

## **Who is Jesus?-Mark 8:27-38**

Derek Berry  
Calvary Baptist Church  
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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at [dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church](mailto:dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church).]*

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 8:27...

Many preach Jesus in this world, and not everyone is referring to the same Christ. So, who's the real Jesus? Is he just another prophet before Mohammad? Is he the first created being by God Almighty? Is he the spiritual brother of Satan? Is he just another pathway to heaven? Is he merely a good moral teacher? Is he a spiritual guru who came to spread love? Or is he King, Prophet, Priest, Judge, Savior, Creator, and God Almighty? We'll consider the answer to this question this morning. We'll trek through this passage by considering five questions:

1. What do they say? (v. 27-28)
2. What do you say? (v. 29-30)
3. What does he accomplish? (v. 31-33)
4. How do we live? (v. 34-38)
5. What does this mean for the church? (Application)

Let's start by rereading the first two verses. So, Mark tells us that on the way to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks his disciples a straightforward question. A question that the twelve have pondered ever since Jesus calmed the waves with a simple declarative command.

*<sup>41</sup> And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" -Mark 4:41*

Who is this, indeed? First, Jesus asks, "What are the people saying?" And they give their answers in verse 28. Some say John the Baptist. This is a callback of sorts to Herod.

*<sup>16</sup> But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."  
-Mark 6:16*

It wasn't just Herod who believed this. Others said Elijah. The Old Testament Scriptures speak of Elijah's return before the end of time.

*<sup>5</sup> "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. -Malachi 4:5*

One way of understanding this text was that Elijah would be raised from the dead and return to Israel. However, Jesus and the New Testament authors clearly understand this prophecy to be figuratively fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist. And still others claimed he was just another prophet, similar to Isaiah or Jeremiah. Now, here's the thing: one may appraise these assessments as favorable. Each option presented is positive and, in some sense, affirming. The people who think this about Jesus believe they're honoring him when, in all actuality, they're misrepresenting him. So, they applaud him while, at the same time, they deny who he really is.

Not much has changed in our day and age, has it? If I ask you, "Who do people say that Jesus is?" I'm sure positive answers would be abundant. However, if you don't get the Lord Jesus just right, you get no credit for your positive answer. 2013 Kanye West's Jesus will walk with you despite your rebellion towards him and immoral life. His Jesus doesn't care about morals or a sold-out faith, so you can have an album filled with vulgarity and everything that God hates, all while screaming, "Jesus walks with me." The Jesus of our culture, or the Jesus of Protestant Liberalism,[1] is devoid of the supernatural elements we read in the gospels. This Jesus affirms sinful lifestyles because he's not bothered by people embracing their true selves as long as they love others. And still, others say that Jesus was nothing more than a good moral teacher. Someone we can all aspire to be. All while denying any claims that he's divine or still alive.

And then you have the answers of various cults and religions. Islam teaches that he was just another prophet. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that he has an elevated status but was created by God the Father. Mormons teach he's the spiritual brother of Satan. Hinduism teaches that Jesus was a holy and wise teacher. Other sects within Hinduism teach that he's a symbol of what humans can attain rather than a historical person. Buddhists believe that Jesus was an enlightened man with the correct perspective on life, and his teaching helped others become self-sacrificial. The New Age Movement has a great diversity in how they view Jesus. However, he's often seen as a man who completed a "spiritual evolution" process over successive generations of reincarnation,

becoming an enlightened master. They often find ways to align Eastern mysticism principles with Jesus's teachings, distorting his words as the means to that end.

So many answers to this question of "Who is Jesus?" But which is the right one? Well, I ask you the same question that Jesus asked his disciples in our text this morning. Who do you say that Jesus is? This takes us to our second question this morning, "What do you say?" Let's reread verses 29-30.

We're going to consider a few points here. First, how Peter and the Apostles would have understood this designation of "Christ." And then secondly, how Mark's audience and the church today should understand the identity of Christ. Remember, the Apostles don't have a fully developed theology at this point, which is made clear in verse 33 when Peter attempts to rebuke Jesus. However, they do have partial sight/understanding, which points back to the miracle in Bethsaida.

To be clear, Peter is not giving Jesus a last name. Christ is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew title "Messiah," which means "*Anointed One*." The Jews have been waiting for this Messiah for ages. However, Israel had different understandings regarding what kind of Messiah was to appear. One part of the community believed there would be two Messiahs, one royal and another priestly. After reading the Hebrew Bible, some of the Jews couldn't fathom the role of King and Priest existing in one person. And understandably so. In 1 Samuel 13, King Saul acted as Priest and made a sacrifice, and as a result, he had his kingdom ripped from him. The two roles existed in Adam, but then the Lord delineated the two in Israel. He's brought them back together in the person of Jesus and now within the church.

The *Psalms of Solomon* was a document written during the rule of King Herod, possibly by Pharisees, that anticipated a messiah who establishes David's throne, destroys sinners, purges Jerusalem of Gentiles, gathers the twelve tribes of Israel, and inaugurates a period of holiness and covenant righteousness. This is probably closer to the Apostles' understanding of a Messiah. Perhaps Simon the Zealot emphasized the political nature of the Messiah all the more due to the Zealots' focus on liberating the Jews from the Romans. Nevertheless, unlike the Pharisees, who outright rejected Jesus as the Messiah, Peter and the Apostles did indeed believe Jesus to be the promised anointed one of the Old Testament.

We'll discover that their understanding of the role or work of the Messiah is off, however, they don't doubt that Jesus is who he claims to be. They repudiate that he's simply a

prophet or a risen Elijah. “No, Jesus, you are the one that all of the Old Testament anticipates. You are a better David, bringing an even greater kingdom. You are the reigning ruler of Daniel 7, who possesses all dominion and authority. You are the one that all of Israel should put their hope in. We cannot leave you, for you possess the words of life.” The disciples believed in the right Jesus; therefore, they were in the right relationship with him. If you believe in a false Jesus, I’m here to tell you that your soul is in jeopardy. Here’s how serious Jesus says it is that you get his identity right.

*24 I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” -John 8:24*

So, I state that question again to everyone here this morning, “Who do you say Jesus is?” By the time this gospel would have been written and sent to the church in Rome, this idea of the Christ would have been even more pregnant with meaning. What are we confessing when we say he’s the Christ? We’re confessing that Jesus is God! That he’s the almighty creator! That he’s eternal! That he’s been one with the eternal Father and Spirit for all eternity. The Nicene Creed would put it this way:

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him, all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made human.*

This is what the Christian church has believed for ages! Jesus the Christ, the King, the one promised in the Old Testament that he would come to earth and set up his kingdom to rule and reign in the hearts of his people and one day over the entire earth. He’s the holy and perfect judge Isaiah caught a glimpse of seated on the throne. He’s the one that angels cry out and worship, the one all creation bows before—all of the kingdom of darkness trembles from fear in the presence of this Jesus. This Christ spoke to Moses from a burning bush and judged the Egyptians for their wicked treatment of the Hebrew slaves. And he’s the one coming back to judge all of humanity based on this question. “Who is Jesus?” What say you?

In verse 30, he charges his disciples to tell no one about him. This has commonly been referred to as the Messianic Secret, and we see this as a theme within this book. When you consider the Jew’s faulty understanding regarding the role of the Messiah, it makes sense that Jesus doesn’t want his identity spread at this time. He’s in the midst of teaching his people what the Messiah was sent to accomplish. Rome certainly wouldn’t have tolerated an open proclamation of a Messiahship that involved political and

revolutionary hopes of liberation from Roman rule. So Jesus was careful not to stir up false hopes and expectations. And he knew that his specific hour to be mistreated by Rome had not yet come. This brings us to our next question and point: “What does he accomplish? Let’s reread verses 31-33.

Here, we find a turning point in the gospel of Mark. The term “he began to teach” is meant to serve as a marker for a new stage in the ministry of Jesus. That’s how Matthew understood it in his gospel.

*<sup>21</sup> From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. -Matthew 16:21*

The first half of the gospel of Mark focuses on who Jesus is. He’s the promised king who has come to inaugurate his kingdom. And the people’s response should be to repent and believe that he is who he says he is. The second half of this gospel focuses on what he came to do. The gospel tells us that the king must die! So, in a sense, from this text until chapter 16 is one long “Passion Narrative.”

Jesus explains to his disciples the primary work of the Christ/Messiah. Never before this moment had anyone in Israel connected suffering with the Messiah. For the Jews, the idea that the Messiah would come and suffer was counter-productive; it made no sense. Why would the one coming to reign and rule need to suffer the violent death of a crucifixion? And you must understand, death by the cross was a scandal! Listen to the words of a Roman Philosopher named Cicero, who died 50 years before the birth of Jesus.

*“To bind a Roman citizen is a crime; to flog him is an abomination; to slay him is like killing a relative to crucify him is—what? There is no fitting word that can possibly describe so horrible a deed.”*

So not only is Jesus saying he must die, but he must suffer in the most shameful and scandalous way known to this culture. No wonder Peter rebukes him! Notice that Jesus uses the title “Son of Man” when referring to himself. The apostles acknowledge that he is the Son of Man figure in Daniel 7 by identifying him as the Christ.

*<sup>13</sup> “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. -Daniel 7:13-14*

This doesn't sound like someone who will be violently killed! This seems like the person who will do the killing! However, the apostles missed that this is the same individual depicted as a suffering servant in Isaiah 53.

*<sup>2</sup> For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected<sup>[b]</sup> by men, a man of sorrows<sup>[c]</sup> and acquainted with<sup>[d]</sup> grief;<sup>[e]</sup> and as one from whom men hide their faces<sup>[f]</sup> he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. <sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? <sup>9</sup> And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. <sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief;<sup>[g]</sup> when his soul makes<sup>[h]</sup> an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. -Isaiah 53:2-10*

So, the Lord Jesus is teaching his disciples that the Son of Man figure in Daniel 7, who receives an everlasting kingdom and whom all the nations will serve, is the same suffering servant of Isaiah 53 who will be despised, rejected, and slaughtered by his own creation. The humiliation of Christ must precede the exaltation of Christ. Our sin is the reason Jesus was slain. It was no tragedy or mistake but the plan of God.

And Jesus' death had to be a violent one. This was a clear display of God's holy character and his hatred for sin. Therefore, he doesn't come and jump off a cliff. But he is slaughtered in a most gruesome fashion.

Unfortunately, Peter's correct understanding of who Jesus is was accompanied by a complete misunderstanding of what Jesus, the Christ, will do. So, he thinks it a good idea to rebuke the Lord Jesus. To be fair, he articulated what I'm sure all the disciples thought. The world respects and exalts power. Therefore, a rejected and suffering king doesn't match their idea of a Messiah.

Jesus reacts with a strong rebuke. The imperative of “Get behind me” may be a call for Peter to resume his role as a pupil instead of trying to teach Jesus. Or it may merely mean something like, “Get out of my sight.” But he also refers to him as Satan, and then the verse tells us why. Peter represents a Satanic-like attitude because his thinking is worldly-driven. Jesus doesn’t say his thinking is “things that come from Satan.” But instead, “things that come from man.” But the New Testament would explain that these two expressions are essentially synonymous. Paul calls Satan the “god of this world,” so the fallen world’s values reflect satanic values.

To bring it to our day, any presentation of Jesus without a message of a bloody cross is satanic. Period. I remember an advertisement that began to play during football games that pointed people to the humanity of Jesus. However, on the website, there was no talk of the cross. Any Jesus that is merely a good moral example for humanity without the cross is satanic. Christians, this is why we must understand the penal substitutionary atonement. There are so-called sects of Christianity that would deny this essential truth. They called this understanding of the gospel “cosmic child abuse. And the words from Jesus to Peter have been echoing throughout the centuries to all who would deny the centrality of Christ's works on the cross.

Still, others may not outright deny it, but they refuse to speak on sin and repentance because that would require a centrality of the cross. Stay away from any who would seek to fit Jesus into their agenda. That’s essentially what Peter tries to do here. He tries to reshape and redefine Jesus to fit his conception of a Messiah. And we do the same when we remove the offense of the cross, sin, and repentance from the gospel's message. Jesus cannot be subdued. You’d have better like taming a lion.

Our fourth question this morning is, “How do we live?” Let’s reread verses 34-38. In some way, shape, or form, everyone here has somehow been negatively impacted or touched by the false understanding of easy believism. This is the idea that all one must do to respond to the gospel is have a mental ascent of facts. Just believe these historical facts as accurate, and you are unquestionably saved. Often, ministers will stress the ease of it all. Perhaps with good intentions, misguided nevertheless. This is why a proper understanding of conversion is necessary. If you understand that God alone has the power to save, you won’t be tempted to soften the blow of the gospel.

Does Jesus’ presentation sound like an easy believism message? Listen to verses 34-35 again. No! This is a call to die! He mentions their crosses even before he mentions his own! Proper faith in Christ includes a denial of one’s self! It says no to the self as the determiner of one’s goals, aspirations, and desires! It accepts Jesus’ words as the true ethics of life. It is a complete life transformation! And because of the aorist

tense of the first two requirements of denying oneself and taking up the cross, it focuses attention on the act of becoming a disciple. So this isn't what comes after salvation for those serious about their faith; this is required for salvation.

And then the final requirement, "following Jesus," is in the present imperative, meaning the act of denying oneself and taking up one's cross is followed by the process of following Jesus. The life of the Christian is that of continual repentance. I like what Dietrich Bonhoeffer said:

*"The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die..."*

This is how we live. We initially respond to the gospel through faith and repentance. Another way of communicating the same truth is by denying ourselves and taking up our cross. Believers follow Jesus through their thoughts, words, and actions. You may be thinking, "This is a costly call." Well, it is. So much so the rich young ruler walked away from Christ. Perhaps you think it would make more sense to live it up since you only live once. You only live once, but you can die twice—a physical death and then a spiritual death, which equals eternal separation from God. Is it worth it? Consider the question Jesus asks in verses 36-37.

Now, I'll admit this is an anti-cultural message. Wisdom today is thought to be learning to accept your internal circumstances. To adapt to them and adjust to them, not to try to fundamentally change them. The spirit of the age says to live for yourself, and anyone who tells you what you believe and do is wrong is intolerant. If your body wants it, you can have it. Certain morals and ethics are merely antiquated ways to gain control, or so they say. But you must understand that your life is a vapor. And it would be foolish to give away that which is eternal for pleasures that are fleeing.

Verse 38 clarifies that Christianity and true faith are personal but never private. Some would say my faith is my own private business, and if that's true, my friend that, you're on your way to hell. Christians all over the world throughout all of church history have died and gone to jail because they reject the idea that faith is private. The Christian walk will have public implications, such as baptism. John Piper hits the nail on the head here:



*“So Jesus is saying, ‘If you are embarrassed by me and the price I paid for you (and he’s not referring to lapses of courage when you don’t share your faith, but a settled state of your heart toward him) if you’re not proud of me and don’t cherish me and what I did for you—if you want to put yourself with the goats that value their reputation in the goat herd more than they value me, then that’s the way I will view you when I come. I will be ashamed of you, and you will perish with the people who consider me an embarrassment.”*

Beloved, I pray you’re making it clear to the world that you belong to the Lord Jesus in various ways. Our last point this morning will deal with an application for local churches. Our last question is, “What does this mean for the church?” There are some profound implications to the Matthean parallel passage. Hear the Lord Jesus respond to Peter’s correct answer in Matthew 16:

*“<sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’”-Matthew 16:17-19*

Jesus is building his church on these types of confessors. What is the church? The church is the people who have confessed Jesus as Christ and have taken up their cross to follow Jesus! That’s the church! So, he’s building his church and local churches on these people. And he also authorizes local churches with the keys of the kingdom to declare who belongs to the church and who doesn’t. We find this in Matthew 18. This is why membership within local churches is necessary. And it’s in this way that the king-priest role is restored not only in Jesus but also with members of the body. That’s the point of the royal priesthood. As a King, Adam was to represent God and act justly; as a priest, he was to work the garden, name what belongs in the temple, and remove what doesn’t. Members in the local church are called to kingly action in our representation of God and just ruling with one another. And as priests, members bind and loose, in other words, declare who’s in and out of the church. In other words, decide who members are and when excommunication must occur when someone rejects their original confession or stops following Jesus with their life.

That’s a heavy charge. That means members, you must know the gospel well enough to spot heresy when you hear it. That’s a part of your ministry. What is a false confession of faith as opposed to a biblical one? Members, that means you must understand what conversion looks like. And that is possible. Listen to what Paul says about a church:

*<sup>6</sup> And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace,<sup>[d]</sup> both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. -Phil 1:6-7*

So, this text points to the necessity of local churches, the necessity of membership, the necessity of members understanding the gospel, and the necessity of members understanding conversion, for all this is a protecting of the gospel within this local church. The beauty of the gospel is that it not only calls us to be reconciled vertically to God the Father through Jesus but also to be reconciled horizontally with his people through the local church. We receive a new family by his blood.

Let's pray.

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[1] This point is about theological, not political, liberalism. The two are often related, but not always.