



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Mark

August 27, 2017

Who is Jesus?

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As we're giving, let's get our Bibles close by and get them open to Mark, chapter 8. While moms and dads are doing that, this is our opportunity to let the kids now go and worship together. There's Alex right over there, with our children's ministry, so if you're one of the kids who are in worshiping with Mom and Dad today, this is your time. It has been really cool. In the month of August, we invite the children to come worship with Mom and Dad so they can just be in big church together. Now they get to go for the rest of the time, being with each other.

Now, as you're opening to Mark, chapter 8, let me just give a little bit of a commercial again. Two Sundays from today, all of our worship times are changing. I told you last week, we're going to tell you this more often than you were told to not look directly into the sun during the eclipse. We just don't want to have mass confusion in two Sundays.

This is the first time we've changed our service times in like 10 years, so it's a big deal as far as us getting all of our things together and in a row. The four services are at 8:00, 9:30, 11:00, and 12:30. That's really key. I was just made aware this week that this summer we are potentially averaging more than 500 people a week more than we were a year ago.

Now that's with everybody going on vacation and traveling. As soon as we get past Labor Day and people start to get back into their normal routines, we're going to really feel that around here, so that's going to be really important for you guys to know. We hope some of you would be willing to shift services. Instead of all coming to the same one you're typically coming to, some of you might just be willing to come a little earlier or a little later. We hope you'll consider that as we start in just a few Sundays.

All right. The kids are dismissed. I made my announcement. We're going to get into Mark, chapter 8. Let me just tell you why I'm so excited about this passage. I really believe those of you who are sitting in this room right now who already have a faith in Jesus Christ... You're a follower of Christ. You've been baptized. I believe your faith is going to go deeper today. The roots of your faith are going to go down deeper as just a result of what we're going to talk about.

I'm also just as excited for those of you in this room who are still on that journey. You haven't stepped over that line yet. You have not submitted your whole life to following Jesus. It's not that you're an atheist, but you're still trying to decide. Is he worthy of all of your trust and your surrender to him, both now and forever? I'm excited for those of you who are following Jesus but you've never been baptized. I think today your faith is going to go deeper. Something is going to change in you as a result of being here this morning.

When you go all the way back to Mark, chapter 1, verse 1, when we started this gospel at the beginning of the year, Mark has been relentlessly now, for eight chapters, focusing the spotlight on the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. He has been emphasizing Jesus' ministry of doing miracles of healing the blind, the deaf, the lame, and the leper. He has written about and recorded that Jesus has power over the demons. He has shown Jesus' control over nature, where he's commanding and calming the wind and the sea, even to the point of walking on water.

Mark has recorded for us and shined the spotlight bright when Jesus is multiplying a few fish and a few loaves to feed thousands of people at a time. He has shown that Jesus has the power to raise people from the dead. Ultimately, he has even shown us in the Gospels, here in the first eight chapters, that Jesus teaches with such divine authority and incredible wisdom that it's inspiring fear in the people. As they listen to him speak, they're often left in awe, saying, "What is this? We have never heard anyone teach this or teach like this."

This is what we've been looking at for eight chapters, and yet in spite of all these things, all these miracles, the disciples, even up to right now, are still struggling to see and understand who Jesus really, truly is. Now, today, for the first time in over two years of following Jesus, Jesus pops the question to the disciples. Straightforward, this is *the* most important question in the universe.

With that, I want us to stand as we go through God's Word together. Let's read. We're going to pick it up in verse 27 because we left off in verse 26 last Sunday. You follow along as I read just this short encounter Jesus has with his disciples.

"And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they told him, 'John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.' And he asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ.' And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him." Let's pray for a minute.

Father in heaven, we ask right now that you would bless the reading, preaching, and hearing of your Word. We ask, God, in the name of Jesus, that you would use your powerful Word to accomplish whatever it is you need to accomplish in our hearts today. We give you, God, all the space, all the place in our hearts to change us as you see necessary.

God, I pray for those who are standing all around us right now whose hearts are extremely heavy. God, you know they're here. You know what concerns them, what worries them, what causes them to fear, and what brings them great pain.

I pray, God, in this very moment, right now, that you would just visit them with an amazing sense of peace that you see them, you hold them, and you are in control right now. Help them, God, to feel that, to know that in the depths of their hearts. In these moments, God, accomplish your will in us. We pray in Christ's name, amen.

There are basically two groups of people I want us to look at in this passage before we get to the application toward the end. The first group of people we notice here are the *crowds*. Jesus calls them the *people*. The crowds have been enormous. They're growing like crazy. The popularity of Jesus is increasing exponentially as we walk through this gospel, chapter by chapter.

But be sure of this: Jesus did not come to impress people. He did not come to win anyone's approval. He knows crowds typically are very fickle. Crowds are driven by peer pressure, by emotions, and maybe more powerfully, by self-interests, and so Jesus asks the disciples, "What are all these people saying about me?"

They answer him. They say, "Well, some think you're John the Baptist, who has come back from the dead, or Elijah, who's alive again, or some people are just saying other prophets and stuff." Of course, they're all wrong. Their answers are all wrong, and there are two reasons why the majority will never get it right about Jesus, why the crowds never get it right about who Jesus truly is.

One of those reasons is found very clearly in Jeremiah, chapter 17, verse 9, where the Word of God says, "**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?**" In our natural state, our hearts are deceptive. You think about this now. If the crowds are right, if Jesus is simply just John the Baptist, Elijah, or just another prophet, then Jesus is no threat to anyone's personal sovereignty. There are no consequences. There are no requirements or change that needs to be surrendered to.

If that's all Jesus is, just another version of a human being, or maybe just a superhuman, then he's just one of us, really. He's just a little more special. You see, a deceitful heart will always do this. A deceitful heart will always try to humanize Jesus. That way, we can relieve ourselves of any guilt, shame, or accountability.

The majority today are exactly the same as the crowds of Jesus' day. Today, it just sounds a little different. If Jesus were to ask one of us who the crowds say he is, we would say, "Well, Jesus, a lot of people today just claim you were a great teacher or a great leader." Others will call Jesus a mercenary or some kind of religious prophet.

Some people believe Jesus was the world's first real socialist. They call him a martyr. Some people give him credit and say, "He was a miracle-worker. We give him that." Other people like to categorize Jesus as a religious revolutionary. In today's crowds, Jesus is everything and everyone except who he truly is: God.

See, when you put Jesus in human categories, that allows Jesus to be safe. It allows him to stay impersonal and just kind of keeps him benign. How many people do we know today in our world

who are on the slippery slope to hell, really, because they've hitched their very souls to the majority opinion of Jesus? We know people like that. It's not that they deny the existence of Jesus; they just hitch their soul, they're making their bet that Jesus is who the crowds say he is.

That deceived majority of our day is made up of atheists, talk show philosophers of self-enlightenment and inner deity, and self-determiners of their souls' destiny. It's made up of the deceived crowds today, filled with those angry intellectuals who populate our high school and college classrooms as instructors and professors.

People will hitch their souls to the Hollywood crowd, the self-absorbed, approval junkie, elitist hypocrites who believe their money actually makes them relevant, or worse yet, smart. Jeremiah 17, verse 9, is very real today, isn't it? How sick is the human heart that we can't see the hopelessness of such blind and misguided spiritual allegiance?

Well, Jesus doesn't respond to the crowd's answers. He asks a second question. He looks at them and he says, "Who do *you* say that I am?" He makes it personal. This is what makes Christianity different from every religion in the world, church. I hope you understand this. I hope you get this.

These are Jesus' intimate and trusted friends, and he promises his followers that he will never leave those who follow him; he will be with them always. He promises his followers, "Ask me for whatever you need, and I will hear your requests and I will answer you according to my will."

You see, for all other religions, their prophet or leader is either dead or some man-made idol or icon made out of wood or stone, or worse yet, some distant, mean, divine dictator that is unknowable by the masses that's just up there, looking for people to punish. That is typical of many and most of the world's religions.

So, Jesus asks them, "Who do *you* say that I am?" because he knows something about us. He knows their opinion of him is the most important thing in their lives. You see, their opinion of Jesus will ultimately dictate every decision in their lives, in word or deed, good or bad. I wonder how many of you believe this about yourself?

You see, the most important thing about you is what you think of Jesus. It's more important than anything or anyone else in your life, because what you think of Jesus ultimately dictates every decision you make in word or deed. That makes the question the ultimate question in the universe, doesn't it?

Now, look at Peter and the apostles as he asks them this personal question. As the self-appointed spokesman of the group, Peter speaks up quickly, and he basically says four words: "**You are the Christ.**" Now, I don't know what force he said it with. I don't know if he had a question mark at the end. I don't know what it was. Next Sunday, we will see he doesn't say, "You are *our* Christ," or, "You are *my* Christ." He says, "**You are the Christ.**"

I don't want us to miss, before we get the implication or application of those four words, the journey Peter has been on up to this point. I think it's just as valuable for all of us in this room. Think about it. Most likely, Peter is from an uneducated, working-class family. His career as a fisherman is probably a generational inheritance that he had very little choice over.

Each day of his life, he is trapped in the pressure-filled monotony of getting up every day, long before the sun rises, fishing for four to six hours, rain or shine, rowing his boat back to shore because you know they didn't have motors back then... They had to row out past the waves into the sea, catch fish, get back to shore, and process (hopefully, if he caught anything that morning) the fish before they spoiled, hoping there was a market and a price or profit that would allow his family and him to survive on this career.

He would spend all afternoon, every day, mending the nets, mending the boat, getting it ready to go back out in the evening for another four to six hours of fishing until dark, then coming home, going to bed, getting up the next day, and doing the same thing. Seven days a week. As far as we can tell, on Peter's journey up to this point, he wasn't all that religious before he met Jesus.

There would have been no time for religion in Peter's life. That's for sure. He's simply in a deep rut of hard work and survival. Now, the very Son of God is standing in front of him and asking him the most important question of his life: "Who do you say that I am?" Now, Peter has come a long way. He's standing in front of God.

I tell you a little bit of that because I think some of us can relate to this little journey Peter has taken, because for some of us in this room, we can relate to the fact that how we got to know Jesus was pretty unorthodox as well. We may or may not have grown up in a really religious family, or it might have been just all ritual but no relationship, or we may have been as far from God as you could imagine before we found ourselves staring that question in the face.

It's certainly true for me. I know it's certainly true for several of you in this room. Nobody would have ever predicted years ago that you'd be sitting in church today with a Bible of some sort, on your phone, tablet, or actually one with real paper. You're sitting in church and you're worshiping God. No one would have ever predicted that about you. Your journey to Jesus has been very unpredictable.

The question, I think, is, how did Peter come up with that answer? How did he get it? How did he come to that understanding when everyone around him, especially the crowds, isn't getting it? They're missing it. A hint to how that happened is actually in Matthew. In Matthew's gospel, chapter 16, when Matthew records this very incident of Jesus asking the disciples this question, Matthew records Jesus' response to Peter.

It says, "**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.'**" Peter says, "**You are the Christ,**" and Jesus says, "Good answer. You were right, but Peter, I need you to understand something. You didn't come up with that on your own. God put that answer in your heart. God

promises, Peter, if you seek me, you will find me. God promises, Peter, that he will give you a heart to see and know I am the Lord. God has revealed this to you, Peter."

Now, do you remember earlier when I said there are a couple of reasons why the crowd will never get it right about Jesus? I said the first reason is in Jeremiah 17:9, because we're all born, naturally speaking, with a heart that is deceitful.

Now, here is the second reason. *Being able to see and understand the truth about Jesus is not a human thing; it is a grace from God.* I want you to hear this loud and clear. Understanding who Jesus is, being able to see he is truly the Son of God, God in the flesh, is not something we come up with on our own. That's not something we can figure out on our own, because our hearts are deceitful. It has to be a grace from God. The unregenerate heart is helplessly blind without God's grace.

This will help explain Paul's writing in some of the verses he writes in the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul wrote, "**The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly [foolish] to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.**" Paul says, "The natural person on his own is not going to wake up one day and go, 'I got it! Jesus *is* God! I figured it out! I can't wait to tell everybody!'" No, he said that doesn't happen. It can't happen.

In fact, just the opposite happens. He wakes up every day and goes, "Those foolish idiots who think Jesus is more than just a great guy... What a bunch of losers!" That's more natural. You see, the unbelieving crowds will never be able to figure Jesus out on their own because it takes a willing heart and a miracle of grace.

Listen to Paul describe himself to understand this a little better. In Galatians 1, he says, "He called me by his grace and was pleased to reveal his Son to me." The great apostle Paul says, "You know how I got here? It was unorthodox. I was going around to kill Christians. I was so deceived I thought it would be better to kill people who believed in Jesus. All of a sudden, by his grace, Jesus chooses to reveal to me who he really is."

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul says, with a little more detail, "**For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness...'**" He's talking about creation there. The God who created the world and made light out of darkness "**...has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**"

You see, every time you come face to face with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, it is God's light shining in your heart. It is God's grace to you. When you hear the gospel, it is God's loving invitation to repent and believe in Jesus and be baptized into him. It has to be this way. It must be this way because the Bible tells us there is an Enemy at work all around us. Actually, the Bible calls him the Enemy of our souls.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4, it says, "**...the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is**

the image of God." The reality is that only by God's grace can the blindness of our deceived hearts be removed. That very miracle has happened to so many of us in this room, hasn't it? By God's grace, God does the miracle of revealing his Son to us. Wow! God gets all the glory.

Now, back to Peter's confession, the four words "**You are the Christ.**" The Greek word *Christ* and the Hebrew word *Messiah* are basically the same word. *Christ* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for *Messiah*, which means the anointed one of God. That's what the word *Christ* is, so when we say *Jesus the Christ*, we're saying Jesus, the anointed one of God.

Now, that description was used primarily in the Old Testament to describe God's appointed kings or priests of Israel. They would be anointed with oil. The priest God would determine, or the king of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, would be anointed with oil and then that title would carry the idea that they were chosen by God for that mission, for that service of delivering God's people and establishing his righteous kingdom upon the earth.

That title, that description of God's priest or king, would carry with it that God would fill them with divine strength, courage, and wisdom to carry out the service of being a priest or a king, but did you notice that Peter's answer is, "You are *the* Christ"? He didn't say, "You are *a* Christ."

"You're not just *another* Christ. You're not just another religious anointed person with strength, wisdom, and power. You are *the* Christ," he says, and that is critical for us today. What does this tell us about Jesus? What do these four words reveal about Jesus? In these four words, we have it all, really...all we need to know about Jesus.

1. *Jesus is the chosen one of God.* There are no others. He's not one of God's chosen ones. He's *the* chosen one. In Ephesians 1:4, it says we were chosen for salvation in Christ "**...before the foundation of the world...**" God determined that it would only be through Jesus Christ that we would be saved, and he made that decision before the world was ever formed.

In Acts, chapter 4, verse 12, we remind ourselves "**...there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**" None. You see, Jesus has a unique relationship to God that is eternally existent. Our salvation was God's plan, conceived in God's mind before time began. That's what this tells us. He is *the* chosen one.

2. *Jesus has all of God's power in him.* Mark has relentlessly been trying to show, through his writing of this gospel, that Jesus is God simply by the miraculous power he has displayed. Yet Colossians 1 emphasizes it as well. Jesus is "**...the image of the invisible God... For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created through him and for him. And...in him all things hold together.**" All of it.

Jesus wasn't just powerful. He was the all-powerful one in flesh and blood. He has the power to do what God has chosen him to do.

3. *Jesus came to deliver his people from their sin.* John 3, verse 17, says, "**For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved**

through him." His mission was not to come and just teach good things, do good things, or say good things.

His mission was to seek and to save the lost and to establish God's kingdom people on earth, which we would know today as the church. We are God's kingdom people. Jesus is our King and we submit to him as our leader, first and foremost. We are a picture. We are a visual. We're supposed to be a presentation to the world of what it looks like to live under the sovereign rule of a loving, all-knowing, all-powerful God.

That's what his answer tells us about Jesus, but what does his answer more personally tell us about us? What do the four words, "**You are the Christ,**" mean to us? There are several things we need to get.

First, we have to remember this answer tells us that *sin is indeed a reality*. It's a reality in all of us. Romans 3 says, "**...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...**" Every human being is born with a terminal disease called sin. It's the spiritual DNA handed down to us from our first parents, Adam and Eve.

Every human being comes from Adam and Eve, who fell in the garden and handed down to us in the spiritual DNA of the human makeup this terminal disease. Sin, that disease, causes our two worst sicknesses or symptoms. It doesn't take much time watching the news or reading any news that this is true.

Our two worst symptoms in the world due to sin... I've just worded it like this. Symptom number one is *self-love instead of God-love*. One of the things sin does to us is it calls us to love ourselves more than God. In fact, taken to its extreme, sin will actually call us to love ourselves *as God*.

The second symptom sin does to the unregenerate heart is *it causes us to love falsehood or lies instead of loving the truth*. Taken to its extreme, we will even believe the lie that, "There is no God, but if there is a god, I am god. I am my own god. I determine my own destiny. I am the enlightenment of my own soul, and if I can just get in touch by meditating on my belly button long enough, I will convince my deceitful heart that I am all there is to worry about. I am at the center of the universe and all of you exist for my happiness. It doesn't take long to watch the news or read the news to confirm this, does it?"

You see, sin teaches us to love the exact opposite of God. We are separated from God in spiritual darkness, and all of the self-esteem and positive thinking in the world will not and does not change this. So, those four words, "**You are the Christ,**" reveal something about you and me. Sin is a reality for all of us.

Secondly, it reveals that *forgiveness is possible*. I love this. "**You are the Christ.**" Colossians 1 says, "**He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins...making peace by the blood of his cross.**" You see, Jesus being *the Christ* means he came to deliver us from our

two worst diseases. He came to purchase our forgiveness and bring us near to God so when we are in Christ by faith, we go from being separated from God to being near to God.

We go from being an enemy of God to being a child of God. We go from condemnation to salvation. That's what Jesus Christ accomplishes by providing, paying the price for our sins, and purchasing our forgiveness through his own death.

Thirdly, it also tells us, not just that sin is a reality and that forgiveness is possible, but the four words of Peter's confession remind us that *this life isn't all there is*. Thank God for that, right? Listen to Jesus. Jesus says, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.**" You know, Jesus is the only one who has the authority to say those words.

He says, "Believe in me. Hear my word and believe and you will have eternal life." Translation: this world and this life aren't all there is. Thank God. There is another life where we live under the perfect, loving, compassionate, holy leadership of God himself.

Fourthly, *all that is broken by sin will be restored*. This may be my favorite point of the morning. This is what Peter's answer means to us. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, we read, "**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**" Those words mean more to some of us than others.

See, for many of us, before Jesus, sin did a lot of damage. For some of you, for me included, before God allowed his light to shine into my heart and reveal who his Son was to me, sin did a lot of damage. For some of you, sin did a lot of damage *through* you, and for others, sin did a lot of damage *to* you through others.

The promise of the gospel, the reality of who Jesus is, means when we come to Christ, all of that past, all of those terrible choices and decisions, all of our stupidity that we did, and all of the sin that was committed against us no longer defines us. We are washed clean. We have been given a new name and a new identity, starting over with Jesus Christ. In Christ, God sees us as his children, freed from the darkness and deception of a sinful heart, able to see him, worship him, love him, and trust him.

Fifthly, *there is hope to hope in him*. Peter, who answered the question in Mark 8, wrote these words: "[Jesus] **was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest [made known] in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.**" I love that!

You see, the world we live in has nothing to offer us to give us lasting or meaningful hope. All the hope the world gives... There are some wonderful, hopeful things in our world. They just don't last. They're fleeting. As soon as they go out of date... The expiration date on hope in our world is pretty short, so we have to keep looking for more hope, and the more we look, the stupider we get.

Isn't that true? Here's what the Bible says. All who put their hope in him will never be put to shame. Never! Is it any wonder that we came to church today to worship Jesus? Is it any wonder that we stood up and put everything aside for a few hours today just to remind ourselves to get centered on the fact that Jesus is alive, he is the Christ, and he give us hope and forgiveness? We raise our hands and we sing off-key, but all together, it sounds beautiful, doesn't it? We worship him and we leave here with a greater sense that this life and this world isn't all there is.

I'm going to ask you to just bow your heads for just a minute. Don't lose this moment. Just close your eyes for a moment and listen to me as I say Jesus alone can save us from eternal death. Jesus alone can lead us through this life and through the ultimate end of life in history and into an eternal union with him.

Listen to me now, with your heads bowed. The cross of Jesus is the greatest power in the universe, greater than wisdom, money, lottery tickets, miracles, the theory of evolution, and everything. The cross of Jesus is greater even than sin, and so we worship him. We worship him because he is *the* Christ, the Son of the living God. Church, let's get to our feet and let's worship him.