

Mark 8:27-35  
September 16, 2018 – 17<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

## Who Do You Say I AM? *The Messiah*

- ✦ **Bold confession** (vv.27-30)
- ✦ **Following under the cross** (vv.31-35)

In the Name of Jesus, the Lord's Messiah, dearly redeemed believers:

How important is your identity? If it's stolen, what a mess! Comedies like *Identity Thief* make us laugh until you suddenly have an extra mortgage or a criminal record. Convincing the authorities you're you proves the Proverb: "***A good name is more desirable than great riches....***" (Proverbs 22:1 NIV84)

Is God giving us a taste of our own medicine? Ruining others' good name with gossip breaks the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment. Swearing violates the 2<sup>nd</sup>. What is God's Name for Americans identifying as "Nones"? Survey: "What faith / tradition / religion are you?" They answer: "None." Yet that still leaves them with their own religion. If all I knew of religion is what's in the news, I'd be a "None" too. But I'm a Christian because of the unflinching honesty of the Bible. Jesus asks His disciples the key question of His identity: **Who Do You Say I AM?** Peter's answer sounds good, but he exposes a lie behind his...

### ✦ **Bold confession** (vv.27-30)

Look at where we are. Jesus has passed the peak of His popularity Feeding the 5,000. John 6 records how He then preached His *Bread of Life Discourse*, only to have the multitudes disappear. Why? Jesus' identity. He said none can make up their own religion. You must believe in Jesus in order to be saved. Result? The crowds disappeared. Jesus' painful question to His disciples, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" was met by Peter's first **Bold confession**: "***Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.***" (John 6:68f EHV<sup>1</sup>)

Jesus needed a vacation up north with the Twelve for time alone teaching them before the biggest tragedy of their lives. Looming back in Jerusalem: the cross. Now Jesus is teaching them in "***the villages around Caesarea Philippi***" (8:27) in sight of Mount Lebanon, today the only ski resort in Israel. It's near the springs that feed the Jordan River where jungle growth of bamboo will soon give way to fields and finally deserts a few hours to the south. But first Peter gives another **Bold confession**.

Then as now the question of Jesus' identity was hotly debated. Opinions ranged from "***John the Baptist***" to "***Elijah***" to "***one of the prophets.***" Jesus quickly guides His disciples to the key question for any age and specifically for our Fall Semester of Growth Groups: **Who Do You Say I AM?**

Peter's answer could not have been more clear, more "right on." "***You are the Christ, The Messiah.*** Both mean "the Anointed One," promised by God down through centuries of prophets to be the Savior of the world. That's another reason I'm convinced the Bible is God's truth. Who could make this up? None. Who would keep promising a Savior-***Messiah*** as God's Son to sacrifice Himself for the sins of the world? None. So why would Jesus warn them? *Don't tell anyone about me.* By this time in Jewish history the rabbis had concluded that prophecies about the Suffering Servant (e.g., Isaiah 53) must be about someone else, not ***The Messiah.*** They imagined ***The Messiah*** as a political hero to relieve them of cruel Roman oppressors. Other interpreters mused that the suffering one was a second Messiah. Which of Jesus' disciples wanted to accept the truth about His real identity? None.

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<sup>1</sup> EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2017. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle.

## ✠ Following under the cross (vv.31-35)

***“Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things; be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the experts in the law; be killed; and after three days rise again.”***

It's only natural to try to *test* the invisible, invincible, inexplicable God by feeble, fickle human opinion. It's like trying to measure the universe with a broken tape measure. Acceptance of Jesus as ***The Messiah*** can only happen by a merciful miracle of God's grace replacing our opinions with a heart that trusts God's truth. Religious leaders closely watched Jesus, and when His words and conduct did not match their opinions of what ***The Messiah*** should be, none wanted Him, especially not **the cross**.

Peter does not like Jesus' plain words at all. He scolded Jesus. Peter is looking at the beautiful ruby of God's plan to save all people, but wants to varnish it with human opinion. How would you react? Jesus' stinging rebuke is for us too. The Lord's ***Messiah*** refuses to let our best intentions ruin us.

Watch best intentions drive into flood waters and drown. See sincere folks insisting human beings can control the weather. What myths they spread! But Jesus is not ***“a muddied spring”*** or ***“a polluted well”*** as if the Bible is legend. God's ***Messiah*** stands strong as God's Truth. Jesus is not like a righteous man ***“who gives way to the wicked.”*** (Proverbs 25:26) Jesus knew how to give a loving rebuke when a brother sins. (Luke 17:3) He sees this sin attacking the hearts of His other disciples too. We need Him now.

Peter with his Satanic opinion is so sincere, so sure he has Jesus' best interests in mind. He demands his “Messiah” of glory, not the shame of **the cross** like a suffering criminal. Peter speaks from the winter of our own discontent when impatience in heart and home and church distort our view of glory. My heart cannot navigate the flood waters of human opinion without falling from mercy.

The Inuit of Canada and Greenland take a piece of wolf bone, sharpen both ends to a point, coil it, and then freeze it in blubber. They put it on a path that bears follow, then wait. After a while a bear waddles down the path, spots the blubber, and swallows it. The moment he swallows it, he has killed himself. Every step, every movement, causes the sharpened bone to slash and cut the stomach of the bear. The Inuit follow the bear, and when he finally collapses from internal bleeding, they pounce for the kill. The person who insists on his own way has no way to life, only self destruction with every step he takes.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus revealed God's mercy when He ***called the crowd and his disciples together and said to them, “If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”*** **The cross** of the Christian is more than human suffering from storms of weather, finance, marriage or health. The Christian *cross* includes all that a Christian is called to suffer simply because he is a Christian. “Cross-bearing *self* denial is to take Christ and His word seriously in both the law and the gospel....It is the struggle to deny *self* and instead to follow Jesus. It is the struggle to follow him willingly, even joyfully, in defiance of the adulterous and sinful generation that still remains in one's own heart as well as in the world. It is a *self* denial that begins with a struggle in the will, continues with struggle in the mind, in reason, and is plagued with obstacles from beginning to end in the emotions....Cross bearing is *self* denial for the sake of Jesus and his Word....The cross of the Christian is designed and given by a gracious God to bring us again and again to those saving and central truths.”<sup>3</sup> We need God's forgiving grace in Christ alone through Word and sacrament to bear **the cross** of God's own choosing, not our foolish desires for glory here. First **the cross** and then the crown of glory there!

Many times Jesus says this: ***“Anyone who loves his life destroys it. And the one who hates his life in this world will hold on to it for eternal life.”*** (John 12:25) Thank-you, Jesus, for your loving rebuke. Thank-you for being the One, the Only, the merciful ***Messiah***. “The love of Jesus, what it is, None but His loved ones know.” (TLH 350:4) Amen.

<sup>2</sup> Dunn, Ronald. *Surviving Friendly Fire*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001, pp. 38f.

<sup>3</sup> Deutschlander, Daniel M. *THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS*. NPH, 2008, p. 30f, 63. Order: 1-800-662-6022.

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