

Mark 8: 27-38, September 13, 2009

²⁷Jesus 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?" ²⁸And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." ³⁰And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

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Is knowing Jesus enough?

It may seem to us that Peter had a clear advantage over us where it comes to knowing Jesus.

Peter was able to spend a great deal of time with Jesus while he followed him around Galilee and the many other places Jesus went preaching and teaching.

He heard Jesus' words first hand.

and didn't have to read the accounts of Jesus' story from documents that are nearly two thousand years old.

He could simply recall and picture in his mind Jesus standing on a hillside

or next to the sea of Galilee surrounded by hundreds of people teaching and preaching, healing

and feeding thousands at a time from a couple of loaves of bread and a few fish.

Peter saw his own mother-in-law healed, and the leper and the paralytic, the man with the withered hand, and many others.

He saw Jesus take on the demons that possessed people, still the storm, raise the dead and walk on the water.

It seems only right to us that by this time in their relationship Peter ought to be able to say clearly, without a moment's hesitation Jesus, you are the Messiah!!

And Peter doesn't disappoint us.

But you only expect Peter to make this declaration because of what you know,

not because of what Peter knows.

Peter only knows what he has witnessed in Jesus' behavior, actions, wisdom, character, and knowledge; his compassion, love and mercy.

Peter wasn't there when Jesus was born and lay in a manger, or when he was presented to Simeon in the temple; when he traveled to Egypt with his family to escape the killing of children ordered by Herod.

He wasn't there when the boy Jesus was lost after having visited Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover and found in the temple.

In fact Peter was not even there to hear the proclamation of John the Baptist that the one Isaiah prophesied about was coming, or when Jesus was baptized.

He hasn't had the benefit of knowing the whole story of Jesus from the beginning of time.

So how did Peter know this so certainly?

The gospel of Mark doesn't tell us but if you go over to Matthew in the 16th chapter you read,

“Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, !! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.”

This was not the witness of all that Peter had seen and done while traveling with Jesus.

This proclamation of Peter’s

Jesus, you are the Messiah! was a realization, a sense, a belief, a faith, an understanding, a revelation about Jesus!!!

Given to Peter by God!

This is a confession of the heart, not of the mind.

Of faith not knowledge

For us, we see things from a different perspective, from a different point in history because of what we have available to us now.

You have an Old Testament and a New Testament of scripture.

You not only have the Gospel of Mark but also Matthew, Luke and John.

In fact without those you would know much less about Jesus.

If it were left up to Mark you wouldn’t have the genealogy, birth story, and earlier life stories of Jesus because Mark begins with the proclamation of John the Baptist and goes on from there.

You have the writings of Paul and many others who provide witness to the life and ministry of Jesus.

You have all manner of learning about Jesus in the church;
 from Sunday school to vacation bible school
 from meeting devotions to small group studies,
 from retreats and independent study

But

As you study and read, discuss and argue, as you agree and disagree
 as you continue to learn about Jesus, His life, and His ministry
 there is something else going on.

There is something that helps you to know WHO Jesus is,
 that helps you to know something more intimate about Jesus.
 and it doesn't come from flesh and blood,

It comes from Your Father in Heaven.

Just like with Peter

This something else that is going on has to do with what God does in
 your world and your lives.

It has to do with God's presence in your lives continually giving you
 faith,

giving you that realization, that sense, that belief, and
 understanding

that revelation that Jesus is the Messiah!!!

But there are some hard things to learn and know about Jesus.

Peter found this out in this particular encounter with Jesus.

This Jesus that he had followed and now confesses as the Messiah
 has to suffer, be rejected and finally die.

Peter doesn't want to even hear this and he rebukes Jesus.

Jesus wastes no time in straightening him out.

He credits Satan with Peter's thoughts and words.

Jesus refocuses Peter's attention on the divine and away from human desire.

No one really understood what it meant for the prophesied Messiah to come.

They thought He would be a Messiah of power and strength,

one who would come to free Israel from its rulers, conquer suffering--

one who would come in glory.

And it is hard to understand how an all powerful omnipotent God can lower himself to embrace human suffering and death as Jesus did.

This has been a topic of great debate among theologians for years.

Why is it necessary for Jesus to suffer and die?

Is it because God is both just and merciful, and divine justice requires that the debt be repaid,

but divine mercy drives God to reach out to sinful humanity?

And so was Jesus' suffering and death are necessary to satisfy both God's judgment and mercy toward humanity?

Or

Was Jesus' suffering and death necessary to bring humanity into full communion with God through the fullness of Jesus' human experience,

there by also shifting the necessity of Jesus' suffering and death from a force outside God,

human disobedience and need for judgment, which imposes the necessity on God,

TO

God's desire and decision to enter into and reclaim the whole of human existence,

reconciling all humanity with God?

This is the true Messiah,

The one who embraces the full human experience of suffering and death.

This Messiah is one to be praised and worshipped,

not wholly because of the glory of his resurrection, ascension and presence and the gift of life He brings

but also for the humility, suffering and death that came with Jesus' willingness to become human.

This is the life you have been baptized into.

Peter's attention is refocused on the suffering Messiah who comes to die for the world.

And so your focus, like Peter's, is also redirected.

You must also remember a Messiah who came to suffer for His people,

not to bask in glory as victor

Jesus came to bear the cross on which He died

so that you might have life, and hope and peace in Him.

Then Jesus calls for the crowd to join the disciples and He speaks to all of them about this cross.

you have a cross to bear as well he says.

This is where we come back to my opening question,

“Is it enough to know Jesus?”

Jesus says NO

If you want to become my follower you must take up your cross and follow me.

You must take up your cross.

He says that those who want to save their life will lose it but those who lose their life for Jesus’ sake and the sake of the gospel will save it

So does that mean that you have to die a death like his?

Does that mean you have to suffer like He did?

Does that mean if you really want to be Christians you have to live a life in suffering and pain until you die?

Does that mean that there is no joy and pleasure in this life?

What is this cross of yours you have to bear?

It is a cross you receive as a gift

It is a cross with a yoke is easy, and a burden that is light.

This cross is the cross of Christ you bear forever from your baptism.

You remember the words spoken to the baptized.

Child of God, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

Bear this cross.

This cross is the sign that you belong to Jesus.

It means that you are to deny your “self”

not deny yourselves things, but to deny your very self.

It means rather than follow your will, live in God’s will

Identify with Jesus not the world

It doesn’t mean to bear the burdens of life that are imposed by your culture, your society, the world, sickness, loss, or any of the bad stuff that happens,

but to take on the identity of Christ for the world.

This lesson and your lives are filled with paradox.

You learn who you are by discovering who Jesus is

The way to self fulfillment is the way of self-denial.

In your baptism into Jesus you get Jesus and lose yourselves,
you are no longer your own.

You have become something else by this gift from God.

And so you

focus on the divine not the human

you allow God’s will and wisdom to preside over all your actions

You are disciples

You learn while you follow

You are not ashamed of your obedience today in the face of what your friends, neighbors or the rest of the world is doing or what they think.

You are not ashamed of Jesus suffering rather than glory
for to be ashamed of his suffering is to deny and be ashamed of
his glory.

And GLORY is what a life bearing your cross and following Jesus
brings;

That glory is the glory of God in the joy and peace that comes with
obediently serving God and others,

just as Jesus through his suffering and giving up himself in
obedience to God received glory in his resurrection.

You also can look forward to the same glorious resurrection and
eternal life,

not just like Jesus

but **WITH** Jesus!