

I was listening to a speaker last week that is involved in the Explore God initiative that Gary and Caleb introduced last Sunday. He marveled at how often people go online to look for information on Jesus. So I was curious. How often do people go on Google to get help in answering the question "Who is Jesus?" Apparently Google keeps track of that stuff and BoneZ helped me out. I discovered that there are roughly 800,000 searches per day for help in answering the question "Who is Jesus?" 800,000. I was astonished. And then I got curious again. I wonder what people are being told when they type in "Who is Jesus?" So I did that very thing and, .42 seconds later, I received 325,000,000 results. Here's a sample of what I found:

- A picture of Billy Graham.
- Savior and Lord.
- The Creator.
- The Word.
- The central figure of Christianity.
- C.S. Lewis's well-known quote - Liar, Lunatic, or Lord
- The way to truth, peace, and happiness.
- A good moral man.
- A prophet.
- Not all knowing. Not all powerful. Only a messenger of God, not God himself.
- The cosmic Christ, the spiritual guide whose teaching embraces all humanity, not just the church.
- A YouTube video entitled, "God is not love."
- And something I missed in both the Bible and history class: That, in the 1300's, Jesus Christ was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald.

There are a lot of ideas about who Jesus is.

This week, as we continue our series in Mark, Jesus is going to ask his disciples a similar question. Remember last week that we find the disciples really struggling. They are arguing about not having any bread right after Jesus feeds 4,000. Jesus says, "Do you not yet understand?" Then Jesus heals the blind guy in two phases, the first phase he kind of sees what's in front of him and then the second phase where he sees things clearly. Well, it's time for the disciples to start seeing things clearly so Jesus asks them what is, quite frankly, the single most important question ever asked and the single most important question ever answered. And, oh yeah, he's asking me, and asking you that very same question. And the answer to that question will have significant ramification for Jesus, for his disciples, and for us.

We'll begin in Mark 8:27 where it says:

27 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?" 28 And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." 29 And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?"

'Guys, it's time to figure this thing out.' Jesus knows that unless they understand who he is, they'll never understand what he came to do. They have to know the person of Jesus before they can know the mission of Jesus.

Now, notice where this takes place: Caesarea Philippi. This is no accident. This is an area no devout Jew would go. It was full of pagan idolatry. Herod had built a temple for Augustus Caesar. There was a large cave that people thought was a door to the underworld. The site was also called Panias, a place where Greeks worshipped the god Pan. It was a perfect representation of the world's ideas of god. And with that as the backdrop, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who is Jesus?" He's saying, "Here are all these little gods that others worship, but what about you? Because guys, remember..."

- When I was baptized, a dove descended and a voice came from heaven that said, "You are my beloved Son." Who do you say that I am?
- My teaching is unique and authoritative. Who do you say that I am?
- I've driven out demons. Who do you say that I am?
- You've driven out demons in my name. Who do you say that I am?
- I've forgiven sins. Who do you say that I am?
- I've healed the sick. Who do you say that I am?
- I've fed the masses, calmed the storms and the seas, walked on water, and I've given a blind man sight. Who. Do. You. Say. That. I. Am?

Peter speaks up and says, "**You are the Christ.**" And does Jesus sprint over, give Peter a high-five, and say, "You got it! Pizza and beer are on me." Nope. Verse 30 says "**And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.**"

What's going on here? Because Peter is right, but he's only half-right. For those of us on this side of the resurrection, we hear Peter refer to Jesus as the Christ and our response is, "He's got it." We hear "the Christ" and immediately think "God made man, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the Cross for our sins, rose three days later, ascended into heaven, and will return one day in glory." But that's not the way Peter meant it. You see, Peter is a Jew, and like all other Jews, he's waiting for the promised Messiah (Christ is the Greek word for Messiah). The Messiah will be

the Triumphant King who comes through the line of David, who will vanquish all of Israel's enemies and establish his Kingdom forever. But the Jews had missed something. They'd missed that Christ had to come and do something else first, before he set up his Kingdom. Jesus knows this, and he's going to clarify their understanding of the Christ before they move on. And when he does, Peter follows up his moment in the sun with a really bad idea. Look at v 31:

³¹ 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. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Principle #1: If Jesus calls you Satan...you've probably messed up!

Remember, Jesus wants clarity about who he is so that there can be clarity about why he's come, about his redemptive mission. And so, as v 32 states, Jesus very plainly explains what his mission is all about. No parables. No miracles that teach the disciples an important spiritual lesson. Jesus bottom-lines them and says that he has come to suffer and die, that he **MUST** suffer and die, and that he's doing so willingly. And Peter is having none of it.

Understand the severity of Peter's disagreement with Jesus. He's not taking Jesus aside and politely asking for some clarification and possibly reconsideration. The text says that he rebukes Jesus. It's the very same word used to describe Jesus silencing demons. So Peter goes from correctly declaring Jesus as the Christ to, moments later, treating him like a demon.

Well, as you can imagine, Jesus is having none of that, and he rebukes him right back. He's not saying, "You are Satan." He's telling him that he's acting like Satan. Remember when Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness, trying to get Jesus off course from his mission? Peter is doing the same thing. Peter is focused on what the Christ can do for him. Peter wants the Christ to show up and make the world the way Peter wants. Peter wants to dictate what the Christ came to do.

Have you ever heard of anyone picking and choosing what they believe about Jesus? The world wants to say that he was a great teacher but ignores his lesson about eternal life coming only through him. Some want to call him a good man but scoff at ideas like holiness and righteousness. Some even say he's a messenger from God while ignoring his claims to be God. And we're not innocent in the church either.

We're all about freedom in Christ but seem to forget that Jesus said if we love him we'd obey his commands. Some say that we have to live a life of misery while ignoring that God wants to give good gifts to his children while others want Jesus to show up and make their life perfectly blissful. That's kind what Peter, and the rest of the disciples are getting at. So Jesus is making clear that **"A follower of Jesus identifies the Christ as both the Suffering Servant and Triumphant King."** A follower accepts Christ's entire saving mission.

Now, I have to admit, I can relate to Peter. In 1999, when I was struggling with my faith and finally made a decision to figure it out and either go all-in with Christ or walk away completely, the biggest question I had was "Why did Jesus have to die? Why couldn't he just show up and make it all ok?"

And the answer that God gave me and the answer that the disciples will ultimately learn is: sin. Jesus didn't come to simply overthrow a world run by Romans, he came to rescue a dead world infected by sin and ruled by the enemy of God. And to do that, he had to pay the price. God told Adam and Eve that if they disobeyed and ate of a specific tree that they would surely die and Romans 6 tells us that the wages of sin is death. Left on our own, we'd have to pay that price. But God has a different idea and it's called forgiveness. But **forgiveness always comes at a cost.**

Consider if someone owed you \$100. If you were to forgive that debt, it would come at the cost of the \$100 you're now out. Or consider this, I have couples who come to see me who are in a really bad place. There's been a lot of damage done, a lot of hurt, and there's a great divide between the two of them. The only way they can begin to reconcile is through forgiveness, but that comes with the cost of laying down your rights, laying down your desire for recompense for the wrongs done to you. And there is no easy fix to something so broken. It is going to be long and arduous and, at times, very painful. And there are no easy fixes with sin either. The writer of Hebrews tells us "without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness of sins." So for us to correctly answer the question "Who do you say that I am?" we must confess that **Jesus is the Suffering Servant.**

Jesus continues. You ever had a difficult conversation with someone and they say, "And there's one more thing"? V34:

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

Jesus first tells them the cost of being the Christ and now he tells them the cost of following the Christ. Remember that Jesus' original call of the disciples was to

become fishers of men. So we might expect Jesus to say “If you’re going to follow me, pick up your plough and start sowing my Word” or “Pick up your shepherd’s staff and tend to my flock.” As Jews, they would have understood that. But instead, Jesus tells them to pick up their cross, a Roman instrument of submission and torture and death. Jesus is telling them **“A follower of Jesus willingly joins him in his suffering.”**

Now there aren’t very many four-letter words left in America, but “suffering” is one of them. We’ll do anything we can to avoid suffering in this fallen world and now Jesus, who, just like Peter, we really just want to just show up and make everyone ok, is calling us to more suffering? What kind of Messiah is this? So Jesus has to radically alter the disciples’, and our, perception of what his mission is about. He’s laying his life down for the mission and, if we’re going to follow him, we need to do the same.

So is he saying, “Follow me and you’ll be miserable”? No. I was talking about this passage with my twelve-year-old son Christian and he said “And don’t forget to tell them that there’s joy in suffering.” He seemed to be speaking from experience. I thought I’d given him a pretty pleasant childhood so far. But I think he’s right.

Look at v 35. Jesus says that if you try to save your life you’ll lose it but if you lose your life for his sake and the gospel’s you’ll save it. Look, I think Jesus is giving them a taste of the Gospel here. He’s saying that the loss of life brings new life. And with new life comes joy. There’s a warning too. Preserving your life, saving yourself, actually brings death.

I know this is tough. There are some of you here who entered into the covenant of marriage before God and you are ready to check out. There are some of you here who, because of your relationship with Christ, have strained relationships with your friends and family and you’re ready to give up on the whole thing. There are some of you here who aren’t even sure that you want to be known as a Christian. You see that the public’s view of us is diminishing and you think it may just be easier if you sort of just keep that to yourself. Oh man. Can I just encourage you to hang on? I know it seems easier to go that way but I want you to see from this passage that **the boundaries we set up to avoid suffering become barriers to intimacy with our Savior.** And there’s hope for all of us who struggle with this. Let’s keep going.

This is a big week for my boys. Comic-Con is happening and the convention always includes previews of upcoming movie releases, particularly animated, sci-fi, and, most importantly, superheroes. So we gathered around a laptop and watched a few. It’s a lot of fun and there are a lot of utterances of “whoa” and “awesome”. They build anticipation and give us a taste now of what’s coming in the future.

In this last section, Jesus is going to give Peter, James, and John a preview of things to come, and I consider it an extraordinary act of grace on God's part. It is a moment of confirmation and encouragement as they move forward with the sober revelation of the mission of the Christ and his disciples. Let's start in 9:1:

9 And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." ² And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶ For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." ⁸ And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

Whoa. Awesome. What a scene. There's so much here. You could do a four-week sermon series on the Transfiguration alone. But there are a few key things I want you to see for our purposes today.

First, Jesus is transfigured and the original word used is where we get our word metamorphosis. Jesus is not slightly altered. He's radically transformed from his earthly body to his divine being, in all his glory. It's the way he will be when he returns to establish his Kingdom. This is the Christ Peter has been thinking about this whole time. **Jesus is the Triumphant King.**

Second, here are three additional witnesses helping these disciples answer the question "Who do you say that I am?" Moses and Elijah are significant. First of all, they each had their own experience witnessing the glory of God. Additionally, Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the Prophets and their presence declares that Jesus is the fulfillment of them both. The third witness is God the Father. You see that a cloud rolls in, which would have reminded the disciples of the Shekinah Glory, God's presence in Israel. And then he speaks, not to Jesus, like he did at his baptism, but directly to the disciples. His answer to the question of "Who do you say that I am?" is "My beloved Son." And you should probably listen to him.

Last thing I want you to see is that the disciples...don't completely get it. Peter calls the glorified Jesus "Rabbi" instead of Lord, Christ, or King. Then he suggests he sets

up some booths. Now this isn't totally random, and it actually shows us that Peter has some idea of what's happening here. Israel celebrated the Feast of Booths to memorialize God's presence with them and the prophet Zechariah says that there will be a perpetual Feast of Booths when the Kingdom arrives. The problem is that Peter is trying to set up the Kingdom right there, seemingly ready to disregard all that suffering stuff Jesus told them about. So Jesus tells them to not tell anyone about this because, quite frankly, they aren't going to completely understand this until Jesus' resurrection.

But don't miss this: Jesus gives them, and us, a gracious glimpse, a hopeful preview of what's to come, as if to say, "I know I've just called you to suffering. But there will come a day when I do return and set all things right." And so, as followers of Christ, we endure our suffering now with the certain hope that Christ will return in glory. **A follower of Christ endures present suffering on the hope of future glory.**

So I have a question for you: Who do YOU say that Jesus is?

If you're visiting this morning, are new to the Bible, new to church, you may say, "I don't know pal. That's why I'm here." Well, you picked a morning that told you the Christian life is one of pain and suffering and picking up your cross. So...WHO'S IN? I promise it's more than that. But there's something I want you to know. Jesus went first. And the cross he calls his followers to pales in comparison to the Cross he picked up himself. He left his heavenly place, he took on the form of a servant, and he died on that Cross so you don't have to. It's a free gift. All you have to do is believe. If you want to talk to someone about that, or if you just want to know more about who Jesus is, we have prayer rooms right outside of the worship center or you can come downstairs and grab some one to talk to.

If you have put your trust in Jesus, who do YOU say that Jesus is?

We have a choice. We can look at him as the guy who's going to get us into heaven but not let him have any real impact on our lives today. We can play it safe and live a life distant from him. Or we can accept all that Jesus is, declare that he is indeed both the Suffering Servant and Triumphant King, and that he calls us to follow him in a way that, while difficult, allows us to know him in a way that we simply couldn't otherwise.

Peter did eventually get this. The one who saved himself, played it safe, by denying Jesus three times, later denied himself by fearlessly declaring the Gospel, leading to his arrest and flogging. And the one who rebuked Jesus about going to the Cross ultimately ended his ministry by picking up his own cross, literally, and being crucified upside down. But before he did, he wrote this:

¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

In the end, he knew the answer to "Who do you say that I am?" You are the Christ: Suffering Servant and Triumphant King.

And so I want to close with a story that I hope gives you some encouragement as you leave this morning. I met with a husband and wife recently. They asked to see me because they were in the middle of a difficult season and had to make some decisions. When we met, the husband explained that his business was in trouble. Some of his associates had reneged on a contract and it was having a significant impact on revenues and cash flow. He felt like the law was on his side and worked with an attorney to sue these people for breach of contract, cease and desist, etc. But he tells me that, the night before all this legal work was to be filed, he got a real sense that he shouldn't do it. He said he was convinced proceeding would damage the reputation of Jesus and his Gospel. He knew what it would mean for his business, what it would mean for his finances, he picked up his cross, he denied himself, and but chose to live for Christ's sake and Gospel's. The story doesn't end there though. You see, he started the conversation with a comment that was almost under his breath. He said, "Kurt, we're going through some tough times...it's actually been a blessing..." And after telling me all that has been going on, here's how he finished. I can tell you that this isn't a guy who cries a lot, and he certainly doesn't cry in front of other guys. But through tears, this man told me that, up to this point, he's had a surface-level relationship with God. He's been a fan of Jesus. But now, through this ordeal, he's never known the love of God like he does now. He's never read the Bible like he does these days. He's never had gratitude for God's provision, which he calls daily bread, like he does these days. And in the midst of all this suffering, a fan of Jesus became a follower of Jesus. Additionally, his wife told me that she's been reminded of the truth that she lacks nothing because of him, that she is completely approved and accepted because of grace, that God is good, and that he relentlessly loves her more than she can comprehend. Oh, and their marriage, this event has driven the two of them...together. Wow.

That's what suffering in the name of Christ does. I'm not telling you to run out of here and seek it out, but if suffering identifies us with Jesus, helps us know him better, reminds us of truth, bonds us to our fellow believers, builds intimacy in marriages, expands our faith, expands the church, keeps us humble, encourages others in their suffering, and leads to our joy and to God's glory, if that's what suffering does, I say let's pick up our crosses, die to ourselves, and get ready to rejoice when it comes. And we can do that because we know that the one who suffered for us to give us life and will one day come back to us to make all things right.