

## Who Do You Say Jesus Is?

### Mark 8:27-35 (NIV)

<sup>27</sup> Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" <sup>28</sup> They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." <sup>29</sup> "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." <sup>30</sup> Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. <sup>31</sup> He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." <sup>34</sup> Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Who do you say Jesus is? Do you have an answer ready for that question? Jesus asked this of his disciples on the way to the villages around Caesarea Philippi, just north of their home base of Capernaum, as they were looking for some respite from the crowds. Jesus was pulling his disciples away from the busyness of life to give them a moment of teaching. He first asks, "Who do people say I am?" (verse 27) The disciples dole out the popular answers: John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. Basically, the people say that you are a great person, a powerful spokesman from God. Then Jesus asks the deeper question: "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" (verse 29) Peter answers for the group, "You are the Messiah." (verse 29)

Peter's answer has a whole lot loaded into a four word response. The word "Messiah," which is the same word for "Christ," more literally means "anointed." In the Old Testament times, people had oil (like olive oil) poured on their heads to mark them as chosen for a special task or responsibility. The high priests and the kings of Israel were anointed with oil, setting them aside for their special roles of spiritual and political leadership.

Many of the people in Jesus' day fixated on the idea that the anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ, was to be a king from David's family line. Just as David was a mighty warrior and conquering king, so they thought the Messiah would usher in a political era of peace and safety for the people by defeating their oppressors and then ruling from a throne in a palace in Jerusalem.

The disciples were not immune to this common way of thinking of the Messiah as a political, earthly deliverer. Jesus sought to make sure that when the disciples said that Jesus was the Messiah that they knew God's special plan and purpose for the Anointed one. "He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again." (verse 31) The Messiah, Jesus, would suffer. He would be rejected by the very people who claimed to have put their hope in him, people who should have been the first to recognize that he was the Messiah, accepted him, and followed him. Instead, they would reject him and then order his execution. The Messiah was going to die.

"No. No," Peter thought. This can't be. Made to suffer? Rejected? Killed? That's not the Messiah. "Peter took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him." (verse 32) Don't talk about this stuff, Jesus. You are not here to die; you are here to rule! You're supposed to save us. You can't do that if you are rejected and killed! And think about what this is doing to all of us! We have given up our livelihoods because we believe in you. You can't die if you are the Messiah! We have put our hope in you to deliver us!

Who do you say Jesus is? My first reaction, first answer, is probably pretty similar to Peter's. I would say, "Jesus is my Lord and my Savior." But what does that mean? When I say "Lord," do I realize what that means? For me to say that Jesus is my Lord, that means that he is in charge of me, that he has power and authority over me. If Jesus is my Lord, then I am not free to do whatever I want. I have an obligation to listen to Jesus, to do what he says. If I believe that Jesus is my Lord, then my actions must line up with what he tells me to do. Do I love my neighbor as myself? Do I show favoritism among people? Do I discriminate against people based on how they dress or how they carry themselves? Do I refuse to lift a finger to help people in need? Do I say Jesus is my Lord but then go off and do whatever I feel like doing? Do I treat Jesus' commands and his Word as mere guidelines that I can do if it's convenient to me? My Lord tells me to deny myself to be his disciple. Do I actually deny myself, stop myself from showing favoritism, stop my sinful urges and attitudes and submit to Jesus' Word and his rule? Because if I don't, he's my Lord in name only.

I say Jesus is my Savior. Savior from what? Does he save me from ridicule? Does he save me from hardship, suffering, pain, or stress? Do I look to Jesus as the one who is here just to make me happy in life, to give me whatever I want when I want like some sort of magic genie? My Savior tells me to take up a cross and follow him. My Savior tells me to be ready to lose my life for him and for the Gospel. My Savior tells me to expect suffering and pain and stress and hardship and ridicule if I believe in him and follow him.

“But I don’t want to submit to your rules. I don’t want to suffer. I don’t want the hardship. Jesus, you are supposed to make my life easier and happier!” Is that who I say Jesus is?

“Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” (verse 33) Jesus’ rebuke of Peter stands for us as well if we come up with our own thoughts of who Jesus is, if we make Jesus our Lord in title only, not by actually denying ourselves and submitting to his Word, if we demand Jesus save us from suffering and pain in this life even though he tells us to expect these things for following him. It’s the devil who wants us to think that Jesus is here primarily for us to have a happy life, that a true Savior would save us from pain and suffering and hardship and stress, that a good Lord would not ask us to deny ourselves what we want when we want it. Satan wants us to think that we know better than God and don’t really have to obey his Word if we don’t agree with it or if we think it’s inconvenient to do so. He wants us to invent a Jesus instead of taking in Jesus exactly as he is.

When we answer that question, “Who do you say Jesus is?” do we have in mind the concerns of God or merely human concerns? When Jesus explained to his disciples that he *must* suffer and be rejected, that he *must* be killed and then rise again, he had in mind the concerns of God. God is concerned about his creation, us, all humankind. God has the eternal view in perspective as he goes about his mission as the Messiah, as the Christ, as our Lord and Savior. He does not want us to live forever in a life riddled with pain and disease and hardship and stress and rejection as we do in this life because of sin. So instead of creating an earthly kingdom with an earthly throne and being our political Messiah and Lord, he suffered and was rejected and killed at the hands of sinful men in order to make us a part of his heavenly kingdom. He must suffer, had to suffer and be rejected to pay for all the times we have not loved our neighbor as ourselves, when we have shown favoritism, when we have discriminated against others simply based on their appearance, when we haven’t helped people. Jesus denied himself a life free from suffering, from pain, from hardship, from stress, from death to keep the law for us in our place since we already have broken it all, since we didn’t deny ourselves and instead did our own thing.

Jesus denying himself, accepting rejection, suffering, and death only to rise again in three days saved us from an eternity in hell, an eternity of rejecting, of suffering, of wanting to die but not being able to. Jesus did it all for us. He kept the law even though we are constant law breakers. He denied himself because we don’t deny ourselves. He shed his blood on the cross and was rejected by God for us in our place so that he would never reject us. He rose from the dead in three days so that we would know with certainty that we will be raised as well. This is the Gospel. This is what God is concerned about for us. This is who Jesus is. This is what it means that Jesus is the Messiah, our Lord and Savior.

Knowing who Jesus is and what he has done for me as the Messiah, as my Lord and Savior, let the pain come. Let the suffering happen. Because I am forgiven. I am saved. I will go to heaven, no matter what anyone else has to say. I will not be condemned because of who my Jesus is.

Who do I say Jesus is? He is my God who lived for me, died for me, and rose for me. He saved me from my sin and my disobedience, my breaking of his law. He saved me from condemnation through his life and death. He will bring me to heaven no matter what anyone else says about me. He denied himself for me, chose to lose his life for me. I will lose my life for him because he is my Lord and my Savior, my Messiah. Amen.