

## **Questions Jesus Asked, Part Two**

***Mark 8:22-30***

\* It sets the stage for the Messiah.

- *Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-21; Isaiah 35:5*

\* It is paralleled with the next story.

- *Mark 8:18, 8:27-30*

1. The Place.

2. The Question.

3. The Answer.

- *Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:30-33*

- *Christ awaits my answer.*

Today, with my life, my answer is: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Questions Jesus Asked, Part Two

### *Mark 8:22-30*

Last week we started our summer series called, "Questions Jesus Asked." In the Gospels, Jesus asks somewhere around 307 questions. There are also 183 times that people asked Jesus a question, but out of those 183 questions he was asked, Jesus gave a direct answer only 8 times. Here's the point: Jesus clearly preferred to *ask* questions instead of giving direct answers,<sup>1</sup> and he did that intentionally. *Every* time Jesus taught, spoke, or did something, his message and methods were always on purpose. That means his questions are important.

*Any* interaction Jesus had with anyone in the Gospels is an interaction he can and will have with *each of us*.<sup>2</sup>

Remember that last week I told us to **never read Scripture as a spectator; always read Scripture as a participant. We are in the narrative.**

So every question Jesus asked people in the Gospels, he's asking *us*. Understanding what Jesus is really asking is essential if we are going to be able to answer his questions honestly and fully and see our lives transformed. Our answers to Jesus' questions will determine the depth of our relationship with Jesus, and will determine the success of our Christian life, the fruit of our Christian life, and the impact of our Christian life. We must answer Jesus' questions well if we are going to accomplish a life of purpose in this world that God has for us.

Remember too that we talked about the fact that how we hear the question reveals more about *us* than it does Jesus; if we don't hear it correctly, it reveals the state of *our* heart, the state of *our* understanding, the state of *our* faith, and it reveals what we really think about Jesus. Hearing the question correctly is imperative, and that's why we are taking the time on these Sundays to unpack them. Of course, we can't answer them correctly if we don't hear them correctly.

Let me give you another example of how we need to listen carefully, because our ability to hear can be changed by our thinking. Maybe you've seen this video on Tic-Toc or Instagram or Facebook, but it really is fascinating. In the video, you will hear a word that has a lot of static with it. You will see on the screen either the word "Brainstorm" or the word "Green needle" – *what you will hear depends on which word you are reading*. Watch the video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyOdarf0wfl>), (warning: it's a low quality video) and you'll see what I mean.

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<sup>1</sup> Dale and Sandy Larsen, *Questions Jesus Asks* (Intervarsity Press, Downer's Grove, IL) 2019

<sup>2</sup> Bible Study Series: Best Questions in the Bible <https://jesusplusnothing.com/series/post/JesusQuestions>

Is that weird? The explanation is that the original word was actually “green needle,” but it’s not very clearly said, and our brains don’t like uncertainty, so your brain will take the information it can gather from your eyes and ears and determine what your brain thinks you *should* be hearing. So when you look at the printed word, that’s what your brain tells you to hear. The point of all this is that our biases and our misconceptions, our wrong thinking and even our sin, can cause us to hear the question that Jesus asks us, differently than he intended. So let’s pray about that.

Today’s question comes in a conversation Jesus had with his disciples. I’d like to ask you to honor God’s Word by standing as I read it to you today:

When they arrived at Bethsaida, some people brought a blind man to Jesus, and they begged Him to touch the man and heal him. Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. Then, spitting on the man's eyes, He laid His hands on him and asked, "Can you see anything now?" The man looked around. "Yes," he said, "I see people, but I can't see them very clearly. They look like trees walking around." Then Jesus placed His hands on the man's eyes again, and his eyes were opened. His sight was completely restored, and he could see everything clearly. Jesus sent him away, saying, "Don't go back into the village on your way home."

Jesus and His disciples left Galilee and went up to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. As they were walking along, He asked them, "Who do people say I am?" "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say You are one of the other prophets." Then He asked them, "But who do you say I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Messiah." But Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about Him." (Mark 8:22-30, niv)

Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God – thanks be to God! Thank you for standing; you can be seated.

Some of you with a really good memory might recognize that I spoke on this passage a year ago, but it was abbreviated because we were using pre-recorded messages at that time, so it was less than 15 minutes long. Well I wanted to take the time to unpack this more, especially since I made reference to this passage in last week’s sermon.

Now, to make sure we are hearing the question, we have to look at the context, right? Because like I said last week, “Context is \_\_\_\_\_*...everything!*” So let’s look at the context of this passage that really involves two stories – Mark 8:22-26, and then 27-30. Let’s dissect the first.

First, Jesus is taking this blind man outside the village to heal him. Why did he do that? For a couple reasons. The man doesn’t want a crowd gathered to watch him, so it shows Jesus’ genuine tenderness and respect toward the man and his privacy. Then Jesus spits in the man’s eyes. Why does he do that? Most likely because the man believed in the common thought at that time that spit had healing power. You hear that and might think “Those silly ancient uneducated people. Spit doesn’t heal things.” But before you get too proud of yourself, let me ask you this: when you cut

your finger, what do you do? There you go smarty pants – that notion is still around today.

Then the man is healed, but it happens in stages – it doesn't seem to "work" right the first time. Why is that? Well, some speculate that Jesus was being sensitive to the man, because for the man to be totally sighted in the intense Middle Eastern sun would blind him again! But most probably, this healing holds a deeper, more significant meaning.

First...

### **It *sets* the *stage* for the Messiah.**

Jesus is about to establish the fact that he is the Messiah, God's anointed, chosen Son, the Christ. And one of the indicators or signs or credentials of the Messiah was that he would restore sight to the blind. One of the Messianic "ID cards" is found in Isaiah 61:1-2. It says:

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon Me, for the LORD has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. He has sent Me to tell those who mourn that the time of the LORD's favor has come..." (Isaiah 61:1-2, nlt)

In fact, Jesus used this very passage of Scripture to introduce himself to the Jews by reading it in the synagogue. In Luke 4:18-21 it tells the story. Jesus stood up and read:

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, for He has anointed Me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come." He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at Him intently. Then He began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!" (Luke 4:18-21, nlt)

*That* was Jesus' first public reading of Scripture that began his ministry.

And in Isaiah 35:5 it also says:

"And when He comes, He will open the eyes of the blind and unplug the ears of the deaf." (Isaiah 35:5, nlt)

One of the signs of the Messiah was that He would heal the blind. So this story sets the stage to tell us that Jesus is God. Do you want a sign that Jesus is the Messiah? Here's your sign!

Secondly with this story...

### **It is *paralleled* with the *next story*.**

This story of Jesus healing the blind man is juxtaposed with the *next* story about the disciples declaring who Jesus is. Here's why: in the healing we see a man, totally blind, then partially seeing, then totally seeing clearly – completely healed.

In the second story, we see the disciples being men who are spiritually blind and ignorant, then beginning to understand, then finally beginning to be able to see who Jesus is. Because of this parallel, it's worth making note of the spiritual eye-exam Jesus just gave the disciples in verse 18 of the same chapter. After feeding four thousand people from just a few pieces of bread and fish, the disciples were still not seeing clearly who Jesus was, so Jesus says:

“You have eyes—can't you see?” (Mark 8:18, nlt)

But finally, like the healed blind man, they begin to see clearly.

That brings us to that next part of the story that includes the question, in Mark 8:27-30. This short little passage has been called the key that unlocks the entire Gospel. It is the spiritual and literary center, and the climax of Mark's account. It is the “grand aha!” or the holy “light bulb” finally turning on. The disciples are finally figuring out who Jesus is.

Up to this point Jesus' ministry was to the multitudes, but from here on in it is primarily to his leaders – the disciples. That's because Jesus must make sure the disciples understand who he is. And that's because the shadow of the cross has fallen on Jesus' path; he will be crucified only six months away from this event. The time was short, so it was imperative to Jesus that the disciples knew who he is. They *must* understand this because time is running out.

Jesus knew that the disciples' concept of the Messiah was messed up. You see, they believed the Messiah would be a supernatural conqueror who would literally torture and destroy *everyone* except the Jews, until only the Jews were left to enjoy their enemies being broken and thrown into Hell. They thought the Messiah would be a destructive conqueror in history; violent, nationalistic, and vengeful. But Jesus was *nothing* like that, and so he had to start setting the disciples straight on who he was and what he would do; the time was getting short. (By the way, do you wonder why, at the end of this passage, Jesus tells his disciples not to tell anyone who he is? Here's why: it was to prevent (one) being set up as a temporal king and, (two) to avoid being killed too soon. Jesus was managing the perception and the timing of everything.)

Now, there are three things I want us to see in this encounter, and this is where Jesus' question is going to probably really start getting through to you.

The first thing we need to see is...

## 1. The *Place*.

We need to see the place where this conversation happens. Jesus is in Caesarea Philippi, and it is not accidental or coincidental. Jesus spent most of his time in Galilee, but this place was over 14 miles out of the way – it was a 30 mile round trip,

on foot. It was a long way off course. But Jesus *chose* to go to this place to ask this question. Why *this* place? What's so significant about it? Well Caesarea Philippi was the place where gods were born and made. In case you are wondering, it's located in the present-day Golan Heights.

First, legend had it that this was the birthplace of Baal worship. Baal is the infamous false god and idol of the Old Testament stories. Throughout Israelite history God's people were drawn away from the True God to worship Baal, and God's prophets kept butting up against Baal. For a long time, the place was actually called "Baalinas," just to signify Baal's birthplace.

Secondly, Greek Mythology said that this was the birthplace of Pan – the Greek god of nature. So for a while it was also called "Paneas." In modern times, Pan came to be associated with paganism and with Satan himself.

To this day, the archaeological site is also called "Banias," which is a combination of the two – Pan and Baal.

Third, in Jesus' time there was a magnificent marble temple that was built as a worship center to the ruling Emperor and self-appointed "god," Caesar Augustus. So it was also a center of human pride and self-worship.

The fourth thing about this location is that, even for Jews, it was packed with memories of God's miracles. There is a natural spring of water in Caesarea Philippi that was considered to be the origin of the Jordan River, and it was around the Jordan River that God did so much for the Jewish people.

All of that was wrapped up in *this* location, and it was in all of *that*, for the first time in Mark's g gospel, Jesus is declared to be the Christ.

So you can begin to see why Jesus chose *this* place; he deliberately established his Divinity, confessed he was the Christ, in the very presence of the world's gods, human pride, and of the Jewish experience. And listen: *you can bet that if Jesus comes into your life he will establish himself as Lord over every other thing that you worship!*

But there is something else here, too (write this down) – ***Jesus will accept me where I am.*** Jesus went right to the heart of the place that represented the world's misunderstandings about God, and met them *there*. And he comes right to where you are – in all your confusion, pain, misunderstanding and Jesus accepts you, right there where you are, but know that he *will* ask you this question.

That's the place. Now see...

## **2. The Question.**

Why did Jesus want to know what people were thinking about him? We've already established that Jesus *knew* who he was; he wasn't going through any kind of identity crisis. He could care less about the gossip that was going around about him; he wanted to know if the disciples understood who he is. So he started out by

questioning them about what the popular opinion of Jesus was (Their answer was: “people say that you are a prophet, a great teacher, etc.”), then Jesus went straight to the heart of things. He pinpointed the issue by asking them – and he asks us – you – *personally*, “Who do *you* say that I am?” Jesus will *always* do this; “Who do *you* say that I am? I’m not so interested in what others think of me; I want to know what *you* think of me. What about you?” Write this down: **“Jesus asks me this question.”** He asks you today. Whatever you did or didn’t say in the past about him, what do you say *today*? Because the third thing I want us to see in this passage is...

### 3. The ***Answer***.

So here comes Peter. Peter takes it upon himself to speak for everyone (typical for Peter), and makes the courageous statement, “You are the Christ!”

Matthew records this event in 16:13-20, and he says that Jesus points something out to Peter:

“Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because My Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build My church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.” (Matthew 16:16-18, nlt)

Jesus renames Simon to Peter – he now becomes the Rock! (the name “Peter” means “Rock”). It is Peter’s declaration of who Jesus is – the Christ – that is the bedrock foundation of faith upon which the church is built. It is a foundation that remains under our feet of faith to this day.

Peter got the answer correct, right? At least, he would’ve been right in Sunday School. There’s an old joke about a little girl who was listening to the message in children’s church, and the pastor asked the kids, “What is small and brown, has a bushy tale, climbs trees, and eats nuts?”

The little girl looked confused, and said to the pastor, “It sure sounds like you’re talking about a squirrel, but I know the answer is Jesus.” The answer in children’s sermons and Sunday School always seems to be Jesus.

The problem is that, even though Peter seems to get the answer right, he still gets it wrong, because in the very next breath, without so much as a commercial break, Jesus had to rebuke Peter:

“He asked them, “But who do you say I am?” Peter replied, “You are the Messiah.” But Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about Him. Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later He would rise from the dead. As He talked about this openly with His disciples, Peter took Him aside and began to reprimand Him for saying such things. Jesus turned around and

looked at His disciples, then reprimanded Peter. "Get away from Me, Satan!" He said, "You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's." (Mark 8:30-33, nlt)

This should be a huge warning to us – even if we get the Sunday School answer right, that doesn't mean we've gotten it right in our hearts and lives. But here's the good news: Jesus accepted Peter *where he was*, and knew full well what Peter *could become*. So he rebuked Peter, in love, in order to correct him and help him. Here's the other deal: whether or not Peter could *become* those things depended upon how Peter answered that question – with his life. You see, for Peter to say, "You are the Christ" was more than intellectual ascent – it *was* his mind (knowing Christ to be the answer to life), but it also became a statement made with his spirit (knowing Christ to be Love and Grace), and an answer he was willing to give with his hands and feet (determined to allow Christ to change him and to obey Christ, eventually being crucified for his faith in Christ – upside down!).

Peter answered the question, and even though he still had to grow, he was on the road to who he could become. And you will be too – depending upon *your* answer.

You see, Christ awaits your answer (write that in – **Christ awaits *my answer***). You cannot leave here today without answering him. You *could* do that, but you understand, don't you, that to *not* answer Jesus' question is in itself an answer? Not giving an answer *is* your answer. To not answer means you are saying, "No, you are not the Christ."

So I want to challenge you to write in *your* answer: "**Today, with my life**, (that's what it means to answer him) **my answer is:** \_\_\_\_\_.

What will you say? As Jesus confronted his disciples so long ago, he questions you today: "Who do *you* say that I am?" Will you say he is a prophet, or a teacher, or the Christ? And keep in mind, your answer does not determine Christ's identity. Your answer does not determine who *he* is – he is Christ regardless of what you say or don't say. Your answer determines *your identity*. His identity is not at stake; *yours* is. Who you are going to be will be determined by how you answer. If you name him Christ in your life, in honest faith, he will accept you right where you are, and he will save you and begin to change you toward the absolute best you could ever be.

*Pause while people write.*

*Prayer*

*2 Peter 3:18 – (May you) grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*