

Who Do You Say I Am?

Mark 8:22-30

Key Verse: Key Verse 8:29

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

When we consider Mark's gospel as a whole, we can divide the book into four parts. We can think of each part as a one-quarter (semester) course study with a clear goal and conclusion. Today's passage is the end of the first quarter. Jesus' goal has been to teach his disciples who he is. At the end, Jesus gives them an exam. Jesus asks, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Christ." It is the right answer. Let's think about the meaning of this confession.

I. Jesus heals a blind man (22-26).

This event reveals Jesus' divine compassion and Messianic identity. It encourages us that Jesus heals the spiritually blind, like the disciples and us. Look at verse 22. "They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him." Bethsaida was on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Actually, Jesus was just passing through. But some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. They must have known that when Jesus had touched a deaf-mute man, he could hear and speak freely. And when a woman with a chronic bleeding problem had "just touched" Jesus' cloak, her body was healed. The people believed that Jesus' one touch could heal this blind man. Jesus honored their faith. Jesus paid full attention to this man though he had his own busy schedule to keep.

Look at verse 23a. "He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village." To Jesus, the blind man was a precious human being. Jesus wanted to heal him at once. But Jesus did not want to turn this healing into a public display that would stir up miracle seekers and embarrass the man. So Jesus personally escorted him to a quiet place. Once there, Jesus spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him. Then Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" Jesus had a personal conversation with the man. Jesus built up a relationship of trust and love step by step. To answer Jesus' question, this man had to look up. He seems to have had a habit of looking down all the time; perhaps he felt fatalistic about his blindness and ashamed. But after hearing Jesus' question, he looked up. Then he said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." His sight was partially restored, but his vision was hazy and distorted. To him, Jim Rarick would have looked like a giant redwood tree; Dr. Joseph Chung would look like a mature oak tree; Sarah Lee would look like a Japanese flower blossom tree.

At this point, the disciples might have identified with this man. They, too, felt a kind of blindness. They had seen many things that Jesus had done, but they always forgot about it right away. Then they reverted back to their habit of living by natural feelings and thoughts. Once, this caused them to misunderstand Jesus—that he was talking about

food—when in fact, he was talking about the bad influence of the Pharisees. At that time, Jesus rebuked them severely, saying, “Do you have eyes but fail to see?” They must have been very sorry. They must have cried many tears in secret, feeling hopeless and helpless. As they watched the blind man, they could relate to him.

Look at verse 25. “Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.” All the man needed was another touch of Jesus. Then his eyesight was completely restored. Likewise, all the disciples needed was a touch of Jesus to their eyes. Jesus can heal our spiritual blindness. Then we can see Jesus, others, and ourselves clearly.

II. Peter’s confession of Christ (27-30).

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. This was Gentile territory. Jesus was deliberately separating himself from the crowds to have quiet time with his disciples. He wanted to ask them something very important. Look at verse 27b. “On the way he asked them, ‘Who do people say I am?’” This was a pretty easy question to answer; it was a request for objective information. Today they could look up Jesus’ name in Wikipedia and summarize what people said in five minutes. Look at verse 28. “They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’” John the Baptist, Elijah and the prophets were all recognized as men sent by God with God’s message. They were men who loved God passionately and led people back to God. People of Jesus’ time believed that Jesus came from God and served God’s purpose. They did not listen to the slander of the religious leaders, who wanted to misrepresent Jesus as demon-possessed. They knew that Jesus came from God.

Then and now, most people believe that Jesus came from God and did noble work. Jesus is generally respected by the world’s religions. Both Hindus and Buddhists include Jesus among their gods. Gandhi’s inspiration for nonviolent reform came from Jesus. Muslims accept Jesus as one of the prophets of God. Many New Age advocates work Jesus into their beliefs. In 1985, something called “The Jesus Seminar” was started by critics of traditional Christianity. Though they tried to rob Jesus of his divine identity and resurrection power, they could not but admit he was a great teacher who advocated peace and love, women’s rights, and respect for children. The general consensus of mankind has been to respect Jesus as a great teacher, a noble humanitarian and a man from God. But to Jesus this was not enough.

Look at verse 29a. “‘But what about you?’ he asked, ‘Who do you say I am?’” Jesus wanted a different answer from his disciples. They had lived with Jesus. The Twelve had seen Jesus calm the storm at sea. Peter, James and John had seen Jesus raise Jairus’ daughter to life. What did they say about Jesus? Look at verse 29b. “Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ.’” This was precisely the answer Jesus wanted to hear. Let’s think about what this confession means in three ways.

First, the meaning of “the Christ” in Biblical context. Peter’s answer, “You are the Christ,” had a very specific meaning in light of God’s promises and prophecies in the Bible. “The Christ” literally means “the anointed one.” Specifically this refers to David’s son who was promised to come and reign on his throne forever (2Sa 7:16; Lk 1:33). Psalm 2 tells us about “the Anointed One.” He is anointed with God’s almighty power to rule as God’s King. His task is to subdue the rebellious nations and to rule over them with an iron scepter. This means he will restore God’s reign on earth as it is in heaven. He brings an end to crime, war, injustice and all wrongdoing. He will restore order, righteousness and peace on the earth. At the end of June, Mayor Daley sent a letter to all pastors in the Chicago area requesting prayer and practical help in dealing with gun violence in Chicago. Yesterday there was a voluntary gun-turn-in. Mayor Daley is doing what he can, but most gangsters will not come and turn in their guns voluntarily. However, when the Christ reigns on earth, gun violence will be ended. The Christ will put an end to domestic violence and all international conflicts, including terrorism. The Christ will establish justice, peace and righteousness throughout the world.

In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus quoted the prophecy of Isaiah in 61:1-2 to declare that he is the anointed one. Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel powerfully. Jesus fulfilled the will of God by dying for our sins and rising from the dead. Whoever believes in Jesus is freed from the power of sin and receives eternal life in the kingdom of God. This is not just a theoretical hope. While we live in this world, Jesus sets us free from the curse and restores God’s favor on our lives. We love to have a king like Jesus. We are willing to be ruled by such a wonderful king. We are willing to serve him wholeheartedly and joyfully all our days. The Christ is the key figure in history. He is not just a great teacher of mankind. He is the King anointed by God to rule forever with righteousness, peace and love. He is the hope of Israel and the hope of the nations.

Second, the meaning of “you are the Christ” to Peter. Look at verse 29 again. “‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ’” (italics added). Jesus was not really looking for a theological answer from Peter. Jesus wanted a personal confession. Jesus wanted a confession of faith and love. When Peter said, “You are the Christ,” he was proclaiming Jesus as his Savior and King. Peter was pledging himself to Jesus as a loyal subject who would love Jesus, serve Jesus, and follow Jesus wherever he would lead.

How did Peter come to make this confession? First of all, Peter had experienced Jesus’ divinity in his life together with Jesus. When Jesus called Peter, Peter obeyed and followed him. Then Peter experienced amazing power and blessings from God. He saw Jesus drive out evil spirits from people. He saw Jesus heal all the illnesses in his home village in one night. He saw Jesus walk on water in the midst of a storm. Moreover, Jesus had imparted his authority to Peter. Then Peter also drove out evil spirits and preached powerful messages to people. Even more than this, Peter had felt in his own heart the hope and faith that Jesus had in him. Though Peter was an ordinary fisherman with many shortcomings, Jesus saw him as a future leader and history maker. Still, Peter’s personal experience was not

enough to enable him to make this confession. It was the work of the Holy Spirit in Peter (Mt 16:17). The Holy Spirit gave Peter absolute assurance that Jesus is the Christ.

Third, “but what about you?” the meaning of this confession to us. The “you” in Jesus’ question applies to all of us. Jesus asks, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” We must answer this question personally. We cannot answer as members of a Christian family, “Well, my dad says Jesus is the Christ.” We cannot answer as members of a church, “Well, UBF believes that Jesus is the Christ.” We must answer Jesus’ question personally by the help of the Holy Spirit. We must answer Jesus on the basis of his work in our lives. We must answer Jesus with faith in our hearts. When we do so, Jesus gives us salvation from sin and eternal life in the kingdom of God. Romans 10:9 says, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

In this relativistic time, we must know that Jesus is the only way of salvation that God has made. In John 14:6 Jesus says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” To confess that Jesus is the Christ is to renounce the claims of any false savior. One young woman thought that her boyfriend could be her savior. She was greatly disappointed. One young man thought that money could be his savior and he sacrificed everything for money. But he was very sorry in the end. Only Jesus can be our true Savior.

I grew up in the Catholic church and heard the gospels read every Sunday. I especially liked hearing the Sermon on the Mount. I felt that someday I would really commit my life to Jesus, but not then. I wanted to enjoy the world first. In the course of doing so, I fell into the devil’s trap through a relationship with a young woman. Then I despaired. Jesus came to me through Mark’s gospel study with Dr. Abraham Kim. Jesus word spoke to me, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mk 2:17). This word really surprised me. I had always thought that Jesus came to save good Catholics. But I learned for the first time that Jesus came to call sinners. I was a sinner. I joyfully accepted the hope Jesus gave and began to follow him. At the 1981 Niagara Falls summer conference, I heard Jesus asking me through the message, “Who do you say I am?” When I went back to the dorm room at the conference place and wrote a testimony, Jesus visited me. Jesus taught me that he suffered and died for my sins. Jesus taught me that he rose from the dead to give me new life. Jesus did not rebuke me for my wrongdoing, but accepted me as his precious child. Jesus planted new hope in my heart and gave me spiritual direction to be a shepherd for my people. As I thought about this, the Holy Spirit worked in my heart and I could confess, “Jesus, you are my Christ. You are my Savior and King.” As I shared this testimony at the conference the joy of the Holy Spirit filled my soul. God accepted this confession, sealed it forever, and gave me a new birth. Since then, Jesus has led me in the way of his truth and blessing in spite of all my sins and shortcomings.

In this passage Jesus asks each of us, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” Let’s prayerfully answer this question as we write and share our Bible testimonies this week.