek translation of the Hebrew "Messiah", which means "Anointed One". This term was used in Old Testament times of kings, priests and prophets which were chosen and empowered by God for a particular task. The Jews came to expect an **ultimate** Messiah who would deliver them and establish His righteous kingdom. So Peter is saying that Jesus is **the** Christ, the one the prophets have spoken of. The one whom the people have been waiting for.

Interestingly to Peter's bold declaration, Jesus says "not to tell anyone about Him". Jesus acknowledged the truth of Peter's statement, but made it clear that it was not time for their public proclamation of His identity. The reason could be to prevent the crowds from acting on their nationalistic conception of the Messiah by forcing a political coronation of Him. Also, Jesus may have wanted to improve on His disciples' defective view of His Messiahship before allowing them to share it with others. This takes us to the third point, their expectation of the Messiah was very different than what Jesus came for. The disciples as well as the crowds had preexisting expectations from the Messiah. Jesus in His **kindness** is slowly revealing that He is a **different** type of Messiah.

So I should ask myself, do I have any preexisting expectations from Jesus, the Messiah? What are those expectations based on? And if my expectations are not met or satisfied, what is my response?

Let's go back to the passage. We'll see this point starting at 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. 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."*

I love what Mark writes in in verse 32. **And he said this plainly.** Mark's Gospel is the shortest, and he gets right to the point, but he chooses to give us this detail. Jesus often spoke in parables or analogies, but here, Mark mentions that with His disciples Jesus explained what was to come plainly. Out of great love for His disciples, Jesus explains it all plainly. And let's recall that He did this 2 more times, in chapters 9 & 10.

The disciples grasped Christ's identity more fully only **after** His Passion and Pentecost. Only then did Jesus send them as His "witnesses...to the ends of the earth.". Jesus Son of Man must be killed, and rise again. This is very confusing since they only knew of general resurrection of all mankind at the end of age.

This takes us to the next point, They also were not expecting that the Messiah would suffer. We see here that God's plans and purposes were very different than what Peter said or thought. Jesus suffered. He humbled Himself even to death on a cross. There is suffering in following Christ. We naturally don't want that. But if we are to follow Him, we are to expect it. Jesus said, in *John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*" (*John 16:33*) So when I have periods of suffering, what is my response? Do I trust Him? Do I still praise Him? or do I question Him as if He owes me an answer?

So to the disciples, it did not make sense that the Messiah would be tortured, killed, but rise again on the 3rd day. His way of living did not make sense, denying oneself, and living as Christ did.

Again Peter is the one who speaks in verse 32, but **this** time the text says he takes Him, meaning Jesus, aside, and begins to rebuke Jesus. Here Peter showed more love than discretion, a zeal for Christ and his safety, but not according to knowledge. He *took him* - He took hold of him, as it were to stop what would come. Peter most likely did not want his beloved Master to suffer. Our Lord Jesus allowed his disciples to be free with him, but Peter here took great liberty. Peter spoke as one that did not fully understand.

This comment by Peter should not have surprised Jesus, since Jesus is omniscient. Yet, Jesus picked Him to be a disciple. As broken as Peter was, Jesus affirmed Him, and does so later on after Peter's denial. You see Jesus sees us as the finished product. And Peter fully understood God's mercy, if you have any doubt on that read the short letters of 1st & 2nd Peter.

Jesus looks at all the disciples before rebuking Peter, the rebuke is intended for all, since Peter spoke on behalf of all of them. This should make us think on how to humbly accept a rebuke. How do you deal when God tells you you're wrong? Let's remember that He does not put shame, but the Holy Spirit is always convicting, never condemning. Paul writes in [Romans 8:1](#) *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1* But we need to be ready with a soft heart to be transformed.

Let's continue reading, from verse 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."](#)

Here we have our last point, the paradox of what you seek you don't get and vice versa. We usually think of a target and aim in a straight line. Here God is showing us a new and different way. I have to trust Him to go a different way.

Jesus is talking about the cost of discipleship . These are hard words. Following Jesus was a far more serious business than the multitudes imagined. He knew that they were following Him with different thoughts of what that kingdom would look like. They may also be following Him to see what signs or miracles He may perform. That is the reason He used such strong statements.

What does it mean to deny self and carry the cross as Jesus says? Jesus isn't calling us to deny ourselves certain luxuries, but to deny our perceived right to direct our own lives. We are to renounce ownership of ourselves, and submit devotedly to God's will. This often brings opposition, as it did to Jesus. Whatever the cost, Jesus calls us to say "no" to self and "yes" to God.

(Example? Not go to Haigazian in 1983)

Be willing to trust the unknown, but trust God. We don't know it all. We have data, science, etc, but there's so much more we don't know. Jesus on the cross could have looked like a failure and perhaps Satan thought he won. When do you follow the logical road versus the God driven road? Peter was let's go on the road we know. At the time, Peter is just seeing the road he thinks they should go.

Jesus said some things that sound so hard and impossible that in themselves, apart from other sayings, they might discourage anyone from even trying to follow Him. He came to bring us the priceless gift of Everlasting Life. But He will not force it on us. The prime condition on which it may be obtained is that we want it **more** than we want **anything** else, and that we **love Him** more than we love anything else. Jesus requires, and must have, the **first** place in our hearts. If He has that, His mercy is infinite. In [Lamentations 3: 22-23](#) we read [The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;](#)

[his mercies never come to an end;](#)

[23 they are new every morning;](#)

[great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3: 22-23](#)

But if we make Him secondary to our every whim, and treat Him as such, the text says [the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.](#)

As we look into this cost of discipleship, Pastor John Piper says, quote, “God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them.” Let me give you just a few examples:

- You may find yourself in prison, and God may be advancing the gospel among the guards, and making the free brothers bold. That would be Paul as we read in Philippians.
- You may find yourself sold into slavery, accused falsely of sexual abuse, and forgotten in a prison cell, and God may be preparing you to rule a nation. That would be Joseph, we can read about him in Genesis.
- You may walk through famine, be driven from your homeland, lose your husband and sons, and be left desolate with one foreign daughter-in-law, and God may be making you an ancestor of a King. That would be Naomi from the book of Ruth. But it could also be said of our ancestors.
- You may be a sexually pure single person and yet accused of immorality, and God may be preparing you as a virgin blessing in ways no one can dream. That would be Mary the mother of Jesus.

(Recall the article I read about witnessing by words and deed)

Let's recap the five points.

The first one is Jesus' question to the disciples **"But who do you say that I am?"** He asks each of us that question as well, as evidenced in v 38. This is the most important question you will be asked. At some point, if I have not already answered that I will need to. What is your answer?

Second, Peter's answer on behalf of the 12. **"You are the Christ"**

Is He your Christ? As Paul writes in **Philippians 2:10-11 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:10-11**

The disciples' understanding of what the Messiah would be like and Jesus' explanation that the Messiah would suffer, and if we are to follow Him, that means we suffer. We could also call that the cost of discipleship. Is He my Lord during the days of suffering? Do I trust Him during periods of suffering or do I question Him?

And lastly, the paradox of what you seek you don't get, and the opposite.

Do I follow Him even when I don't understand or see where the road is going? Do I trust Him with all that I am?

I believe that is what He desires of us. To be all in, to have a relationship with Him, to surrender, and trust Him, because He is worthy. Amen.