

No Greater Question

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Mark 8:27-30

Let's turn our attention to the text before us this morning. Mark, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pens the following words:

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." And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.
Mark 8:27-30

Brothers and sisters, "The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever" Isaiah 40:8.

THE LOCATION OF THE TEST (v.27a)

And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi.

Caesarea Philippi was located about 25 miles, a full day's walk, northeast of the Sea of Galilee. As far as Jewish territory was concerned, Caesarea Philippi was considered the northernmost extremity. The city was built on an outcrop of rock at the base of Mt. Hermon. It was an old city that had been rebuilt by Herod the Great, who harbored great disdain toward Jesus, and later beautified by his brother, Herod Philip. Herod Philip named the city Caesarea Philippi, which means "Caesar's town," after Caesar Augustus, who ruled the Roman Empire for 57 years. As a matter of fact, Caesarea Philippi was home to a gleaming marble temple, built by Herod Philip, to honor Caesar, who was considered a god. The citizens of this city were required to enter this temple at least once a year and place a pinch of incense on a burning altar and proclaim, "Caesar is Lord!"

This geographic area, where Jesus asks His disciples about His identity, was an area of mingled religious influences. Hebrew and pagan worship as well as Roman emperor worship were prevalent. Caesarea Philippi represented all the forces that were vehemently opposed to who Jesus was in His person and work. Some scholars think that while disciples were discussing all the statues and pagan God's, Jesus asked the question, "Who do people say that I am?"

I. TEST QUESTION #1 - WHO DO PEOPLE SAY THAT I AM? (v.27b)

And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

It was customary for students to ask questions of their rabbi, but here, Jesus asks the questions and the disciples do the answering. Normally people ask what others *do*, not what they *are*. Jesus' question is one that has been on the disciples' minds since the stilling of the storm, "Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey Him?" Mark 4:41. Jesus did not ask this question because He didn't know who He was or because He had a twisted dependence on the opinion of others. He asked this question as an introduction to an even more important follow-up question.

Jesus had become a well-known figure; He could certainly attract a crowd. The report or the news of His itinerary often spread quickly, and this was before the days of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The crowds would find out about where He was going and they would show up to be there, to hear Him and to see Him heal the sick. But who was Jesus? Who was it that the crowds thought they were following, that they were coming to hear?

A. VOICES FROM THE PAST. (v.28)

And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets."

a. John the Baptist

Herod thought that John the Baptist, who he had beheaded, had been reincarnated and risen from the dead as Jesus (cf. Mark 6:14-15). This is interesting since John and Jesus had been seen together publically. They were also quite different in personality and ministry (cf. Matthew 11:16-19). John didn't perform any miracles, but Jesus often performed miracles.

b. Elijah

Elijah was taken to heaven in a fiery whirlwind. The Jews saw Elijah as the forerunner and herald of the Messiah. In Jewish minds, Elijah would return and bring order to chaos, thus preparing the way for the Messiah. When Elijah came, the Messiah would not be far behind.

c. One of the prophets

In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses foretold, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers - it is to him you shall listen." To liken Jesus to John, Elijah, or a prophet was to rank Him among the great figures of Israel's long history. This is an indication of Jesus' preeminent standing in the popular mind. Yet, even these comparisons are inadequate.

d. Other voices

The Pharisees

“He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?” John 10:20.

The Scribes

“He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons” Mark 3:22.

The Jewish Sanhedrin

“He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?” They answered, “He deserves death.” Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, “Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?” Matthew 26:65-68.

Jesus’ family and friends

“He is out of his mind” Mark 3:21.

e. Not everyone was mistaken about Jesus’ identity.

John the Baptist

“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29.

The Angels

And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” Luke 2:10–11.

The Roman Centurion

And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” Mark 15:39.

The blind man

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. John 9:35–38

The demons

And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" Mark 5:7.

f. What did Jesus think of Himself?

Jesus saw himself as the Messiah and God's Son. He demanded faith and obedience from His followers. He accepted worship and full commitment from His disciples. He viewed his death as a sacrifice and atonement for sin. It was not just an example, but a ransom. Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" Mark 10:45.

B. VOICES FROM THE PRESENT.

a. The **Muslim**

The Quran mentions Jesus, or *Isa*, 25 times, but differently each time. The Quran explains that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary (19:20–21) and is honored highly in this and the next world (3:45–47). The Quran also refers to him as the "spirit from God," someone "blessed by God," the "word from God," and a "prophet - messenger of God." However, while Muslims accept that Jesus was a servant, teacher, and lover of God's Word, they do not believe that He was divine or the Son of God.

b. The **Hindu**

There are many varieties of Hinduism, which embrace a complex and divergent set of beliefs, and for this reason, it is difficult to isolate a unified set of beliefs related to Jesus. Most Hindu's believe that Jesus is just one of an estimated 333 million gods. They would see Jesus as a virtuous, maybe even holy man. They see Him as a wise teacher, but He just sits in a line of countless others gods. They don't believe Jesus is the only way of salvation. Instead, Hindus believe in the unceasing cycle of life, death, and reincarnation. Your karma, which is the result of your actions, good or bad - determines how you will be reincarnated in your next life.

c. The **Mormon**

In more than half of the states in the U.S., Mormonism is the fastest-growing religion. Mormons believe that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are three separate gods. The Book of Mormon teaches that only fools say the Bible is sufficient and that other scripture is not needed. 2 Nephi 29:6 says, "Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible." In the other Mormon books, they teach Jesus was the first baby born to Father God and Mary, his own daughter. Jesus is the spirit brother of Lucifer. But Mormons

don't believe that Jesus alone is the only way to heaven. They believe they will get there on the basis of their own good works.

d. **Humanist / Secularist / Atheist**

They deny that Jesus ever existed at all.

Listen to this quote from atheist Penn Jillette, of the magician duo, Penn & Teller. Penn says, "I've always said that I don't respect people who don't proselytize. I don't respect that at all. If you believe that there's a Heaven and a Hell, and people could be going to Hell or not getting eternal life, and you think that it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward—and atheists who think people shouldn't proselytize and who say just leave me alone and keep your religion to yourself - how much do you have to hate somebody to *not* proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?"

e. **Sentimentalized Jesus**

This is picture of Jesus holding a lamb, knocking on a door, and frolicking with children.

f. **Pop Culture**

The culture, for the most part, believes that Jesus was a great teacher; He had some good ideas about loving others and being good to others, but they don't believe that He is the Savior, or that He is God in the flesh. Most people acknowledge His existence, but they refuse to bow to His authority or give Him the worship He demands and deserves.

C. S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity* says, "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

II. TEST QUESTION #2 - WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM? (v.29)

And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ."

The emphasis in verse 29 is on "you". Jesus stressed "you" when He asked this question. He wanted to know whom the disciples, in contrast to the multitudes, believed He was. God has answered and the demons have answered. Now Peter answers! Peter speaks up on behalf of the disciples. The other disciples evidently agreed with his statement and made no objection. Peter's answer:

Mark 8:29 - "You are the Christ." Christ is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew title "Messiah."

Luke 9:20 - "The Christ of God."

Matthew 16:16-17 (combines the two) Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

It's interesting to note that Jesus emphasized the "you" when he asked, "Who do you say that I am?" Now, Peter emphasizes "you" when he answers, "You are the Christ." Peter says, "You, and *you alone* are the Christ." Of all the gods represented in Caesarea Philippi, "You alone are God."

This is the fork in the road that everyone comes to. Your answer to this question, and everyone has an answer, divides eternity. Friends, your confession concerning Christ is a matter of life or death (cf. John 8:21, 24; 1 John 2:22-27; 4:1-3). Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. (cf. Philippians 2:10-11) Jesus is still asking this question today. Who do you say that He is? If He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, how does your life reflect that truth?

CLOSING BENEDICTION

Hear this benediction as we bring our corporate worship to a close this morning. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life" John 6:47. And all God's people said, "Amen!" Go in peace!