

Follow Me

In Mark's gospel, we find one of the private conversations that occurred between Jesus and His disciples. The conversation follows several times when Jesus had preached to crowds, fed thousands, and healed many. Jesus is asking those who are closest to Him a probing question to see if they are learning who He is and what they need to understand as they move forward in their roles as disciples.

Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets." (Mark 8:27-28 NASB)

Jesus walks with His disciples out into the region of Caesarea of Philippi. Then, Jesus addresses the twelve apostles and asked the first of two questions we will consider this morning. First, Jesus asked them who do the people think that Jesus is. For approximately two years, these men had followed Jesus and they would know what others thought and said about Jesus. Jesus has less than a year left in His time on earth and this is a good time to gage both those who came to listen and those who were the closest to Him.

It is interesting to note that none of the responses suggested that Jesus was the Messiah. Mark records that the demons who encountered Jesus had no problem recognizing Him to be the Son of God (Mark 1:24, Mark 3:11, and Mark 5:7).

The crowds clearly saw Jesus as a messenger from God like John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. They did not make the connection that Jesus might be the Messiah.

Once Jesus had the answer to His first question, He then asked the apostles the same question. **And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." And He warned them to tell no one about Him. (Mark 8:29-30 NASB)**

Peter, with his typical impetuous nature, quickly answers for the twelve apostles; **You are the Christ.**

This simple declarative statement answers the question by assigning the title of Christ to Jesus. Mark records Peter's answer as the Greek word Χριστός (Christos) which means anointed one and corresponds with the Hebrew word Messiah. When we refer to Jesus as Christ, we are saying that He is the anointed one or He is the Messiah.

With this statement, Peter is declaring that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies that speak of the anointed one of God sitting on the throne of David. Peter is telling us that this Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise. This Jesus is more than a prophet, or a wise teacher of rabbi. Jesus did not correct Peter but instructed the twelve apostles not to tell others about this. Peter's confession revealed real insight into the nature of Christ's person and mission, but his concept of Jesus' messiahship was far from being perfect. He and the other disciples still had much to learn of Messiah's suffering, rejection, and death, as we see revealed in the next few verses. So, Jesus told them to be quiet at this time about his role as Messiah. They still needed instruction about it before being given permission to proclaim it freely.

Jesus begins to prepare the apostles for the events that would be occurring near future. Jesus opens up about the coming crucifixion and resurrection.

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. (Mark 8:31 NASB)

Peter, impetuous Peter, had just confessed that Jesus is the Messiah and then Jesus tells him that He will be killed. Peter is not ready to hear this.

And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.” (Mark 8:32-33 NASB)

Peter, at this point does not understand the significance of the sacrifice that is wrapped up in the death of Jesus. He is speaking as most humans would respond to a pending death. He does not want Jesus to die. It may be that at this particular moment, Jesus knew the horrific death that was awaiting and hearing Peter rebuke Him for speaking of His death, Jesus may have realized that He had the power to call it off. Yet, when He turned and saw His disciples, He knew that it must proceed as God had planned. Peter is rebuked for failing to consider God’s interest and plan. Jesus then addresses the crowd along with His disciples. He paints a picture that may discourage many from following Him.

And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. (Mark 8:34-35 NASB)

Jesus is telling those present that they must choose. In choosing to follow Jesus, we must deny ourselves. We must place Jesus before our desires, our interest, and our plans. From the time we are born, we are made aware that we are the center of attention. Life reinforces the notion that we must look out for our own interest. We become very self-centered. The notion of denying ourselves is foreign. This requires a concerted effort to achieve what Jesus has called us to do by denying ourself.

Jesus does not stop with telling us to deny ourselves. He then tells us to take up our cross. Some will tell us that the cross is our burden. It goes far beyond being a burden. The cross is an instrument of death. It is a torturous death. For some of the crowd and certainly some of His disciples, following Jesus would lead to actual physical death.

For all of His disciple, then and now, taking up our cross signifies our death to our old life. Paul wrote to the Colossian church and specifically tells us the things of this world which we are to put to death. Many of these things are rampant in the world today and even may be seen in some of the people who claim to be Christians. Listen to them.

Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— *a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. (Colossians 3:5-11 NASB)

In Romans, we read about the symbolic act of baptism is our joining with Jesus in the death burial and resurrection. Which, again points to the death Jesus calls us to in bearing our cross. **Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. (Romans 6:3-7 NASB)**

To put it simply, **now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:24 NASB)**

Jesus calls us to take up our cross. It is an invitation to put to death some of the things that we hold dear in this world. It may also be an invitation to actually give up our physical life for His cause. Many are not ready for that.

Jesus closes out this conversation by reminding those disciples that our souls are eternal beings and this world is temporal. This world will not last forever and when we place the things of this world above our own souls, we will be the loser.

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:36-38 NASB)

I cannot picture a sadder picture than to be standing before Jesus and hear Him say: **‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’ (Matthew 7:23b NASB)**

This morning, Jesus is asking us **who do you say that I am?** If we are like Peter and ready to confess that Jesus is the Christ, then the expectation is the same. We must deny ourself and take up our cross to follow Jesus. The plan is that simple and the choice is that clear. There is no middle ground where we may gain an exception.

Who do you say that Jesus is? Are you ready to follow Him?