

Mark 8:27-9:1
I Can see Clearly Now – Hard Questions
September 19, 2021
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Our series is entitled, "I can see clearly now" and remember we've been saying that spiritual sight is about understanding who Jesus is and his mission. This morning we reach what is probably the climax of the series because in today's reading the issue of Jesus identity is addressed directly.

Jesus asks his disciples two questions, "Who do the crowds say I am?" and "Who do you say I am?" These questions of course go to the heart of Jesus' identity.

Here in Mark 8 we are at the halfway point of Jesus' ministry so these questions are like the mid semester exam for the disciples. The first question, doesn't really have a right or wrong answer, it's just asking what others are saying; but it does set up the disciples for the second question.

So the first question: 'Who do the crowds say that I am?' The disciples answer, "*Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah and still others one of the prophets.*" The crowds obviously hold Jesus in high regard, John the Baptist and Elijah were both great prophets and it would seem a number of other notable prophets were also in the offering.

Jesus was indeed a prophet, but he wasn't a prophet as people would usually think of prophets. Prophets usually point people to the future and what God's plan is for the future. Jesus was causing God's plan to appear before people's eyes right now. We have seen that with the feeding of the 4,000, and with the healing of deaf and mute man, and the blind man. In fact, Jesus was saying and doing a lot of things that were beyond the realm of simply being a prophet.

The crowd's answer to this question exalts Jesus; but not sufficiently, not nearly enough. Even a prophet as great as John the Baptist said, "*I am not worthy to untie the thong of his saddle.*"

Now I think Jesus is really clever. By asking his disciples to first consider what other people are saying, the disciples have the opportunity to think about the alternatives a bit more deeply for themselves. When Peter gives his answer that Jesus is the Messiah it's not because he hasn't considered other options. Peter could have just gone along with the crowd but he actually comes to a better opinion - He is the Messiah.

It is interesting to note where Jesus conducts his survey. It was on the way to Caesarea-Philippi. This was in fact a pagan area in the very north of the country. It was a place where there were Temples and shrines to many other gods.

In 2014 Lynda and I were in Caesarea-Philippi.

- So there was the temple of Zeus,
- the court of pan and the Nymphs,
- the grotto of pan,
- the temple of Augustus.
- the temple of the sacred goats
- the temple of the dancing goats

When Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" he does it in the context of all the other gods of his day. And he is asking his disciples to make a comparison.

He is saying who do you want to follow?

Who really has the words of life? These pagan gods or me?

Do you want to follow them, or do you want to follow me?

Have you worked out yet that I am the Messiah?

There are some people who think it was easier back then because everyone believed in God, whereas today atheism is the default position, and we have all these other religions as well and it's not right to say any one is more true than any other. Back then the spiritual marketplace was full of alternatives as well. But the Apostles came to the conclusion that Jesus was who he claimed to be, the Messiah and only way of salvation.

The disciples were aware of a lot of options - Jewish options – Jesus was just another one of the prophets; and pagan options - one of the idols that were all around them. But they came to the very settled conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah.

Last week do you recall what Jesus said to the blind man after he was healed? He said, "Don't go into the village, go straight home." Time and again Jesus seems to want to hide the fact that he was the Messiah. Look at verse 30. Peter has just confessed that Jesus is the Messiah and what does Jesus say. READ v30

Why would he do that? Wouldn't he want the message proclaimed from the rooftops?

Well one of the reasons I suggested last week was that the people's understanding was so distorted that if the word got around it would be a gross misunderstanding of what it meant to be the Messiah.

Jesus understanding of the Messiah was so different to popular thinking.

Look at the verse which follows. v31

This is a radically different view of the Messiah from what people expected.

-The popular understanding was that the Messiah would be a glorious king who would restore the political fortunes of the nation by kicking out the Roman Kingdom and bringing in God's Kingdom.

-Jesus' understanding was the Messiah would be a suffering servant who would be rejected and crucified.

These are polar opposites.

The cross was a symbol of shame and failure rather than power and victory.

I think Jesus knows that if his teaching and miracles became a popular political movement he would be completely misunderstood.

-Jesus wants his disciples to understand the true nature of the Messiah's mission.

-Jesus is trying to prepare his disciples for what will come - the cross.

One person who totally misunderstood the nature of the Messiah's mission, of course, was Peter. When Jesus explains that the Messiah will suffer and his enemies will kill him; Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him (32). This is not Peter's idea of the Messiah. This would be like the Captain of the team saying, "We're going to let the opposition flog us today. Make sure you let in at least 20 goals and don't score any yourself."

What sort of strategy is that!!! Jesus was talking a loser's strategy. Peter's understanding and the popular understanding was that the Messiah was about a winning strategy for the nation.

Jesus of course will have the power and the victory but it will be seen in his willingness to go to the cross to die for the sins of the world.

This is the plan, this is the mission, and Jesus won't be deflected from it. The cross appears to be defeat but in actual fact it is Christ's victory.

Jesus tells them to not tell anyone until after his resurrection. It's only after his resurrection that he will give them the Great Commission and send them into all the world with a true understanding of what it means for Jesus to be Messiah and reign as king in his kingdom.

Now I find it fascinating the way Jesus regularly integrates good doctrine with practical discipleship. And he does it here again. You see, discovering Jesus is the Messiah is not just a theological puzzle to solve in your head; it is a life puzzle that calls you to follow Jesus. Look at vv34-38.

Having predicted the cross for himself he says that if you want to follow me, you too will have to deny yourself and take up your cross.

Hardly what the disciples were expecting. Jesus was at the height of his popularity;

-There is the story of the feeding of the 4,000 three weeks ago?

-Then there was the ever popular ministry of healing people - the deaf and blind.

I suspect the disciples were really looking forward to being the top dogs in this sort of kingdom. But what does Jesus tell them now. This Kingdom is about

- denying yourself and taking up a cross.
- It's about giving your life away serving others.
- It's about not being ashamed of the name of Jesus when the going gets tough.

Jesus is basically saying you have to have your life turned upside down and inside out. Some evangelists promise an easy life with riches and everything turning out according to your dreams. That's not the Gospel Jesus taught. Jesus is actually talking about dark and dangerous days that lie ahead. But he is saying if you deny yourself and take up your cross you will find your life and save it. Jesus is saying follow me and that will be enough.

So when we ask the question, Who is this man? I believe it is not just about working out a theological riddle in our heads. It's about accepting the life changing implications of declaring Jesus is the Messiah.

PEREGIAN

This morning Kate and David McKnight are being baptised. In taking this step they are declaring Jesus is the Messiah and that he has changed their lives. David and Kate will declare:

I turn to Christ.

I repent of my sin.

I reject selfish living.

I renounce Satan and all evil.

They will be declaring that Jesus is better than anything this world has to offer. The idols of this world pale into insignificance compared to the salvation offered in Christ.

They will be taking seriously Jesus' words to deny self, take up their cross and follow him. And declaring this is the path to truly seeing clearly - spiritual sight in mind, heart and lived experience.

Jesus said those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.

God bless you David and Kate as you make your stand of faith today.

TEWANTIN

Someone who has been feeling the life changing implications of faith in Jesus recently is Pat Johns. This morning Pat has reaffirmed her baptism promises. She has reaffirmed that Jesus is Messiah and the way of salvation. So she has declared

I turn to Christ.

I repent of my sin.

I reject selfish living.

I renounce Satan and all evil.

Pat is declaring that Jesus is better than anything this world has to offer.

The idols of this world pale into insignificance compared to the salvation offered in Christ.

She is taking seriously Jesus' words to deny self, take up her cross and follow him. And declaring this is the path to truly seeing clearly - spiritual sight in mind, heart and lived experience.

Jesus said those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.

God bless you Pat as you make your stand of faith today.

Our Church is committed to the confession of faith in Mark 8. That Jesus is Lord and Messiah and -thus we want everyone to come to know him.

-thus we are writing a plan, our Vision 26, why 26? Because it is a five year plan.

We are setting ourselves some goals for taking the message of Jesus into our community.

There are three ways you can be involved...

1. Prayer Groups You have an opportunity to contribute through our prayer groups. There is nothing more important you can do than pray.
2. Anonymous Questionnaire - Here you can contribute ideas and let us know what you think.
3. All of Church Planning Day - This is on the 2nd of October and will be an opportunity for you to do some work on the details of the plan.

If you are convinced Jesus is Lord and Messiah, then get involved in the plan.

My friends today we come to the crunch point of what it means to see clearly.

Jesus gives his disciples a little test.

-Who do the crowd say I am?

-Who do you say I am?

Are you convinced that he is the Messiah? If you are, then you have no choice but to take up your cross and follow him.

To take up the cross is a call to die.

It is a call to die to self.

So my friends let me ask you these questions –

Are you caught up on a work treadmill? Come and die

Are you bored with retirement?

Come and die

Are you anxious?

Come and die

Are you complacent?

Come and die

Wherever you are in your life, hand it over to Jesus. Come and die.

Jesus said whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will find it.

This is the only way to see clearly.