

Mark 8:27-33 The Most Important Question

Read Mark 8:27. Mark had just written that Jesus healed a blind man and was heading to Caesarea Philippi. Jesus had healed a man who needed physical sight and next He was going to deal with spiritual sight. Caesarea Philippi was about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee and over 100 miles from Jerusalem. That gives us an idea of how far Jesus and His disciples walked to present the Gospel. Caesarea Philippi was at the very border of Israel and was primarily populated by Gentiles with a lot of pagan idols found there. It was a center for the worship of Baal and the Phoenician God Pam, who supposedly was born near there. In Jesus' day it was a center of the worship of Caesar. Jesus will stand in contrast to those false gods.

Mark wrote that Jesus and His disciples were on **the way** there while Luke added that Jesus had been praying just prior to this. The phrase "**the way**" was used often in Mark's gospel to move the action forward. While they were walking along Jesus asked two questions of them. First, He asked who the people in general believed He was. The word used there for "**people**" was used to refer to what the popular opinion was on the street, that is what the masses thought, as compared to the religious elite.

Read Mark 8:28. As far as the people in general were concerned, Jesus was one of the good guys. Mark had been telling us that the people listened to His teachings because He did not teach like others. They also marveled at His power, demonstrated in His healings and casting out of demons. While they didn't understand who He was, they thought of Him in terms of a man of God.

One of the reasons for asking that question was to help the disciples understand the difference between popular opinion and the truth. The people who were represented in the answers were undoubtedly good people but they were wrong. One of the messages of this section is that it is not sufficient to simply look upon Jesus as a good man or great teacher. Too many in our culture see Him simply as that. He is so much more.

The first suggestion was that He was John the Baptist who had come back to life. Mark 6:16 tells us that King Herod Antipas was one who believed Jesus was John the Baptist who had been resurrected. Herod was the one who had ordered John's beheading, so the idea that John was alive was scary for him.

The second popular view was that Jesus was Elijah. Read Malachi 4:5. If Jesus was not the Messiah, and few understood at that point that He was, then He had to be the one who was preparing the way for the Messiah. He had power that could come only from God and Israel desperately wanted a Messiah to set them free from Rome.

The third idea was that He was one of the prophets. Moses had talked of one who would come and perhaps that was what they had in mind. Read Deuteronomy 18:15. It had been 400 years

since Israel had had a prophet and undoubtedly every Jew knew of God's promise to Moses and couldn't wait for him to come.

They may have been thinking about Jeremiah. Popular belief was that before the Babylonians invaded Israel and destroyed the temple, Jeremiah rescued some of the furniture, including the Ark of the Covenant, and had hidden it. The belief was that someday he would return and bring the Ark out again, probably at the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom.

The truth is, Jesus wasn't one of the prophets but the one to whom the prophets pointed. He was not just a prophet but the fulfillment of the prophetic promises.

Do you think for a moment that Jesus didn't already know what the people thought of Him? His concern was not their ideas but the understanding of His disciples. To get to that, Jesus asked a second question. Mark 8:29 reads, **"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"**

No question we will ever be asked is more important. The issue is never, "What does your church teach?" It is never "What did your parents believe?" It is never, "What does society believe?" The real issue is **"What do you personally believe about Jesus?"**

Mark wrote, **"Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah.'"** Mark did not say anything about the reaction of Jesus to Peter's confession but simply wrote **"Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about Him."** Jesus did not want the disciples talking about who He really was because the people did not understand the role of the Messiah. They thought only in terms of a political leader in David's line who would overthrow Rome.

Read Matthew 16:17. We must never forget that the spiritual insights that we have are the result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit who came to reveal all truth. If we want to grow spiritually, we must seek God's help via the ministry of the Holy Spirit as we study the Bible.

Read Mark 8:31. This is the first of 3 predictions Mark recorded of Jesus speaking about His impending death and resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:33). Note the word **"must."** There was no question about it. It was absolutely necessary that all of the events associated with Jesus' arrest, trial, death and resurrection occur. It was part of the eternal plan of the triune God, a plan set forth before He created. Read Titus 1:2. It was a plan designed by the triune God. Because He so loved us He was willing to do whatever it took to provide for our redemption, including suffering and dying on the Cross. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked if there was any other way, saying if not, He was willing to go to the Cross. There was no other way. Every part of the eternal plan must be fulfilled.

Definite things had to happen. The verbs Jesus used are all passive verbs meaning that while they would happen to Him, He was part of the planning. Sometimes we think God the Father planned it and Jesus went along with it. The triune Godhead planned it together.

Pause for a moment and try to put yourself in the place of the disciples. We know the story but the disciples did not know it when Jesus announced He would suffer and die. Picture yourself as Peter. You grew up being taught that God was going to one day send an anointed servant, called the Messiah. The Messiah would set up a kingdom that would restore David's kingdom with a

perfect rule. Then Jesus came on the scene. John the Baptist declared He was the Messiah. Jesus taught as no one else had ever taught and He backed up His teachings with miracle after miracle. Only an anointed one, literally a Messiah, could teach and do what Jesus did. Peter believed that Jesus was that promised Messiah and when Peter confessed that belief he was met with approval by Jesus. In his mind the only one question that remained was, “When do we begin to take on Rome?”

And Jesus says, **“Peter, here is the plan. I’m going to suffer and die so let’s head to Jerusalem so we can get on with it.”** Peter’s response, “You don’t die, you take on Rome and win handily. We all know that is what the Messiah will do.”

Mark wrote that Peter kindly took Jesus aside and rebuked Him (v. 32). Can you imagine rebuking Jesus? We have all done it at times. We were sure we knew what God should do for us and how He should do it and when He opted for His better plan we tried to explain that He got it wrong. There is always a danger in making up our minds about how God should act and become upset when He does it differently. Think about how different our world and our eternal future would be had Jesus agreed with Peter, mustered an army and overthrew Rome. If there was no Cross there would be no paying the penalty for our sins. If there was no defeat of death by a resurrection there would simply be a new empire going on for ever and ever. It would be a great place to live but there would be no future there.

Read Mark 8:33, Was Peter’s concern really that bad that Jesus had to call him **“Satan”**? We probably don’t think so, but we forget that whatever is not of God is of Satan. Behavior is either what God wants from us or it is satanic. Spiritual truth is what God has declared to be true and anything else is a lie of Satan.