

Who Do You Say That I am?

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[0 : 0 0] Tyrian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you this morning. As many of you know, two weeks ago, Jim Franks and I were in Birmingham, Alabama for our denomination's national gathering, where we vote on all sorts of church business. And I know some of you are interested in that, and some of you, it would put you to sleep at the very beginning if I were to cover anything. So I'm more than happy to talk about it. If you want to know more, you're free to email me, and I'll send you some links of summaries and overviews of what happened during that time. Unfortunately, when we came back, we and many other people who were there brought back COVID with us, so I was very sad to not be with you all last week. Of course, I don't preach the Sunday after General Assembly, so Jonathan had already been scheduled to preach.

He had not been scheduled to baptize, though. And I was very, very sad to miss the baptism of Ethan Peter's, but so glad to have the series with us as members of our congregation. And I'm glad to be back with you all this morning and able for us to look together at what God has to say to us in his Word. We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus in his life and his death and his resurrection. And as we've been going through, I've been presenting these two questions to you over and over. The first question is, who is Jesus? And the second question is, how do we respond to him? Now, I've been asking this question, and I've been pointing out to you that the text asks this question from time to time, but there's one person who has not asked this question yet, and it's Jesus. In this passage, Jesus is finally going to turn his gaze to his disciples and ask them for the first time to answer and tell him who it is that they think he is. In fact, this passage serves as the hinge on which the two doors of the Gospel of Mark turned. Gospel of Mark is 16 chapters. We're in chapter 8, and if you're better at math than I am, you might have figured out that we're right in the middle.

And so the first half of the Gospel of Mark builds up to this point, and then we're going to have a change in the way the story operates after this point. In other words, this is a watershed for the Gospels.

It's where Jesus finally pushes the disciples to actually answer this question, who it is that he is. It's with that, I invite you to turn with me to God's Word. We're reading in Mark chapter 8, verses 27 through 30. You can turn with me in your Bible. You can turn on your phone.

You can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that his Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

[2 : 5 7] And so that's why we read now Mark chapter 8, starting at verse 27. And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way, he asked his disciples, who do people say that I am?

And they told him, John the Baptist, and others say Elijah, and others one of the prophets. And he asked them, but who do you say that I am?

Peter answered him, you are the Christ. And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. And I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word.

Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you for bringing us here together as your church this morning. And we thank you that in the midst of our confusion and questions in this life, you speak to us as a Father.

You provide us with instruction and clarity. We ask that you would do that again this morning by your Word. That you would show us Jesus. You'd grow us in our knowledge of him.

[4 : 10] And even more than that, you'd make us look more like him. We thank you that you do this by your grace. And so we don't have to worry about earning it or deserving it. But instead, we ask for all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Some of you may remember all the way back to 2006 when there was this great cinematic masterpiece that was released called Talladega Nights, The Ballad of Ricky Bobby.

And it tells the story of a NASCAR driver named Ricky Bobby who's played by Will Ferrell. And he happens to be the number one NASCAR driver until he's defeated by another French driver.

And the rest of the movie sort of explores the drama surrounding this. Now, I want to say up front, I'm not recommending this movie to you. So if you watch it, don't come back and complain to me.

But it has become famous for one scene near the beginning of the movie that helps us understand this passage. Ricky Bobby's sitting around the table with his family.

[5 : 15] He's going to say grace to pray for their meal. They've gathered some dominoes and some Taco Bell and some other fast food around their table. And he begins his prayer by saying this, Dear Lord, baby Jesus.

He says that a couple times until his wife finally interrupts him and says, Sweetie, Jesus did grow up. You don't always have to call him baby. It's a bit odd and off-putting to pray to a baby.

Well, Ricky Bobby's offended by this. And he says, Well, look, I like the Christmas Jesus best, and I'm saying grace. When you say grace, you can say it's a grown-up Jesus or teenage Jesus or bearded Jesus or whoever you want.

At that point, the prayers interrupted for them to begin sharing their favorite versions of Jesus. One of their children says, I like to picture Jesus as a ninja fighting off evil samurai. Then Ricky Bobby's buddy, Carl Naughton Jr. says, I like to think of Jesus like with giant eagle's wings and singing lead vocals for Leonard Skinnerd, with like an angel band, and I am in the front row.

Now, this story is ridiculous. The prayer is ridiculous. The idea of comedy is that it always reveals something true. That's part of what makes it funny. And here, there's a few things that story teaches us.

[6 : 35] First, everyone has to answer the question of who Jesus is. Everyone has to answer the question of who Jesus is.

I've been telling you over and over since last year that that is the main question of the Gospel of Mark, that we have to answer Jesus' identity, and that it's something that we bring from the inside of the text and it comes out.

It's not something that we take from the outside and we impose on the text. This is a question that Mark, the author of this Gospel, wants us to answer. We've seen the question asked in chapters 1 through 8.

Remember, chapter 1, Jesus is doing these mighty works, and the people say, What is this? A new teaching with authority. Mark, chapter 4, The disciples see Jesus' great power, and we're told they were filled with great fear and said to one another, Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?

Not only do we see the question asked, we also see it answered. There's various characters who believe that they know who Jesus is. The unclean spirits in Mark, chapter 3, tell him that he is the Son of God.

[7 : 49] So the demons seem to understand something, that the disciples are still working to grasp. Later in Mark, chapter 3, the scribes provide their own answer. Jesus must be demonic.

That's the only way he would be able to perform these miracles. Mark, chapter 6. Remember, Herod has an answer to who Jesus is. He believes he's John the Baptist raised from the dead.

It's with that question asked over and over, answered over and over, that we finally get to this point where Jesus is willing to turn his gaze to the disciples and ask personally, Who is it that people say that I am?

Verses 27 and 28. And they give him a variety of answers, some of which we already saw in Mark, chapter 6, about these ideas that are circulating of who this man could be who's able to perform these miracles and demonstrate this sort of power.

John the Baptist is one of the ideas. Maybe that's because there's some similarities in their message. Maybe it's because both Jesus and John the Baptist are baptizing people. Maybe it's because they both preach repentance.

[8 : 56] Maybe it's because Herod has already suggested this as an answer. Elijah. Maybe they're suggesting Elijah because in the Old Testament, in Malachi, chapter 4, we're told that before God's day of judgment and salvation, the prophet Elijah is going to return again.

Maybe they're saying this because Elijah, like Jesus, performed miracles. So they're looking for these figures that make sense of the kind of power that Jesus has. And then they simply give this broad category of one of the prophets.

Jesus is so powerful, he must be an Old Testament figure who's returned to the world. And so there's a sense in which here they've given a good assessment.

These are positive figures. Elijah's a good person, not a bad person. They're not committing the error of the scribes of saying that Jesus is demonic. John the Baptist, that would be a good person to emulate.

Prophets, people that we look back to and listen. The problem is not that their assessment here is good. The problem is that it is insufficient.

[10 : 05] They believe that Jesus is a prophet. Muslims also believe Jesus is a prophet. Good, not enough.

Incomplete, insufficient. They call him a prophet. They don't realize that he is the prophet. And so with that, Jesus turns his attention to his disciples.

Verse 29. Okay, I've heard what people are saying about me. What do you think? Who do you say that I am? You've seen firsthand my miracles and my teaching and my power.

You've walked with me. You have the evidence to assess the case before you. And it's with that that Peter finally gives the correct answer.

You are the Christ. Now, many people, as it's been said, may confuse the word Christ as Jesus' last name.

[11 : 09] But in fact, the word Christ means something very specific and particular about who he is. When I was in college in my junior year, I think it was the spring of my junior year, I took a class on the early history of Christianity.

You've heard me tell the story if you were in the new members class recently. And I also told you in that class, fair warning, I was going to use it again. And at the very beginning of the class, the very first class, the professor took the role.

But before he took the role, he wanted to make sure we had something very clear up front. He said, we're going to talk about Jesus in this class. Now, some people believe that he is the Christ, which means anointed one.

Other people do not believe he's the Christ. Everyone agrees that he's Jesus. Now, this question of whether he's the Christ or not is not a question we're going to answer in this class.

And so I'm going to ask you all in this class to only refer to him as Jesus. At that point, he took the role. And my last name, starting with a C, I was pretty early on.

[12 : 19] And he came to me and he called Matthew Capone. And I raised my hand and he said, are you related to Al Capone? And I didn't have a great answer at that point in my life.

As a 20-year-old, I was still trying to figure it out. Now, I tell people, in my family, we say the past is the past. But in this point, when I was 20 years old, I said, honestly, I don't know.

I'm not sure. And he said, no, you have to know. You cannot tell me you don't know whether you're related to Al Capone or not.

I was a little sassier as a 20-year-old. And so I turned to him and I said, some people say yes. And some people say no.

But that's not a question we're going to answer in this class. He was speechless. But he brought up for this this important category.

[13 : 23] Everyone recognizes Jesus as Jesus. Some people say he is the Christ. Some people don't. Christ means anointed one. It means someone who's had oil poured on them.

That's the meaning of anointed. People who were anointed in the Old Testament were prophets and priests and kings. But there were not just prophets and priests and kings in general.

There was also the prediction in the Old Testament, the promise and the prophecy, that there would come a figure who was the prophet, the priest, and the king.

This is the one that's referred to by the Jews as the anointed one. It's the kind of figure that's spoken of in Psalm 2 that John read for us earlier this morning.

We see it in Psalm 110, Deuteronomy 18, 2 Samuel 7. There's this promise over and over again of this figure who's going to do things that no human would be able to accomplish.

[14 : 26] This is the person who's going to fulfill all the longings of Israel. This is the person who's going to bring God's promises to bear on the world.

He is the one. In other words, when we use the word Christ, when Peter says, you are the Christ, he is saying, unlike all these other people who are giving guesses about you, I don't believe you are a prophet.

I believe you are the prophet. I don't believe you are a king, but I believe you are the king. I don't believe you are a priest. I believe you are the priest.

That is what it means to be the Christ. Who is Jesus? Jesus is the one who has come fully and finally to fulfill all the promises and the expectations of the Old Testament.

He is the one who makes every other prophet, priest, and king unnecessary and obsolete. And so how do we respond to him?

[15 : 36] We respond to him by answering this question. Everyone has to answer what Jesus asks in this passage. Who do you say that I am?

Now, if you are a Christian, you might be thinking, okay, great. This passage then has nothing more to say to me because I agree with Peter.

I believe, too, that Jesus is the Christ. So I finish any work that I have to have. This passage has nothing else to speak in to my life. The problem with that is this.

We have to read verses 27 through 30 along with verses 31 through 38. Those two passages, the 31 through 38 we'll talk about next week, are meant to go together.

They complement each other. They help us understand one another. Peter gets the right answer, and he has no idea what he's talking about.

[16 : 36] In the very next section, Peter begins to tell them what it's going to mean for him to be the Christ, and what it's going to mean is that he's going to suffer and die.

And Peter rebukes him, and Jesus tells him, says, Get behind me, Satan. In other words, Peter knows the right answer.

He still needs to learn who Jesus is. I told you we're going to learn a few lessons from Talladega Nights.

The first one is that everyone must answer the question of who Jesus is. The other answer, the other lesson that we learn is that we love to have a Jesus who aligns with us and our preferences and our desires.

Carl Naughton Jr., when he's giving his answer about who Jesus is, says this, I like to picture Jesus in a tuxedo t-shirt because it says, like, I want to be formal, but I'm here to party too.

[17 : 45] Because I like to party, so I like my Jesus to party. We could take that phrase and fill it in with whatever our desires and loves are.

I like X, so I like my Jesus to love X. Many people love therapeutic Jesus. Therapeutic Jesus only says comforting and kind words.

Maybe he rebukes bad and evil people if they're really bad and really evil, but he would never discipline someone he loves. I like comfort and reassurance, so I like my Jesus to be full of comfort and reassurance.

Some people aren't given in to therapeutic Jesus. Maybe, and this is maybe a little too close to home, they love American flag Jesus. American flag Jesus loves guns.

And he's mainly concerned about freedom. In fact, he loves freedom so much that it is even more important than holiness. Now, don't hear what I'm not saying.

[18 : 55] It is a great thing to love your country. It's a great thing to celebrate and desire freedom. And we have more in common, or we should have more in common, with our brothers and sisters, Christians in other parts of the world, than we do with Americans who don't love and follow and obey Jesus.

We want to see Jesus for who he is. We don't want to be like Carl Naughton Jr. and say, I like America, so I like my Jesus to love America.

No. We conform ourselves to Jesus. We don't ask him to conform to us. Some people love liberal Jesus. A liberal Jesus is a great example of sacrificial love.

In fact, he is a model that we can use for the way to live our lives. Now, a liberal Jesus didn't die for us. In fact, whether or not he rose from the dead is sort of an unhelpfully relevant question, because that's not really what we're after.

What we're after is inspiration and motivation. And liberal Jesus, he turns tables when it's people we don't like, and he mainly heals and forgives.

[20 : 23] Liberal Jesus is only concerned about sin when it comes to self-righteous people. But he is rarely, if ever, concerned about our sin.

And so if you're a Christian, the urgency of this passage for you is this.

Keep coming back over and over to the scriptures to learn who Jesus really is. Peter knows the right answer and is deeply confused.

We, as we follow after Jesus, much like Peter, can know the right answers and be terribly far away from what the Bible presents.

Jesus is going to spend this next half of the Gospel of Mark helping his disciples understand who he actually is, what he actually loves, how his mission actually works.

[21 : 25] We come back to the scriptures over and over to be challenged again and again to know and understand and love Jesus more and more.

What does it mean that he is the Christ? Now, if you're not a Christian, you also have to answer this question.

You cannot avoid what Mark is pressing us towards in this Gospel. You cannot avoid what Jesus is pressing these people with.

Remember, I mentioned a long time ago that it's been pointed out that as the Gospel of Mark continues, as the story approaches the end, the people in the middle who don't seem to have made their minds up about Jesus disappear from the plot line.

And what we see are either people who are loving Jesus and following after him or people who are hating him and opposing him. The point of that in the narrative is to point out for us that as we learn and know more and more about Jesus, we have to pick one of two camps.

[22 : 38] We are either for him or against him. We either obey him or rebel. Part of the reason this question comes in chapter 8 is that finally the disciples have had enough information to be able to make an assessment.

They've heard Jesus' teachings. They've watched his healings. They've understood the way in which he's cast out demons. We today in 2022 have seen even more.

We today in 2022 have even more information about who Jesus is. We have even less of an excuse than the disciples.

We have an even greater responsibility to answer this question. In his book, Hope in Times of Fear, Tim Keller makes this argument that it is impossible for us to simply dismiss the historical claim that Jesus rose again from the dead.

And he presents these two facts together. First, the empty tomb in which Jesus' body was not found. And two, the hundreds of people who claim to have seen Jesus alive.

[23 : 48] And he makes the point that we can refute either one of those claims, but we cannot refute both of them together easily. In other words, we must wrestle and grapple with the historicity of the events of the Christian faith.

You are not able intellectually to be honest on the one hand and on the other hand to dismiss the historical claims of Christianity. He says this, Peter made this confession for the disciples having seen in part what Jesus did.

We answer this question knowing it in full. And so Jesus demands an answer from anyone and everyone.

There is no lack of evidence. You must respond. Who is Jesus? Is he the Christ or is he not?

He is the Christ or is he not? It's become common in our culture to use the phrase pleading the fifth, which refers to the fifth amendment. It's the idea that if I don't want to answer a question, I don't have to because I don't want to incriminate myself.

[25 : 26] The problem with pleading the fifth is that it applies to witnesses in a courtroom. You are not forced to testify against yourself.

Pleading the fifth, however, does not apply to judges and jurors. If someone's a judge in a case, that judge does not get to say, you know what?

I'm kind of tired of looking at all this evidence. You want me to say whether this person's guilty or innocent? Well, you know what? I plead the fifth. No, it's out of context, right? It doesn't make any sense.

It doesn't apply to that situation. The same for a juror. If you're in a jury room and there's 12 of you and you're supposed to come to a verdict about a case that you've heard and everyone else has voted yes and you're the last juror and they turn to you, you know what you don't get to say?

I plead the fifth. Judges and jurors have to look at evidence and provide answers. Brothers and sisters, what Mark is doing in his gospel is the very same.

[26 : 28] He is not calling you to testify as a witness. He is saying, you must sit in judgment over the facts and reach a conclusion. You must look at the evidence and say yes or no.

You must be able to come and proclaim innocent or guilty. We must, you must answer this question once and for all.

Who is Jesus? Is he the Christ or is he not? Verse 29.

But who do you say that I am? Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you for the instruction and the encouragement that you have given us in your word.

We ask that you would help us to see Jesus for who he is more and more. Ask that you would help us to love him more and more. Father, we ask that you would search and pierce our hearts, that we would not be able to rest until we're able to answer with clarity and certainty who Jesus is, whether he is the Christ or not.

[27 : 48] We thank you for those of us who believe that as we come to you, we have confidence knowing that he is a prophet and a priest and a king on our behalf. And so we ask these prayers in his mighty name.

Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen.