

QUESTIONS FROM JESUS: "WHO DO PEOPLE SAY I AM?"

THESIS: Believe In Jesus

TEXT: Mark 8:27-38

OPEN: Two weeks ago Minnesota Vikings offensive line coach Tony Sparano was at home getting ready for church, but suddenly dies of heart failure at the age of 56.

In **Mark 8:27-38** let's discover the answer to life's most important question—who Jesus is and why it matters. What does it mean to believe in the Lord?

Mark 8:27a *"Jesus and His disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi."*

Historical: Caesarea Philippi was originally named Paneas after the Greek mythical god Pan. It was considered the last outpost of Israel. Philip the tetrarch inherited the land and renamed it after Caesar Augustus and himself. Caesarea Philippi was a haven for religious shrines and temples in worship of false gods.

Mark 8:27b *"On the way Jesus asked them, 'Who do people say I am?'"*

Illustration: Who do some people say Jesus is today? (From book *So What's The Difference?* by Fritz Ridenour):

1. *Judaism:* This religion does not accept Jesus as God's Son nor as the Messiah.
2. *Hinduism:* They believe that every man is a "god." Gandhi said "It was more than I could believe that Jesus was the only incarnate son of God. And that only he who believed in Him would have everlasting life. If God could have sons, all of us were His sons. If Jesus was like God then all men were like God and could be God Himself."
3. *Jehovah Witness:* They do not believe Jesus is God instead they say He was God's first created creature--denying Christ's deity.
4. *Mormonism:* They teach that Jesus is a created being--the elder brother of Lucifer and one of many "gods" being once sinful and imperfect, earning His own salvation (*Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Mormonism* by John Ankerberg, p. 131).
5. *Unitarianism:* They reject the deity of Christ and believe Jesus was no more or less divine than any man.
6. *Islam:* To the Muslim, Jesus Christ is only a man--a prophet inferior to Muhammad. They don't believe Jesus died for man's sins; claiming Judas, not Jesus, died on the cross.

Why does it matter who you say and believe Jesus is?

Mark 8:27b-28 *"Jesus asked the disciples, 'Who do people say I am?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.'"*

Historical: Earlier John the Baptist was beheaded while in prison, so there were those who thought Jesus was John the Baptist back from the dead. The Jews knew from Scripture that the prophet Elijah had not died

(*2 Kings 2:11*), but instead was taken into Heaven. There was the belief he would return to earth to announce the End Time. Some people thought Jesus to be another of the OT prophets (*NIV Notes*, p. 1627; *Fourfold Gospel*, p. 103).

Insight from author C.S. Lewis: "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 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 or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Mark 8:29 *“But what about you?’ Jesus asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ.’”*

***Christ** (Greek: *Christos*) means Anointed One, Messiah, or Savior.

Matthew 16:16-17 “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in Heaven.’”

God put Peter in a favored (blessed) position by speaking through him to declare the truth about Jesus. Jesus accepts Peter’s proclamation that He Jesus is divine (God’s Son) and thus the Savior of the world (Christ). He also goes one step further by saying that God agrees with it, too, because He is the One who reveals it to Peter and sent Jesus.

1. Regardless of popular opinion—whether people say Jesus is just a prophet, moral man, or great teacher—the Bible declares He is God in the flesh. In fact, Scripture says it's God the Father Himself who reveals Jesus is divine—His one and only Son.
 - A. **Luke 10:16** “Jesus declares: ‘He who listens to you (Apostles) listens to Me; he who rejects you rejects Me; but he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.’”
2. Pray for opportunities to speak for God.
 - A. **Colossians 4:2-3** “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ...”
3. Plan for opportunities to speak for God.
 - A. **1 Peter 3:15-16a** “In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”

Insight from Josh McDowell: “If, when Jesus made His claims, He knew that He was not God, then He was lying and deliberately deceiving His followers. But if He was a liar, then He was also a hypocrite because He told others to be honest, whatever the cost, while He Himself taught and lived a colossal lie. Many will say that Jesus was a great moral teacher. How could He be a great moral teacher and knowingly mislead people at the most important point of His teaching—His own identity? If Jesus wanted to get people to follow Him and believe in Him as God, why did He go to the Jewish nation that adhered to undivided unity of God? Why didn’t He go to Egypt or Greece, where they believed in various gods and manifestations of them? Anyone who lived as Jesus lived, taught as Jesus taught, and died as Jesus died could not have been a liar” (*A Ready Defense*, p. 242-245).

What does it mean to be a believer in the Lord?

Mark 8:31-33 *“Jesus then began to teach His disciples that the Son of Man (Messiah) 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. ³²He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ³³But 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.’”*

In just a matter of moments Peter goes from speaking on inspiration from God that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God” to spouting devil talk. Whether he was well meaning or not—the truth is Peter was contradicting Jesus and thus God’s will when he rebuked Jesus for stating His divine purpose of sacrifice and salvation for mankind.

In essence Peter was saying to Jesus: “My way is better than Yours and the Father’s.” The Lord didn’t like it then and He doesn’t like it now. Is your way about the things of God or the things of men (this world)? Peter eventually becomes a faithful preacher and lead apostle so if you struggle with putting the things of the Lord first—there is hope for you, too, if you repent.

The term "Savior" indicates what Christ has done and is doing for the believer (*Mtt 1:21* “He will save His people from their sins” & *Romans 8:34* “at the right hand of God interceding for us”). The title “Lord” reveals what the believer should do for Jesus their Savior (*Lk 6:46* “do what I say”/*Eph 2:10* “created to do good works”/*Rev 1:5-6* “kingdom and priests to serve God”).

Some people are interested in what Jesus has done and is doing for them (Savior), but are unconcerned about what Christ expects and requires of them (Lord). The Apostle Peter reminds us that "God has made this Jesus whom you crucified *both Lord and Christ*" (Acts 2:36).

What does it mean to believe in the Lord and why does it matter?

Mark 8:34-38 “Then Jesus 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. ³⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His Father’s glory with the holy angels.’”

Deny (Greek: *apareomai*) means to refuse or disregard one’s own interests so as to act in a wholly unselfish manner; to give up one’s personality. It’s a strengthened form of forsaking or renouncing a thing or oneself.

Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

1 Corinthians 10:24 “Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.”

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.”

Historical: In the Roman Empire days, the condemned had to carry their own cross to the place of execution, this indicated to the spectators in the streets he passed by, the kind of death he was about to suffer. It was a public badge of his shame.

The cross was an instrument of death and here symbolizes the necessity of total commitment—even unto death—on the part of the followers of Jesus.

Insight from Leroy Lawson: What it means to deny self, take up cross, and follow Jesus— “Jesus has challenged Peter and his fellow disciples to the highest possible standard of living. Starting with Peter’s concern for His physical safety, Jesus rebukes Peter for his limited, this-world thinking. Some things are more important than merely staying alive, and certainly more urgent than making oneself comfortable. The secret of real life is not to be found in protecting or “finding” oneself, but surprisingly, in just the opposite: “Whoever loses his life for Me will find it.” Real life is not to be confused with the accumulation of wealth; one can be rich in goods and poor—even dead—in soul. What matters more than riches or comfort or even staying alive is to please God and receive the Son’s reward for faithful service which is eternal life” (*Matthew Commentary*, p. 210).

Mark 16:16 “Jesus said to them, ‘Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.’”

Some people are mistaken about Christianity thinking that to not believe in God and His Son Jesus Christ—one is cast into hell for it because the Lord is just upset about being rejected. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He atoned (made up for) it by His sacrificial death. If one rejects their only possible pardon—they forfeit eternity in Heaven which is by the grace of God through faith. Therefore, condemnation in hell is not just about rejecting God—it’s that there is no other means for forgiveness or pardon from sin other than through Christ Jesus—God’s call to creation for reconciliation.

For someone to reject their pardon from sin that comes through believing in Jesus—they are self-condemned to eternity in hell. If one chooses not to believe in God through faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior before they die then the opposite of God and eternal life in Heaven is eternal darkness and torment in hell. There is no purgatory or nothingness. If one does not want to come to Christ in this life then the only other place for them remaining upon death is what’s opposite of God and that’s damnation in the lake of fire—plus it’s the due punishment for their crimes of sin. God will not force Himself on anyone. Jesus is the only name given by which we must be saved (*Acts 4:12*). Jesus says He is “the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him (*John 14:6*). Only Jesus was ordained of the Heavenly Father and fulfilled the prophecies to pay the penalty for mankind’s sins thus providing the means of pardon through His death (1 Timothy 2:5-6). God resurrected Him from the dead and exalted Him above every name so that those who believe and are baptized shall be saved.

What is salvation? Ultimately, it’s the forgiveness of sins. The Lord speaks through the Apostle Peter in Acts 2:38 who proclaims “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness of your sins*. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Salvation is not based on good works—we’re saved to do good works which happens when we follow Christ and His Word (*Ephesians 2:8-10*). We live like we’re going somewhere.

Illustration: In his book *The Success Journey*, Dr. John Maxwell shares several keen insights. Among them is this: “If you live in a town near the ocean, you may have seen advertisements for ‘cruises to nowhere.’ People get on board a cruise ship, and when they leave the pier, instead of setting out for a lush island or other exotic location, they go out to sea and travel in circles for a couple of days. Meanwhile, they dine on sumptuous meals, lounge around the pool, enjoy the shows, and participate in onboard activities. The problem for some people is their lives are too much like those cruises. They’re on a trip with no set destination. They’re in a holding pattern—occupying their time pursuing pleasures or engaging in activities that don’t have any lasting benefit for themselves or others. Meanwhile, they travel in circles. In the end, they finish no better than they started. A cruise to nowhere may be a fun way to occupy a few days of vacation time, but it’s no way to spend your life.”

John 14:1-3 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am.”

CLOSE: Believe in Jesus by following His word so you may share in His eternal glory.