

Isaiah 50:4-9a  
 Psalm 116:1-8  
 James 3:1-12  
 Mark 8:27-38



## HE BEGAN TO TEACH THEM THAT THE SON OF MAN MUST SUFFER

In the months before his crucifixion Jesus traveled farther north, to Phoenicia on the coast and Syria in the northern mountains. These journeys afforded him time to prepare his disciples for his departure, and kept him from being arrested until Passover, when the appointed hour for his arrest would finally come.

Mark 8:27-30. *And Jesus went on with his disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that I am?”* <sup>28</sup>*And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets.”* <sup>29</sup>*And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?”* Peter answered him, *“You are the Christ.”* <sup>30</sup>*And he charged them to tell no one about him.*<sup>1</sup>

• “Who do men say that I am?” (v.27). Miraculous signs were fresh in the disciples’ memories. Thousands had been fed (Mark 8:1-10). A blind man had been given sight (8:22-26). These had been the works of God.

But they were now leaving Galilee where these things had taken place. They were leaving the familiar towns and villages where people followed and even worshipped Jesus. Caesarea Philippi, ruled by Philip, was an area where the authority of Rome prevailed along with pagan gods. The birthplace of the Greek god Pan was said to be there. The Roman emperor himself was regarded as a god, and a great temple dedicated to his worship had been erected at Caesarea by Philip. Here, in this worldly atmosphere, Jesus asked, “Who do men say that I am?” When you ask, “Who do the people say Jesus Christ is?” today, what answers do you get? The most important question, on which your life depends, is coming in v.29.

The commentaries differ on why Jesus asked the question in v.27. Clearly the simplest explanation is that he asked because he wanted to know the answer. Belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God determines the course of human life everywhere, for all time. Therefore Jesus would be anxious to know whether men were beginning to believe in him, because he knew his days were limited.

The trouble with this explanation is that it does not fit very well with the rest of Scripture. John 2:25 says, “He knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man.” In the interview with Nicodemus in John 3 Jesus showed clearly that he knew the thoughts of men concerning himself. So Jesus probably asked the question not for his own sake, but for the benefit of the disciples. Discuss why the question “Who do people say Jesus Christ is?” could be worth our asking today.

• *And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets”* (v.28). Some were saying John the Baptist, whom Herod had beheaded, had risen. In Matt 14:1-2 Herod said of Jesus, “This is John the Baptist, he has been raised from the dead; that is why these powers are at work in him.”

The people also were aware of the prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes...” And they noticed Jesus, performing signs and speaking with the authority of God, was a lot like the OT prophets. In John 9:16-17 the authorities asked the man who had been born blind, “What do you say about him?” The man answered, “He is a prophet.”

What were the people not saying about Jesus? They were not describing him merely as a teacher with unusual gifts for healing and inspiring people. If people who knew him then did not describe him this way, how is it that people who do not know him today describe him this way?

• “But who do you say that I am?” (v.29). He knew what they believed about him. He didn’t ask, “Who do you think that I am (or could be, or might be)?” He wanted to know what they *said* about him. Romans 10:9 says, “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the

<sup>1</sup> Bible quotations are from the RSV.

dead, you will be saved.” Demons know who Jesus is. They know he is risen from the dead. But they do not confess him as Lord. They have another lord. If Jesus is your Lord, say so.

- “*You are the Christ*” (v.29). In Matt 16:16-20 Jesus replied, “*Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.*” Discuss two points:
  - (1) When you proclaim your faith in Jesus Christ in the hearing of others, our Lord hears you and is glad.
  - (2) Faith God’s gift. We did not discover God or invent him. He revealed himself to us.
- *And he charged them to tell no one about him* (v.30). Discuss also Mark 9:9 where Jesus gave the disciples the same instruction following his transfiguration – *to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of man should have risen from the dead.* Why would Jesus require this of his friends?

Certainly one reason for this lies in the different expectations the Jews had of what Messiah would be like. The prophecy in Isaiah 9:6-7 reveals a great king, born to the people of God. He will rule “*upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and righteousness ...*”

Isaiah 53:4-6, on the other hand, reveals a servant of God, who suffers and dies on our behalf: “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*” Considering these things, why would Jesus charge his disciples to say nothing about him?

Mark 8:31-33. *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.* <sup>32</sup>*And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.* <sup>33</sup>*But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men.”*

- *The Son of man must suffer many things ...* (v.31). This was a difficult teaching for the disciples. It has always been a difficult teaching. Jesus is *the Christ, the Son of the living God*. All the power and glory in the universe is his. Yet he became human, and was rejected and killed. Why? Because “*Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole*” (Isa 53:5).

Was there ever any other way for God to save us? Even Jesus asked this in the garden. But the answer is, and always will be, “No. This was the only way.” He said so himself (in Mark 10:45, John 8:24, etc).

- *Peter took him and began to rebuke him* (v.32). Peter’s words (“*God forbid, Lord! ...*”) are in Matt 16:22. It was (and is) hard for anyone to accept the fact that one cannot become righteous without being reborn, and that this new birth comes to men only through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Jesus knew the disciples were listening (v.33). He wanted them to know there are different roads you can walk in this life, and only one leads to life. “*You are not on the side of God, but of men,*” he said to Peter (v.33). You and I are also *on the side of men* until we repent and admit we are lost sinners, and open our hearts to receive the free gift of eternal life that comes only through the cross of Jesus Christ.

Mark 8:34-38. *And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.* <sup>35</sup>*For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.* <sup>36</sup>*For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? <sup>37</sup>For what can a man give in return for his life? <sup>38</sup>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.”*

- “*... let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*” (v.34). Jesus calls everyone to *follow* him. The logic in v. 35-37 is inescapable, yet many are slow to realize it, and some never see it at all. Jesus was preparing his disciples for the great commission: to tell a dying world about its blindness to the truth – truth about ourselves and about who Jesus Christ is and why he came to save us. It is a commission that extends to every believer today because today Jesus still asks the question: “*But who do you say that I am?*”
- “*Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words ...*” (v.38). Jesus was speaking of Peter and many of us, that is, people who do not see why the Son of God should have to die on the cross and pay for their sins. If you believe this, you are “*not on the side of God, but of men.*” You and I are called to loosen our grip on this idea of men, and to take up our cross, and follow him – follow Jesus to Calvary, and on to glory.