

December 28, 2003

Rev. Jeff French

“Who is This Jesus”
Mark 8:27-38

Considering the Scripture:

Read Mark 8:27-30. How is Jesus’ question important then and now? Since Caesarea Philippi was the center of pagan worship of the time, how is their location significant to what Jesus is asking? How have you settled the question of Jesus’ identity? How do some people avoid answering whether Jesus was God or not while still holding admiration for him?

Read Mark 8:31-33. Why do you think Jesus brings up his future suffering at this time? How might this future suffering and rejection be different than most Jews would expect for the Messiah? Why does Peter fight it with such forcefulness?

Read Mark 8:34-38. What struggles does Jesus foretell about his followers? How is this tied to what Peter said about Him in verses 27-30? What does Jesus say His followers should do with their life in this world? How is that difficult? In what ways have you believed that Jesus is Lord, but you have lived in a way that brings that into question?

Message Outline:

I. The Identity Question

II. The Messiah Question

III. The Lordship Question

Action Points

- Settle on Jesus’ identity
- Trust his purposes for your life
- Give over your actions

Quotes to Consider:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

author C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity

“The three kings had only a rumor to go by. But it moved them to make that long journey. The scribes were much better informed, much better versed. They sat and studied the Scriptures like so many dons, but it did not make them move. Who had more truth? The three kings who followed a rumor, or the scribes who remained sitting with all their knowledge.”

philosopher Soren Kierkegaard

“The person and work of Christ are the rock upon which the Christian religion is built. If he is not who he said he was, and if he did not do what he said he had come to do, the foundation is undermined and the whole superstructure will collapse. Take Christ from Christianity, and you disembowel it; there is practically nothing left.”

author John Stott in Basic Christianity

Your behavior is a reflection of what you truly believe.”

author Hyrum W. Smith in The 10 Natural Law of Successful Time and Life Management

There are very few who in their hearts do not believe in God, but what they will not do is give Him exclusive right of way. ... They are not ready to promise full allegiance to God alone. Many a professing Christian is a stumbling-block because his worship is divided. On Sunday he worships God; on week days God has little or no place in his thoughts. I want people to place their faith in Jesus and motivate them to live more obediently.

preacher D.L. Moody

Staggering Statistic:

Percentage of Americans . . .

who believe in God or a universal force: **95%**

who define God as “the all-powerful, all-knowing Creator of the universe who rules the world today”: **67%**

Virtual America citing “The Barna Report 1994-1995”

Message:

The Christmas season is drawing to a close. For many of us that means taking down decorations, boxing them up, and storing them away. For others of us those decorations will stay up well into January and a few on into February. For those January and February Christmas people, maybe you are trying to hold onto Christmas just a bit longer. Maybe you keep them up in hopes of grasping its real meaning lost in the midst of all the parties, presents, and busyness.

It really isn't that difficult to miss the point. A baby was born in a manger over 2000 years ago. We go to great lengths and expense to celebrate Christmas – a gigantic birthday party for Jesus. But when this season is said and done, you might ask the question, who is this Jesus we celebrate.

That was the question Jesus asks of His disciples in Mark 8. Listen as I read starting with verse 27. **[Read Mark 8:27-30]**

I. The Identity Question – Who is this Jesus?

It is significant that they are on the road to **Caesarea Philippi**. Caesarea Philippi was the center of pagan worship at this time. So we see this stark contrast between the question of who is the one true God and the multiple God's of the Roman world. One of key cults centered around the emperor and key affirmation was, **“Caesar is Lord.”** So what does Jesus do, He presses the question of who is truly Lord.

“Who do people say that I am?” The response, “some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others one of the prophets.” The people saw Jesus as a person who spoke for God – a prophet. This was no small compliment, but it several steps from who Jesus completely was – the Messiah, the Son of God who stepped out of heaven to live among us.

This same thing happens today. Maybe you have seen it or heard it. You share your faith with someone and ultimately you come to the question of who was Jesus. And they say, “Well I think he was great teacher.” Or “I think he was an important historical figure.” Or “I think he was a great leader.” **Each answer gives Jesus high standing but they are all problematic.**

Why, because Jesus made some audacious claims. He claimed to be divine. He claimed to be the co-creator of the world. He claimed that he could forgive sins. He said that he would judge every person at the end of time. He claimed that He was the only way to eternal life.

Author C.S. Lewis struggled to address this very problem in his book, Mere Christianity. Listen carefully . . .

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Lewis suggests **three viable options. Jesus was a Liar, Lunatic, or Lord.**

Maybe Jesus knew he wasn't God but lied for some reason. Maybe He did so to gain notoriety, power, or money. But it doesn't seem to fit. Jesus asked for little personally. His claims and teaching led to His rejection and to His death. **Jesus, the Liar** just doesn't work for me.

Maybe Jesus was crazy. He genuinely thought He was God, but He wasn't. We can find people in our psychiatric wards that claim to be historical figures or even think they are God. So maybe Jesus was just a little off. However, it is hard to mesh Jesus' incredible teachings and impeccable character with someone with delusions of grandeur. **Jesus, the Lunatic** doesn't work for me either.

Ultimately, I come to **Peter's answer.** Jesus was and is the Messiah. He is God himself come from heaven to save us from our own darkness. **For me Jesus is Lord.**

Brothers and sisters, **the central question of life is who is Jesus.** It is not something to be put off till a later date. You might not agree with Peter's assessment or mine, but you must answer this question. All of the Christian faith is dependant on Jesus being God. If he was not, you and I are wasting our time together.

But Jesus doesn't leave us there, even if we believe he was the Messiah. He leads us to the Messiah question.

II. The Messiah Question – What is God like?

Listen to verses 31-33.

So Peter gets the question right – Jesus is the Messiah. So Jesus decides to tell them what it means for him to be God's chosen one. It means rejection. It means suffering. It means death. In other words, not what they expected to hear. The Messiah was supposed to be someone who would be sent by God to save His people. Most Jews saw the Messiah as some great military and political figure who would overthrow the nations controlling Israel. All this suffering and rejection bit didn't really fit.

So Peter decides to take Jesus aside and correct Him. You know, help him understand what it really meant to be the Messiah. I can almost hear him now, **“Now Jesus, you know I think you are the Messiah and all, but um, the Messiah is supposed to be a powerful ruler not someone who gets rejected and killed.”** Jesus goes the root of the problem as he points out that Peter’s mind is on human things and he is missing the divine.

Can you picture the audacity? I know you are God’s son and all but let me tell you a thing or two about who things are supposed to go. It sounds silly. But wait, I think I do that sometimes.

Something happens or doesn’t happen and I look at God and think, “Man, you were supposed to take care of that or you are supposed to be like this.” In other words, I try to tell God how to be God. The same thing has happened recently in the Episcopal Church where they have validated gay marriage and ordained an openly gay bishop. They have tried to take God aside and say, “Look God, this is ok. I know that you came out against this in the Scripture a number of times, but we think you need to reconsider.”

The real answer to the Messiah question is **God is the person revealed throughout the Bible and in the person of Jesus Christ.** However, when we fix on human things we often want to reshape God into a more comfortable image.

And that leads us to the last question.

III. The Lordship Question – What must I do.

Listen to what Jesus says in **vs. 34-38.**

Jesus lays it out on the table. **If you believe I am the Messiah and you can accept what that means, then you need to know what it will mean to follow me.** It means giving up your selfishness, being prepared to deal with hardship, and giving up your life as you know it. It means living as I lived. He doesn’t soft sell it or put it in the small print. He places it right up front.

But Jesus shares a secret we all need to know. As we do those very things we experience life at its fullest. As we give it away and give in to His ways, life becomes richer than it ever has before. However it is always challenging.

We all have those areas of our life where God has pointed out, areas that must be changed. Places where we need to stop something, start something, or give more. It might be that we are to love someone that is hard to love. It might be giving up your affluence to help others. We all have them. The question

Sometimes we say no. Yes, we accept Jesus as God and say that he is Lord, but we say no. It is kind of strange. This, “No Lord” answer. Because we really aren’t letting him

be Lord if we say no. The truth of the matter is our behavior shows what we truly believe. Let me give you an example . . .

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Virtual America citing “*The Barna Report 1994-1995*”

Do 2 out of every three people actively live out God’s purposes for their life? I have to say no. I think our country and the world would be a significantly different place if that were the case. So how can they say that? They do what we do sometimes. They say something that they don’t live out all the time.

What must I do – follow. Give over those areas.

Action Points

- Settle on Jesus’ identity
- Trust his purposes for your life
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