

Who do you say I am?

Introduction: Who are you? What are you doing here? These questions may sound different under different circumstances. This may sound like a surprised security guard finding someone in a restricted area. It may be a friendly greeting to someone you've never met before. But today, we want to ask ourselves these questions.

How do you define who you are? Philosophers, authors over the ages have tried in vain to define existence. You are a child of your parents, a parent of your children, a sibling, a neighbor, an employer or employee. There's a country song right now that talks about how the singer wants to be remembered, and simply says "He was a good man." So, who are you? What are you doing here?

To shed light on this issue, today we consider who Jesus is. There is no shortage of ideas about who Jesus really is, either. Muslims would say that he was a great teacher, but only a lesser prophet. Jehovah's Witnesses say that Jesus was a great teacher, but that he was only a man. There are authors who say that Jesus is a huge cover-up by the church, and some people deny that Jesus even existed. All these people are fumbling around in the blindness of unbelief.

Today we go to the Scriptures, the only authority on the issue, to answer the question that Jesus poses to his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" To know Christ is to know his mission, and the mission of those who follow him.

Today we seek to understand the Mission of Christ, and carry out the mission of a disciple.

I. Understand the Mission of Christ (verses 27 – 33)

In our lesson for today, we see Jesus spending time with his disciples on a journey. They were just finishing up a tour of the regions around Tyre and Sidon. Jesus had just fed the 4,000 and healed a blind man at Bethsaida, and now they were on their way north from the Sea of Galilee.

We are getting down to the last few months of the disciples' training. At this point, they are about a week before the Transfiguration, and about 6 months away from the crucifixion. Jesus has passed the high point of his popularity with the people, and they were now experiencing more opposition from the Jews. Jesus was not interested in being an earthly king, or merely filling their stomachs. During this time, many people stopped following Jesus.

So, Jesus and his disciples were walking along, and he was instructing them during the trip. Jesus asks his disciples who other people thought he was. Jesus asks this as an introduction to a test, just to get them thinking. Jesus wanted them to think about the crowd in terms of faith; he was preparing them to be pastors.

By the answers he received, we can tell that popular opinion was positive, but it was misguided. These answers all agreed that Jesus was an important man. But did you notice that the suggested men were all dead? John the Baptist had been beheaded by Herod two chapters earlier, in Mark chapter 6. Elijah had been dead for 700 years. The prophets were all historical figures, men from times gone by. All these answers said that Jesus was a powerful man, but only a man.

²⁹ **"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"** Jesus is testing here whether popular opinion had tainted their understanding. The disciples knew who he was. They had been there to witness the powerful miracles, hear the preaching, the parables. They had lived and traveled with Jesus for 2 years, and had the benefit of his instruction all along. Their teacher gives them a test. Let's see how they do.

Peter answered, "You are the Christ." Peter, as usual, answers for the group. The disciples, since there is no disagreement, seem to have a correct understanding of whom Jesus is. They know that he is the Christ. But, as we will see, the disciples misunderstood the mission of the Christ.

³⁰ **Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.** The time for this had not yet come. Jesus instructs his disciples to keep quiet right now. The people weren't ready. The disciples weren't ready. The time would come soon, though. Think of the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday, when Jesus says that if the people had not cried out "Hosanna" that the stones would have shouted his praises. So the time was coming, but not quite yet.

While Jesus' disciples were not yet ready to be sent out, Jesus heard in their answer that they were ready for the next stage of their instruction. They knew WHO he was, and now they needed to hear WHAT he came to do. ³¹ **He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.**

This teaching was the heart and core of Jesus' MISSION. Jesus says in this passage that 4 things had to happen. These were necessary. These things were a MUST. He must suffer, must be rejected, must be killed, must rise. This is the action of God's plan of salvation boiled down into one verse. And Jesus just lays it out there for his disciples. He doesn't speak in parables, he doesn't mince words. He spoke plainly to instruct the people.

Why does this upset Peter? Why does he scold Jesus for this? Jesus is telling them the reason he came to earth, and Peter doesn't like it. What gives? Let's look at the next verse.

³³ **But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."** Peter heard what Jesus said, but he didn't get it. Peter missed the big picture. He was staring at a whole bunch of trees, but couldn't see the forest. He could see all the individual pieces, but none of the disciples put it together on their own. It was the Holy Spirit coming on them at Pentecost that opened their eyes to the mystery.

Peter was putting all his trust in an earthly return to power. This is all going to be worth it when Jesus defeats those Romans and the unbelieving Jews. This seems silly compared to saving all of mankind from their sins. Peter put his own interests before God's plan of salvation, and Jesus rebukes him for his selfishness.

How often aren't we just like Peter? All too easily we misunderstand the mission of Christ in our lives. We want a convenient Savior, who will save us from what we think are our biggest problems. We think we know how to prioritize things. But when we get busy, what is the first thing that gets dropped from the schedule: R and R, or personal devotion? When our paycheck runs short, what suffers more: your hobby or your offering? When something bad happens, where do we turn with our troubles: do we go to our Lord first, or only when all else fails?

Thanks be to God that Jesus always knew who he was. Jesus did not get caught up in his own interests or popular opinion, but always had in mind the things of God. His only agenda was to do the Will of his Father. Remember Jesus' baptism, when John the Baptist objected, and said that Jesus should baptize him. Matthew 3:15 - **"Jesus replied, Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness"**. Jesus knew what he had to do. Think of the Garden of Gethsemane, when he prayed: "Not my will, but yours be done." Jesus was self-less in his time, his work. He made sure that he got away with his disciples to pray. Jesus always saw his mission in the big picture. He knew that these things HAD TO HAPPEN to fulfill all righteousness.

He did all those things for you and me. He didn't get lost in the details. He lived in perfect obedience to his Father's Will, but he suffered for our selfishness. All the times we've put our interests before God's, all the times we've gotten in the way of Christ's mission, these sins were paid for by his innocent blood. Jesus had his eyes on the cross, where our sins of selfishness weighed entirely on him. He was entirely selfless, and paid our sentence with his perfect life.

We must not forget the last MUST, though. The final part of God's plan was that Jesus had to rise. This was the whole point: to defeat sin, death, and the power of the devil, Jesus Christ proved his power over death. The grave could not hold him. Satan could not shut him in. Christ always knew that this was his mission.

TRANSITION: So, in view of Jesus resurrection, who are you? You are a dear child of God, whom Jesus bought with his innocent blood. And what are you doing here? You are here to follow Christ, to be his disciples. Once God has clarified Christ's mission for us, we can truly understand our mission, the mission of a disciple.

II. Carry out the Mission of a Disciple (verses 34-35)

Peter and the other disciples had passed the initial test, but then bombed section 2. So Jesus calls everyone together to give a review lesson. ³⁴ **Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."** We see from this verse that there were other disciples in the area beside the 12, but they were not a part of the first conversation. Now Jesus wishes to instruct them all about the true nature of a disciple.

Jesus says that there are three things that someone needs to do if they want to follow him. First of all, that person must deny himself. Renounce all confidence in himself and his own righteousness, and rely on Christ alone. To give up our selfish ambition, and have God's Will as the center of our life. This involves sacrifices in our lives, and avoiding everything that might come between us and our Savior.

Next, you must take up your cross. This is a word picture that should not be lost on us. This picture involves crucifixion, that horrible torture that Jesus endured for us. Prisoners were normally forced to carry their cross, even if they were unwilling to do so. This picture is to pick up that cross willingly. Jesus tells us here that we must be prepared to endure suffering and even death. A true disciple must be willing to be a martyr for Christ. To give your life for your faith.

Thirdly, whoever wants to be a disciple must follow Jesus. This is more than just being a nominal Christian. True disciples follow Jesus in everything. That path leads through humiliation, self-giving love, through death to eternity. Through faith, we follow Jesus all the way.

³⁵ **For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.** This does not mean that we should initiate "kamikaze evangelism." Here Jesus sets forth a paradox for motivation in this life. Our purpose is to stay connected to Christ. If we try to go our own way, we forfeit the forgiveness that Christ has won for us. By ourselves, we are totally lost. But those who stay connected to Christ will lose what this world calls life, and will have their inheritance in Heaven.

Picture a stormy sea. You are on a ship that is being tossed by the huge waves. The ship is dashed on the rocks, and begins to sink. You make it out of the ship, and through the buffeting of the waves, you see the rocks that are an outcropping from the land close behind them. And you find yourself at the edge of those rocks, and you grab on. You turn around to look behind you, and you see the multitude of people clamoring around, looking for safety, but they don't know where to go. What do you do? You could climb over that rock, and continue on toward land. But what about the many others who do not know the way? So instead, you turn around and call to them, showing them the way toward safety. With one hand, you grab onto the rock, and with the other, you snatch people out of the tumultuous sea. This is a picture of our life on this earth. We have a life-and-death rescue mission, and you KNOW the way to safety. Your mission is to stay firmly connected to the rock, God's Word, and to reach out to others. This is a mission of eternal importance, and God uses us as the tools to bring out this miraculous, life-saving work.

Brothers and sisters, we have the comfort of knowing that Jesus always knew who he was, and what he was here to do. He perfectly fulfilled his mission – to save his children from the power of sin. And Jesus instructs us about our mission, to be a true disciple and follow him.

So, the next time someone asks you, "Who are you? What are you doing here?" You can tell them that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, who knew his mission and carried it out perfectly for us. Remember who Jesus is. Understand the mission of the Christ, and Carry out the mission of a disciple.

Amen.