

Who Is Jesus?
A Question You Must All Answer
Mark 8:27-30
Halifax: 12 January 2020

Introduction

Today we come to a great transition point in the gospel of Mark.

- The passage before us concludes what has gone before and it also introduces to us what comes ahead.
 - Everything we have seen so far has prepared for the question raised here: “Who is Jesus?” and what comes afterward is a response to that question.
- In many ways, what we have here is also a kind of outline of our life in the gospel as Christians—that we come to confess Jesus as Christ and then we go on learning of what it means that He is the Christ.
 - We go for the rest of our lives discovering His fullness and riches of His grace.

Listen as I read our text to you from Mark 8:27-30.

- Give very careful attention because this is the holy word of God.

Mark 8:27-30: Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, “Who do men say that I am?”²⁸ So they answered, “John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.”²⁹ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.”³⁰ Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him.

May the LORD add His blessing to reading and now to the preaching of His holy word.

Here Jesus forces His disciples to answer the great question, “Who do you say that I am?”

He introduces the subject gently—by first asking, “Who do men say that I am (v. 27)?”

By the word “men” (actually “the men”) He is speaking of the general masses of men who have encountered Him—the ordinary men of His day.

- He is not asking about the leaders, but the men, in general—what are they saying? who do they say that I am?
- His disciples were in the best position to answer that question because they were often among the congregation where they could hear people talking.

The answer is basically that He is some kind of great prophet.

- You can see the words in verse 28: **So they answered, “John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.”**

The crowds were not jealous of Jesus the way their leaders were, so they had not embraced the ridiculous notions that Jesus did miracles by the power of Satan or that He was a deceiver of some kind.

- Or even the notion that He had not done enough signs to show that God had sent Him.
- Jealousy makes leaders ridiculously absurd in their opinions about those who are a threat to them.
- The general populace does not usually follow their leaders in these obviously twisted notions... after all, here was a man who was healing the sick, casting out demons, and multiplying bread.

They concluded that He must be some kind of prophet... and a notable one at that. In this way, they put Him quite above an ordinary teacher or rabbi.

- They associated Him with several prophets from the past.

When they speak of John the Baptist, it is probably not in the same way that Herod did—that John had actually risen from the dead.

- Herod was paranoid because, as you will recall, he had beheaded John.
 - Now he was haunted by the remembrance of godly John who had boldly spoken the truth to him when few others would do so.
- But the crowds likely just meant that Jesus was a successor to John the Baptist, carrying on John's ministry the way Elisha carried on Elijah's ministry, receiving a double portion of the Spirit of God that John had—meaning the fullness of that blessing as reflected by inheritance laws where the firstborn received a double portion.
 - In Jesus, they saw John's ministry continued.
 - Partially that was true.
 - They saw the same announcement that the Kingdom of God was at hand and they saw the same boldness that John had shown... but John himself had testified that he was not even worthy to loosen Jesus' sandal strap.

Those who thought He was Elijah, on the other hand, may have supposed that Elijah had come back to life.

- If you will remember, Elijah did not die as other men do—he was rather taken up to heaven in a chariot.
- Furthermore, Malachi, the last of the prophets, had concluded with a prophecy about Elijah:
 - Mal 4:5-6 said: **Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.**
 - Some of the Jews actually placed an empty chair at the Passover for Elijah to symbolise their expectation of his return.
- Jesus explained that it was John the Baptist who fulfilled this prophecy, because John came in the spirit and power of Elijah.

- In other words, it was not of a literal coming of Elijah that the text spoke, but of one that would come in the likeness of Elijah.

Others of the crowd said that Jesus was one of the other prophets... elsewhere Jeremiah is specifically mentioned—

- Perhaps because Jeremiah was very compassionate, like Jesus, and was often opposed by the leaders.
- The truth is that all the prophets together represent Jesus—He is the fulfilment of them all.

While these notions of the crowds were far superior to those of their leaders, they were far from adequate... they were in fact reprehensible.

- They were like the notions many hold about Jesus today... that He was a prophet or a great man or a moral leader or a man of love...
 - While nice and true as far as they go;
 - in not going far enough, they are in fact in great error.
- To have the Son of God who made the world and gives light to every man come among us and to see Him as no more than a mere man is not to be slightly mistaken—it is to be completely wrong.
 - It is horrific that He came to His own and His own received Him not.
 - It speaks of a terrible blindness that the multitudes had about Jesus.
 - It was an inexcusable blindness that arose out of the hardness of their hearts.
- This is what Jesus said—that having eyes they did not see, having ears they did not hear, and the reason was because of the hardness of their heart.
 - They showed their desperate rebellion against God by their ill-formed notions about Jesus.
 - We might want to go soft on them and say, “How could they have known more from what they saw?” but that is not the way Jesus Himself describes them...
 - And if we are going to be correct in our judgment, we need to go with what Jesus says, lest we ourselves be like that general populace that misses the blazing light of God’s truth.

TRANS> And since the crowd’s notion was inadequate, Jesus now puts the question to His disciples with the adversative:

He says **“But who do you say that I am (v. 29)?”**

Jesus is expecting something better from His disciples.

The grammar shows it.

- The word “but” is included because Jesus is expecting something better of them.
- He also emphasises the word “you”... who do *you* say that I am—you in contrast with the crowds who think I am but a prophet.

These twelve disciples had been with Him all this time and they ought to know better than the crowds.

They had seen more of His miracles than the crowds had simply because they had been with Him as He went from one place to another...

Unlike most, they had the privilege to go with Him when He went into the house and raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead—remember how He did that so effortlessly?

They were the only ones who had seen Him calm the storm and walk on the water.

But perhaps even more importantly than that, they had been privileged to hear His private explanation of His parables, and had been constant recipients of His personal teaching and training.

Besides all of that, we saw in Mark 8:13-21 how Jesus had prepared them to make this confession by rebuking them for their lack of understanding.

- Do you remember that?
 - He had gone so far as to ask them very biting questions like those in verse 17 & 18: **“Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? ¹⁸ Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?”**
- With these questions, He had challenged them that by now they ought to have made a lot more progress in their understanding.

So now when He says, “But who do you say that I am?” they know that they cannot avoid giving an answer.

- He forces them to make up their minds about Him.

It was time for them to move past vague and indefinite notions about Him.

- They had been with Him for quite a while now.
- The time had come for them to confess what they believed about Him.
- He would not allow them to avoid the question any longer.

If they were to get on with their discipleship, they needed to get on with deciding who He was... with committing themselves one way or another.

- There was no place for half-hearted disciples.
- Jesus calls them to confess what they believe.
- This is why those who want to be rightly of His church must confess that He is Christ.

This is true of you also—that the time comes in your life when you need to go on and decide what you think of Jesus and say it out loud—to commit yourself.

We have seen Him as He is revealed in the first part of Mark.

- He is the one who claims to have been sent from heaven and calls people to repent and believe because He is the one who came to establish God’s righteous kingdom.
- He is the one who raised the dead, who healed the sick, who cast out demons and cleansed lepers.
- You cannot ignore Him and be undecided about Him.
 - You must declare what you believe about Him, one way or the other.
 - It will not do to avoid it.
 - You will go to hell if you leave the question unanswered... just the same as those who reject Him outright will go to hell.

It is true for those of you who have grown up as covenant children. You also must come to a point in which you officially declare what you believe about Him.

Properly, you should have been confessing Him and following Him as your Lord and Saviour from as far back as you can remember.

- You were baptised into the church and you have been taught of Him from your earliest days. His name is upon you.
- There is no reason to have doubts about Him—for the truth is self-attesting and you have been exposed to it from the start.
 - Only the gospel fits with our true situation in life and you have had the privilege of knowing the gospel of truth from your childhood.
- The doubts you have are not due to a lack of evidence, they are due to your own rebellion against God.
 - I do not say that we never have doubts, only that we ought not to have them and that the only reason we do is because of the hardness of our own hearts.

But because the human heart is hard and rebellious, we have been praying for you children of the church from your birth... that you will continue in the gospel into which you were baptised and nurtured... by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit...

- God has also appointed that when you come to age and maturity to do so, you publically confess what you think of Christ.
 - You are to do that when you reach sufficient maturity to take responsibility for your own walk.
 - When you serve the LORD and come to church not because your parents tell you to, but because you are committed to Him.
 - When you are able to rise up and say that you believe that He is Christ and that you are committed to Him as your Lord and will follow Him.
- As a little child, you come to church and learn of the Lord because your parents bring you, but there comes a time when you can decide if you are going to continue to follow the Lord or not... when you are called to speak for yourself instead of having your parents speak for you.
 - This is not so much a time when you start to believe—ideally it is not—but a time when you officially declare before God and His church that you believe and when you begin to come to the Lord's Supper.

But what about those of you who did not grow up in the church?

- Perhaps you have only just recently begun to learn about the Lord Jesus.
- Well let me tell you that you too will be brought to the place where it will be time for you to made up your mind about Jesus...
 - a time in which you will be called to say what you believe about Him and whether you will follow Him or not.
- You are not to sit on the fence of uncertainty forever.
 - You are to receive the truth and to openly confess the truth about Jesus.
 - You are to believe in your heart and confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, that He is the Christ and that you are trusting in Him for your salvation and are committed to follow Him.

- As I said before, failure to do this puts you in the same place as those who oppose Him. You need to be saved from your sins and the way of salvation is by coming to Christ, believing and confessing Him.

And let me add that every one of you needs to live out your confession of Him wherever you go.

- If the people at work or in your neighbourhood do not know that you believe Jesus to be the Christ, it is time for you to stop being uncommitted.
 - When Elijah spoke to Israel in the passage we read earlier in 1 Kings 18, they were all circumcised Israelites (or at least most of them were), but they were serving Baal instead of the Lord.
 - If Jesus is the Christ, then serve Him.
- Let me ask you... are you indeed living for Him as your LORD?
 - Some of you need to stop messing around and get serious about serving Him.
 - He is the LORD and it will never do to be vague and indefinite about Him.
 - You need to move on with your confession and start following Him.

TRANS> There is no place for fence sitting.

- Fence-sitters are not in the kingdom of God.
- There is no place for continuing to be vague and indefinite about Jesus.
 - As those who have encountered Jesus, you must declare what you think of Him and get on with following Him.

Jesus' disciples do indeed come through with a better confession than the multitude.

Peter, speaking for them all as he often does, declares, "You are the Christ."

Matthew and Luke record this confession too, but Mark puts it the most simply and the most elegantly...

- Matthew has the fuller statement, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," but it is Mark's way to be succinct so he only records the essential fact, "You are the Christ."

Christ is His title—

- It is not a name like John or Andrew or Jesus, but a title that describes who He is.
- And with the definite article it means that He is the Christ in a way that no one else is... not just a Christ, but *the* Christ.

Although, as we see in the narrative that follows, the understanding of the disciples was grossly deficient about what the Christ was to do,

- They were technically correct as far as the title itself—
- He was indeed the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of David that the nation had been waiting for...
- He was the Son who had been given to them from heaven.

Let's consider what this title means—that He is the Christ.

The word *Christ* itself means "the anointed one."

- It refers to the fact that those God sent to do His work were anointed to their offices with oil.
- That is how they were set apart and consecrated to their task.

- The oil represented that they were anointed with the Holy Spirit of God so that they could carry out their work by the power of God.

There were essentially three offices to which men were anointed—the office of prophet, priest, and king.

The prophet was one like Moses or Elijah who spoke for God.

- They revealed God's will to His people, bringing them God's commandments and promises along with His warnings.
- When the people regarded a prophet as anointed by God (as a Christ), they realised that that prophet spoke for God and they revered the words they spoke as God's word that was to be believed and obeyed without question.

The priests were those like Aaron or Zadok who spoke for the people to God.

- Their task was to offer the appointed sacrifices for the peoples' sins and to guide them in receiving the washings that God appointed for their cleansing.
- By the sacrifices, they opened the way for the people to God so that they could have His favour and so that He would receive their prayers and their worship.
- As those anointed by the Lord for this work, the people were encouraged that God accepted their offerings and heard their prayers for forgiveness.

The kings were those who were anointed to deliver God's people from their enemies and to carry out righteous judgment among them.

- It was their responsibility to lead the people in righteousness, and to punish and exclude those who refused to follow the way of the Lord.
- As those anointed by the Lord, the people recognised that they were given grace and power to lead them to victory and obedience, and that they were given authority from God to execute the judgments that He appointed.

- Each of these was anointed to carry out their task—they were christs or anointed ones in that sense...

But *the* Christ, the One who was *the Christ*, was anointed above measure as the prophet, priest and king... one person with three offices.

All of these other christs were mere shadows and types of Him... bringing provisional blessings until He came to whom it was appointed to save His people...

- Until He came to be the ultimate prophet, bringing light and truth to them... not only to their mouth and ears, but to their hearts so that they would know God as revealed by Him.
- To be the ultimate priest who would offer Himself to take away the sin of the world forever (and not just in a ritual way)—for by one sacrifice He has paid for all our sins and now He ever lives to make intercession for us.
- To be the ultimate king who would deliver them from Satan and death and the world and from all their sin, giving them a home in God's eternal righteous kingdom under His dominion.

What an excellent Saviour He is!

- There is none like Him... none in the same class.

- He alone is the Christ, the Son of God.
 - Only He can save us and bring us to God.
 - No one else is worthy.
- Who is so gracious as He... giving Himself for our sins.

By calling Him *the Christ*, Peter and the other disciples were confessing that Jesus was the one who was anointed for all of this.

- They did not yet grasp all of that—but that was who He was.

The confession of Jesus' disciples is both impressive and not so impressive.

First let's look at the twelve...

Their confession was impressive because it was only by God's Spirit that they could make this confession of Him because they were sinners.

Left to themselves, they were so foolish and stubborn that they would have rejected their own Saviour for no other reason but our unjustified malice toward God.

- That is what is in all of us because of our sinful depravity.
- It is irrational to be quarrel with our Maker as if we have some occasion against Him that can stand or justify our resistance—resistance that will bring us to everlasting misery.
- This being so for all of us, it is truly a remarkable thing when the Spirit of the Lord opens anyone's heart to believe.
 - To see them profess Christ is to see a miraculous change of heart in them—a spiritual birth.

It is also impressive that they confessed Christ *at this time*.

- Given that their leaders had rejected Him and given that the people generally stopped short of seeing Him as the Christ,
 - and given the fact that the understanding of the times called for Christ to arise as a military king with earthly pomp and glory and that there was none of that in Him...
 - It is remarkable that they still confess Him to be the Christ at this time.
 - He had delivered them from the skepticism of the Pharisees.

➤ So their confession of Him as the Christ was quite impressive. But...

It was not so impressive because it was so long in coming and because their understanding was so deficient.

If anyone had truly had a pure heart when Jesus came, they would have seen that He was the Messiah long before these disciples saw it.

- The truth is that there were some in Israel who really were looking for the redemption that they needed—such as the Lord had revealed.
- There were very few, but there were some who knew that He must suffer—just as it said in Isaiah 53 and just as the sacrifices that Moses appointed testified to.

- Anna the prophetess, and Simeon the elderly prophet appear to be among those who recognised this—and perhaps a few of their associates, but the great majority were mistaken...
 - and they should not have been mistaken.
 - The Scriptures had testified clearly concerning Him if they had only had eyes to see.
 - That the disciples are confessing Him to be the Christ is wonderful, but it is to their own shame that they did not see it long before.
 - Did Jesus not say, “How is that you are still without understanding?”

And the other way that their confession is not so impressive is because of its deficiency as to what they believed Christ to be.

- Jesus tells them to tell no one that He is the Christ (verse 30) because He knows that they are clueless about the true work that God has given Him to do as the Christ.
 - Even though they confessed Him despite the fact that He had not arisen to an earthly throne yet, they completely missed His essential mission, which was to give His life on the cross.
 - We will see more about that next time when Peter rebukes Him for saying that He will do this, instead of standing by Him in awe for His willingness to make so great a sacrifice for His people.
 - Jesus will be recorded in the next two chapters trying to get it into His disciples’ heads that He really is going to the cross and will be raised again on the third day.
 - That’s how deficient their confession was.
 - For them to go out declaring it now would have been a disaster.
 - You would have deficient messengers bringing the message they did not understand to people who would not understand... the blind leading the blind, as it were.
 - Not a good situation.
- So again, it is wonderful to see their confession that He was Christ (the words were right), but also there was much to be desired.

Our confession is likewise both impressive and not so impressive. Let’s look at that.

Like theirs, if you confess Christ, God is to be praised because He is the One that enabled you to make such a confession.

- You see others with hard hearts rejecting Him to their own peril and you know that but for the work of God’s Spirit, you would be no better—you would have gone on in hardness rejecting Him too.
- It is impressive that God has upheld your faith when you are surrounded with people who have deficient views of Christ...

- who see Him as a good man—maybe even the best of men, or as a great prophet or revolutionary—maybe even the best of these.
- Such confessions can sound so reasonable and so kind.
 - They can be contagious and winsome to us in our fleshly thinking.
 - But remember—they are a terrible insult to the Lord of glory who came down from heaven to give His life a ransom for many.
 - To reduce Him to one who died as a mere man is to show contempt for Him and for His Father.
- That you are able to see that and not be swept into this enticing confession, is due to God’s gracious work in you.
 - He has opened your eyes so that you cannot deny the truth.
 - It is a marvellous thing that you confess Christ in the world!

But as with the disciples, there is much that is deficient about our confession.

- If our faith was as it should be, how much more would we love Him and admire Him!
- How much more complete would our devotion be to Him, and our willingness to lay down our lives for others if we really grasped the depths of His laying down His life for us.
- What boldness we would have in our confession and in fulfilling our duty to Him... what wisdom would we have... what purity and holiness.

But let the God of grace be praised in that He accepts us, as weak as our confession is, just as He accepted His disciples as weak as their confession was.

How patient He is with us and how patient with His disciples, to continue to bear with us as He did with them...

- to continue to work with us and bring us to a better confession.
- How glad we should be that He does not accept us on the basis of our perfection, but on the basis of His own perfection and righteousness.
 - If this were not so, we would all be condemned.
- So let us gladly confess Him with hope in His mercy, looking with eagerness to grow stronger in our confession as He teaches us and works with us,
 - even as we go on in Mark, hearing Him set forth to His disciples what it means for Him to be the Christ and for them to follow Him.
 - How good it is of Him to accept us and work with us when our confession leaves so much to be desired.

But let me warn you all that if your confession is like that of the multitude—that you admire Christ and see Him as a great one but nothing more—then you are not on the path to heaven.

- Though you may say fine things about Christ, you are a bitter enemy to Him and you need to repent.
 - You need to confess Him as the Christ and trust in Him to be God’s anointed prophet who enlightens you, God’s anointed priest who atones

for you and reconciles you to God, and God's anointed king who delivers you from all your enemies and establishes you in God's righteous kingdom.

- He is indeed the Christ and there is no other.

Conclusion: Yes, each one of you must decide who Jesus is.

- If you confess that He is Christ, you will be saved.
- If you do not, you will perish, being without a Saviour.