

Who Do You Say That I Am?

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this morning, with the Lord's help and guidance, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. The Gospel according to Mark, chapter 8.
- And if we read again at verse 27. Mark, chapter 8. Reading again at verse 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?
- 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. Who do you say that I am? Who do you say that I am?
- [1 : 0 4] When it comes to the topic of Christianity, and the message of the good news about Jesus Christ, it's always an interesting discussion point.
- Because more often than not, we have so many questions about the Christian faith that we don't even know where to start. But we have so many questions about Jesus and who he is.
- And maybe we're asking, maybe you're asking this morning, Who is Jesus? What is Jesus like? Why did Jesus come? What has Jesus done for me?
- Why do I need Jesus? Where is Jesus now? And maybe you have so many questions about Christianity. What is it all about? Why should I become a Christian?
- What is a Christian? What does it mean to be a Christian? How do I become a Christian? And that's a question we'll be asking this evening, in the evening service.
- [2 : 0 7] So, if you want to know how to become a Christian, come to the evening service. But, maybe we even have more questions about the Bible. What is the Bible? How can I know that the Bible is true?
- Can the Bible be trusted? Is it really God's Word? And if it is God's Word, what does it have to say to me in the 21st century? Is this old book still relevant in the 21st century?
- And there are all these questions, which we may have in our mind, that you may be coming to church with. Some of them may be the result of our upbringing, or our past experience, maybe bad experience.
- And these things make us hesitant, and reticent, and undecided about becoming a Christian. Or maybe we have questions which have arisen because of bad experiences with other Christians, where Christians are not living like Christians should, and Christians are not being an example of Christ in our community.
- And undoubtedly, these things, they cause us to have reservations about Christianity. And there are all these things about Christianity and the Christian faith that cause us to ask so many questions that sometimes we just don't know where to start.
- [3 : 2 6] Well, I want to say that if you have any questions about Christianity, come to Christianity Explored. If you have any questions about it, come.

It's an informal gathering, and you have the opportunity to ask questions or just sit and listen. Just like I said, and they're all the topics that are of concern to you.

They're all raised during Christianity Explored. But as we come to this passage this morning, we may come to church with many questions about Jesus and about Christianity and about the Bible and about other Christians.

But this morning, Jesus wants to ask you a question. And it's a personal question. And it's a question which only you can answer. Because it's all to do with your understanding of who Jesus is.

Because in verse 29, Jesus asks us the question, Who do you say that I am? Who do you say that I am? Who do you say that Jesus is?

[4 : 33] Or in other words, what does Jesus mean to you? What does Jesus mean to you? And it's a good question because I often wonder why you come to church on the Lord's Day.

I often wonder why you come and you sit and you hear all about Jesus. And I often wonder why you keep coming to church. Is it because Jesus means something to you?

Is it because there is something about Jesus that you're actually drawn to? Is it because deep down you want to know Jesus for yourself and you want to follow Jesus?

Well, Jesus is challenging you this morning to make a decision. A decision about Jesus. Because he's asking you, Who do you say that I am?

Who do you say that I am? But in the immediate context of this passage, we're given an account of this blind man.

[5 : 36] That's what we read earlier on. This blind man who had his sight restored to him. And on the surface, it may seem irrelevant to the question which Jesus is now asking us.

But Mark has a reason as to why this is part of the narrative. And so, within this section of Mark's Gospel, I'd like us to consider just three things. Three things.

A disability, a discussion, and a decision. A disability, a discussion, and a decision. So we look firstly at this disability.

A disability. It's in verse 22. They came to Bethsaida and some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, that's Jesus, and led him out to the village.

And when he had spat on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, Do you see anything? Do you see anything? And now, last time we were looking at Mark's Gospel, we were considering the conversation which took place in the boat on the Sea of Galilee.

[6 : 43] The conversation between Jesus and his disciples. And that's in the section above. That's what we were reading earlier on, where the disciples, they had got into the boat and they were crossing over the Sea of Galilee.

But what caused the disciples this great concern and anxiety, it wasn't their soul. Their soul wasn't bothering them, but their stomach. Their stomach was bothering them because they had forgotten to take some bread with them and they had only one loaf between thirteen men.

It wasn't much. But that's all that was consuming their mind as they were sitting in this boat crossing the Sea of Galilee. And of course, Jesus knew this because he says to the disciples, Watch out.

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. And with this, Jesus was warning the disciples of what was going to take place soon. That the influence of the religious and political powers in Israel they were going to infiltrate and contaminate and affect the entire society to turn against Jesus.

To rise up against Jesus and crucify him. And Jesus is forewarning the disciples of what is going to happen. But the disciples don't get it.

[7 : 59] They don't understand what Jesus is talking about. They have no clue as to what he's on about. And the disciples try and guess what Jesus is actually saying to them. And they think it's only to do with the fact that they have not brought enough bread onto the boat with them.

But it's then that Jesus turns to the disciples and he says to them, You're missing the point. Because he says, Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread?

Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? He says in verse 18, Having eyes do you not see?

And having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? And when he says do you not remember? He starts talking about all these miracles of feeding the 5,000 and feeding the 4,000.

And he brings them to the disciples' attention and he says in verse 19, When I broke the five loaves for the 5,000, how many basketful of broken pieces did you take up?

[9 : 02] They said to him, Twelve. And the seven loaves for the 4,000, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? And they said to him, Seven. And he says to them, Do you not yet understand?

And Jesus is saying to his disciples, How is it that you don't understand yet? How is it that you're not getting this? Because what the disciples were failing to see and what they were failing to understand was who Jesus really is.

They were failing to recognise the identity of Jesus. And Jesus is asking them, How is it that you do not understand? But what's interesting is that Mark then proceeds in his gospel to tell us about this man with a disability.

He tells us that when the boat ferrying Jesus and his disciples when it landed on the shores of Bethsaida, the people of that region brought this man who was blind and they brought him to Jesus begging him that he would touch this blind man and make him whole again.

And Mark tells us that Jesus took the blind man and he led him by the hand out of the village of Bethsaida away from all the crowds. And when they were alone it says that Jesus spat on the eyes of this blind man, which for most people wouldn't have been the most pleasant experience to have someone spit in your face.

[10 : 38] But when Jesus spat upon this blind man and particularly spat in his eyes, Jesus then put his hands over his eyes to cover them. And Jesus asks the question, What do you see?

What do you see? And the man, as it says in verse 24, he looked up and said, I see men, but they look like trees and they're walking.

And so the blind man, he now has some sight. Light is coming into his eyes that wasn't there before. Because before he was in complete darkness.

He couldn't see a thing. But now, light is now streaming into his eyes and he's able to make out some shapes and some shadows. These trees, it's not a clear vision, it's a blurred vision.

All he can see is shadows that look like trees that are walking. And so Jesus, the optician, he responds to the man's blurred vision by putting his hands over his eyes again and he makes him look up.

[11 : 43] And Jesus, when Jesus did this, we're told that the man was restored and he saw everything. He saw everything. Now the question that arises in my mind when I read this is why did Mark record this miracle?

What has this miracle got to do with anything? What reason did Mark have for telling us what happened to this blind man at Bethsaida? Was it because it was a failed miracle?

Because it didn't work the first time, Jesus had to have a second attempt at it. Does that mean that not all the miracles of Jesus actually worked? Does it mean that Jesus failed to be this perfect miracle worker?

Does it mean that Jesus was flawed in some way? What does it mean? And why is Mark drawing our attention to this blind man? Well, we can be certain that it wasn't a failed miracle.

We can be certain that Jesus wasn't flawed in any way. But we can also be certain that this miraculous event wasn't just randomly put into Mark's gospel account.

[12 : 51] It's there for a reason. There is a reason for it being here. And the reason for it being here is to emphasize the lack of perception and understanding of the disciples.

Because, my friend, the miracle wasn't about the blindness of the blind man. The miracle was about the blindness of the blind disciples. The disability wasn't about the man who was physically blind.

the disability was about the disciples who were still spiritually blind. The reason Jesus performed such a miracle in such a manner was to highlight the disability which the disciples had.

The miracle was this illustration of their inability to see and understand who Jesus really was. And this two-stage miracle, it wasn't to show Jesus' disability to heal the blind man.

The two-stage miracle was to show the disability of the disciples, to understand who Jesus is after being with him and hearing from him for so long.

[14 : 02] It was an illustration of their experience. And you know it's an illustration of our experience too. Because Jesus had said to the disciples when they were in the boat, you have eyes but you do not see.

You have ears but you do not hear. And what Jesus is talking about is that like many of us, the disciples were once in complete darkness.

Just like this blind man. They had no light and they had no salvation. They were walking in darkness. They were walking in ignorance. They had never knew Jesus.

They'd never heard the name of Jesus. They didn't know anything about Jesus. That was until Jesus met them and confronted them in the gospel and he called them to follow him.

But when they were confronted with Jesus, they had the light. But they still had no salvation. Because they were like the blind man who could only partially see.

[15 : 07] Where they knew that the light was there and that it had granted them this ability to see but not clearly. They couldn't fully see who Jesus was.

And Jesus in that sense he was only this shape or this shadow. Because even after all that they had seen and after all that they'd heard, the disciples still didn't fully understand who Jesus is.

But in this miracle of healing the blind man, Jesus was building upon his earlier question, how is it that you do not understand? And the same is true in here today.

Because there are far too many in this congregation, in our congregation, who are still at the first stage of dealing with the disability of blindness.

You've heard the name of Jesus. You're familiar with the stories of Jesus. You've witnessed and seen in the gospel the miracles of Jesus. You've heard the message of Jesus. You've been brought to the cross of Jesus.

[16 : 12] But there's still this blurred vision that you have in which you can't see Jesus clearly. You can't see him for who he is and what he has done. And you don't get it.

There's something keeping you back and you just don't get what it's all about yet. It doesn't make sense to you. And maybe your blurred vision is because you have preconceptions and misconceptions about Jesus and what it means to be a Christian.

But my friend, it's only when you come to know who Jesus is and when you come to see him clearly for who he is and for what he has done, it's then you'll be saved.

It's then you will be able to say with the psalmist, the Lord is my light and my salvation. salvation. But how do you come to that point?

How do you come to the point where you see Jesus for who he is? Simply ask him. Ask the Lord to show you who he is.

[17 : 25] Ask the Lord to remove the spiritual blindness and enable you to see him clearly. Ask the Lord.

That's the promise of the Bible. Ask and it will be given. Ask and it will be given. But before Jesus prompts his disciples to make a decision about his identity, there's first of all this discussion about the identity of Jesus.

So we've considered this disability. But secondly, we see a discussion. A discussion. You look at verse 27. It says, 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 so having restored the blind man to full vision, Jesus and his disciples, they take this 25-mile trip north. They go from Bethsaida north to Caesarea Philippi, which was situated at the foot of Mount Hermon.

[18 : 42] Now, knowing the location of Jesus and his disciples, it's key for us to understand what sort of people lived in Caesarea Philippi. Because Caesarea Philippi was named after the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus, and the Jewish herod, Philip, hence the name Caesarea Philippi.

And because it was a city dedicated to the Roman Emperor within a Jewish nation, Caesarea Philippi was a place of confusion. In fact, Caesarea Philippi was a particularly godless city.

It was a city which was known famed for worshipping the emperor, where Caesar was always proclaimed as lord. And all of this emperor worship and paganism was taking place within the boundaries of God's elect nation of Israel.

And so Caesarea Philippi was a city of confusion. It was a city that didn't know who it worshipped or what it believed in, which was a fitting context for this discussion between Jesus and his disciples, where they're walking towards one of the most godless cities in their nation, and Jesus poses the question to them, who do people say that I am?

Who do people say that I am? And this question wasn't asked out of pride, it wasn't saying, well, who are people talking about me, who do people say I'm like? The question was asked because like Caesarea Philippi, there was confusion over the identity of Jesus.

[20 : 25] The identity of Jesus, it had not only been an issue for the disciples, but it had been an issue and a point of discussion and debate for everyone who had come into contact with Jesus.

And it was a crucial question, who do people say that I am? Everyone wants to know who Jesus is. And Jesus, to them, was a hot topic.

He's the talk of all the villages and all the towns and all the cities. Everyone is talking about Jesus, not only because of what he's doing, but also because of what he's saying.

He's a man who speaks with authority. And so, who is this Jesus? And who do people say that this Jesus is? And as the disciples point out, everyone is coming up with their own conclusions about Jesus.

And as you would expect, there are a variety of opinions about the identity of Jesus. There are plenty of answers that are on offer to choose from. And the disciples, they respond to Jesus by indicating all the theories that have arisen due to popular opinion.

[21 : 34] Who do people say that I am? And they told him, John the Baptist. Others say, Elijah. Elijah. Some people say, just one of the prophets.

And so, the first theory regarding the identity of Jesus that they present to him is, you're like John the Baptist. And those who thought that Jesus was John the Baptist, they took the same line as Herod.

Because when Herod was confronted with Jesus back in chapter 6, when he came face to face with Jesus, he said, this is John. whom I beheaded, he has been raised from the dead.

And so, many people thought that Jesus was this reincarnation of John the Baptist. But when we think about it, I suppose it could have been quite easy to confuse John the Baptist and Jesus.

Because they were cousins. Their mothers were sisters. So they could have looked alike. They were both popular preachers with the crowd and they had disciples and they preached this message of repentance and their message.

[22 : 46] It had infuriated all the religious leaders. But if the people had actually listened to the message of John the Baptist, they would have known that the message of John the Baptist was a message of preparation, where he was preparing for the arrival of Jesus.

Jesus never pointed to John the Baptist. It was John the Baptist who pointed to Jesus and said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

But what about popular opinion number two? Some said that Jesus was like Elijah. But why would they say that Jesus was anything like Elijah? Elijah was one of the most dynamic prophets in the Old Testament.

He called down fire from heaven upon Mount Carmel. He prayed to God and the rain stopped. He was a dynamic prophet. He did great things and he lived during the period of Israel's history when some of the most godless kings ruled in the nation.

But not only that, Elijah was the opposite extreme of John the Baptist. John the Baptist had been put to death. He was beheaded. But Elijah never died.

[23 : 59] He was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire. Yet why would they say that Jesus was Elijah? Well, I think it's because the very last Old Testament prophet, Malachi, he prophesied by saying, Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

And so some had come to the conclusion that Jesus was the return of Elijah. Elijah didn't die, so Elijah is back and he's come to bring judgment and this eternal reign in Israel.

But Malachi's prophecy about this Elijah figure who was to come, it related to John the Baptist and not to Jesus because that's what Jesus actually says in chapter 9 at verse 13.

I tell you that Elijah has come and they did to him whatever they pleased. They beheaded him as it is written of him. So John the Baptist is the Elijah-like figure who has come to prepare the way for Jesus.

And if that's the case, then who is Jesus? Maybe it's our third option. They say he's one of the prophets. Jesus is just like one of the prophets.

[25 : 21] One of the Old Testament prophets who proclaimed God's word and challenged any who fail to uphold the word of God in their lives. Jesus is a prophet. He's just like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Amos and Hosea and Haggai.

Jesus is just a prophet. There's nothing special about him. There's nothing unique about him. Jesus is just a prophet. And you know, reading about the popular opinions of first century Palestine, the popular opinions of Jesus in the 21st century still haven't changed.

because what is the popular opinion of Jesus today? Who do people say that Jesus is? When, if you were to ask someone, who do you say that Jesus is?

Some would say, Jesus, just a fictional character. He wasn't a historical figure. He's not real. Just like the Bible's not real.

But others would say, well, Jesus is real. But he was just a man. He wasn't God, he was just a man. But a good man at that. Jesus was a good man with a good philosophy for life and we should follow his philosophy.

[26 : 44] He had good teaching. Love your neighbor as yourself. Good teaching. He was a good man with a good philosophy. Who do people say that Jesus is? Others say Jesus was a prophet.

Muslims say that Jesus was a prophet. But only a prophet. He's one prophet among many prophets. Just like Muhammad, he's just a prophet. Jesus isn't the son of God.

He wasn't divine. He's only a prophet. He couldn't save us from our sins. But when you ask other people, who do people say that Jesus is? There are others that say he can save us from our sins.

Because according to popular opinion, some people think that Jesus was a savior of sinners. But not the only savior of sinners. sinners. But a savior of sinners.

Jesus is one of many ways to get to heaven. But he's not the only way. He's not the only way. So who do people say that Jesus is? And with all these opinions and all these interpretations and all these perspectives and debates and discussions over this one man, Jesus Christ, there is so much confusion.

[27 : 55] confusion. So much confusion and everyone is asking, who is this Jesus? Who is this Jesus? But then it's Jesus that says, you have heard all the opinions of others.

You've heard the popular opinions of who people think I am. You've entered into the discussions and the debates about Jesus. You know all your options.

You know all the options about who people say I am. But now it's time for a decision. Who do you say that I am?

Who do you say that I am? And this brings us to a final point. We've looked at a disability, we've been involved in a discussion, but now it's time to make a decision.

Time to make a decision. because it says, 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?

[29 : 03] And they told him, John the Baptist, others say Elijah, others one of the prophets, and he asked them, but who do you say that I am? Peter answered, you are the Christ.

You are the Christ. And up until this point in Mark's gospel, we see that the disciples have been repeatedly slow of understanding. They haven't understand.

Their faithfulness to Jesus has been sporadic and rare, and their heart has been hardened to what Jesus is saying. And that's because they were like the blind man who could only partially see, where they had eyes, but they couldn't see clearly.

They had ears, but they couldn't hear fully. They had a heart, but they couldn't understand completely. But after this discussion over the identity of Jesus and presenting them with all the options, Jesus opens their heart to see clearly.

And then he asks the disciples to make a decision. Who do you say that I am? And then Peter, he steps forward and says, you are the Christ. You are the Christ.

[30 : 13] And what we must be aware of is that Peter's confession here, it's the climax of Mark's gospel. because from the very outset, Mark's gospel has been about identifying who Jesus is.

In fact, from the very first verse of this gospel account, Mark has told us that that was his intention. He said right at the beginning, this is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And throughout his gospel, Mark has retold us all the events of Jesus' life, all the parables, all the miracles, all his preaching, where Jesus went, what Jesus was doing.

And Mark's sole desire is that we would be asking ourselves, who is this Jesus? Who is this Jesus? And all the time, the storyline is building and building and building and building up to this great climax where Jesus finally asks his disciples to make a decision.

Who do you say that I am? And Peter, having witnessed everything, having sat at the feet of Jesus, having heard everything, having heard all the parables, having seen all the miracles, having experienced so much from Jesus, having been with Jesus from the very beginning, Peter, he doesn't fall in with the public opinion.

[31 : 36] He doesn't say that Jesus is John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets. Peter finally understands who Jesus is and he says, you are the Christ.

You are the Christ. He gets it. You are the promised Messiah. You are God's chosen King. You are the anointed Saviour whom God has sent into the world.

You are the fulfilment of all the Old Testament prophecies. They all pointed to you. You are the Son of God. You are the hope of our salvation. You are Lord.

Caesar isn't Lord. No, you are Lord. You are the Christ. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And in this confession of the identity of Jesus, Peter received light and salvation.

He received light and salvation because he confessed who Jesus is. And that's the promise of the gospel.

[32 : 41] If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, that he is the Christ, that he's the Son of God, and if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then the promise is you will be saved.

You will be saved. But Jesus solemnly warns us, whosoever confesses me before men, him will I also confess before my father in heaven.

But whoever denies me before men, him or her, will I also deny before my father who is in heaven.

And so my friend, you have to make a decision about this Jesus. you have to make a decision. Will you confess him? He is Lord, you are the Christ, you are my savior.

Or will you deny him? Will you deny him? Who is this Jesus? Who is this Jesus?

[33 : 53] Because either Jesus is a liar, either Jesus is a lunatic, or Jesus is Lord. He is either a liar, a lunatic, or he is Lord.

And that is a question which we all have to answer. Who is Jesus? Is Jesus a liar? And if he is a liar, don't listen to him.

Don't follow him. Don't look to him for your salvation. If he is a liar, don't look to him. is he a lunatic?

And if Jesus is a lunatic, then he's not God, he's not a saviour, he's not the Christ. So don't look to him either. Or is Jesus Lord?

Is Jesus Lord? And if Jesus is Lord, you must bow down before him. and you must confess that he is Lord.

[34 : 56] You must ask him to forgive you your sin and you must plead with him that he would open your eyes and see that you would see who he is and what he has done.

My friend, if Jesus is Lord, then you must acknowledge him as the king over your life. Who is Jesus? Is he a liar?

Is he a lunatic? My faithful friend J.C. Ryle, when commenting on what Peter said, Peter's confession of Jesus, he said, there are many who know the name of Christ and acknowledge him as one who came into the world to save sinners.

And these people regularly worship in buildings set apart for his service, just like today. However, says Ryle, few thoroughly realize that he is very God, the one mediator, the one high priest, the only source of life and peace, their own shepherd and their own friend.

Then J.C. Ryle, he concludes by saying, may we never rest until we can say of this Christ, my beloved is mine and I am his.

[36 : 15] May we never rest until we can say of this Christ, my beloved is mine and I am his. My friend, you have to make a decision about Jesus.

And your decision is a decision of life and death. your decision is a decision of being saved or being lost. Your decision is a decision of heaven or hell.

Your decision it's your decision it's not the decision of public opinion it's not the decision of other people it's not the decision of your parents it's not the decision of your wife it's not the decision of your husband it's not the decision of your children it's your decision it's your decision because Jesus is asking you today who do you say that I am who do you say that I am and I hope and pray that every one of us will leave here saying with a hymn writer having made a decision I have decided to follow Jesus no turning back no turning back the world behind me the cross before me no turning back no turning back

Jesus is asking you today who do you say that I am who do you say that I am you have a decision to make my friend please make the right one because it has eternal consequences may the Lord bless these thoughts let us pray O Lord our gracious God we give thanks that Jesus has revealed himself to us help us Lord we pray to respond to say that Jesus is my Lord my Saviour he is my Christ he is the one who loved me and gave himself for me all that we would confess him as the Saviour of our life Lord bless us we pray bless thy word to our souls apply it to our hearts that we O Lord would hear and live do us good then we pray keep us for we know that we cannot keep ourselves and do us good for Jesus' sake

Amen we shall conclude by singing in Psalm 43 Psalm 43 it's on page 264 in the blue book singing from verse 3 down to the end of the psalm Psalm 43 from verse 3 O send thy light forth and thy truth let them be guides to me and bring me to thine holy hill in where thy dwellings be then to God's altar will I go to God's to God my chiefest joy yea God my God thy name to praise my heart I will employ down to the end of the psalm of Psalm 43 to God's praise O send thy light forth on thy truth let them be guides to me and bring me to thy holy hill shall know to Lord through God

[40 : 43] Jesus Christ He brought my God I need to praise My heart I will employ Why art thou then custom my soul What should discourage thee And why with cleansing thoughts Are thou disquieted in me Still trusted God

For him to praise Good cause I yet shall have Be of my countenances The help of my God That doth me save The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father The fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all Now and forevermore Amen