

## Script For Mark 8: 27-38

Who is Jesus Christ really? Who is Jesus Christ? There are many opinions out there. Some will say he's not much more than another Jewish Rabbi or teacher. Islam says that he is one of the prophets, but that he's not all that significant now that Muhammed has come. More recently people have tried to say that he's just a good example of how to live a moral life. But who is he really? As Christian, as Christ-followers, this is something that ought to matter to us because if we have this wrong, we will look more than foolish. And today's passage helps us to answer the question. And as we'll see it's not just Christians who need to know who Jesus really is.

We pick up the narrative as the Lord or King Jesus' and his disciples move into Caesarea Philippi. Caesarea, as you might guess from the name, was a Gentile or non-Jew area. And as they are walking along Jesus asks a seemingly innocuous question. But of course, it's not as harmless as it seems.

v27 "Who do people say that I am?"

Now by this stage, there is a decent following him by this stage and you can imagine the answers rolling in from different members of the group:

John the Baptist. Elijah. One of the prophets.

Elijah we can read about in 1 and 2 Kings. He was one of the more significant prophets, or spokesmen of God, in the Old Testament.

And we know of John the Baptist from other parts of Mark's gospel. He is the last of the prophets and his ministry was to get people ready for Jesus.

But I think what we're supposed to see it that the people don't really know who Jesus is, apart from some sort of prophetic figure. Maybe he's one of the old prophets like Elijah. Maybe he's one of the new prophets like John the Baptist. Or we don't really know and so we just say 'one of the prophets'.

But then Jesus starts to turn the screws and it becomes clear that he's not just making conversation as they walked.

"But who do **you** say that I am?"

I like to imagine them forming a bit of a huddle to decide what they'll say.

'What do we say?'

'We can't just say you're just a prophet, we'll look dumb!'

'Should we tell him?'

'I reckon we have to.'

v29 "Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah.'" And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about this."

Messiah is a Hebrew word, the equivalent Greek word is Christ and they both mean the same thing: 'annointed one', the one who is annointed.

That's all very well, but why do we call him Jesus Christ?

Now the first thing we need to know about the word 'Christ' is that it's not Jesus' last name.

Jesus would have known as  
'Jesus, son of Joseph the carpenter' (or something like that).

Christ, or 'Messiah', was a title.

A pretty prestigious title from the OT.

**It basically meant 'king of Israel', or 'king of God's people'.**

The most famous Christ to Israel was Christ-David. So Peter, by calling him Christ, is declaring that Jesus is God's King.

Now, strangely, almost as soon as Peter realises that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus immediately starts to talk about himself as the **Son of Man**.

This was Jesus favourite label for himself – he rarely called himself anything else.

'Son of Man' is a Hebrew expression meaning 'an ordinary looking person'. It's almost like calling himself 'Mr Ordinary'. And that's normally what it means.

But the OT has one really famous "Son of Man" in Daniel 7. Daniel chapter 7.

In that chapter the Son of Man walks up to where God is seated on his throne and receives the universe from him. For centuries, God's people knew that whoever this guy would be, he's a really big deal but they had no idea who it could be.

You gotta ask yourself:

***What man could walk up to God's throne and receive the universe from him?!***

Now, Jesus called himself 'Son of Man' because he,  
a carpenter's son, expected to soon enter heaven on clouds, and receive the KOG from God,  
and rule all things.

Jesus is that Son of Man.

It is one thing to **know a label**. It is another to correctly **interpret the label**.

Liz and I went to the Hunter Valley on holidays a few years ago. We went to some of the wineries and sampled some of the wine, feeling pretty sophisticated, despite not really knowing what we were doing.

One of the places we went was the McWilliams estate and thought we were on a good thing because we recognised the label and has won a few awards.

But it turned out that the wine we liked the most was a \$6- a bottle mixed white! We had no idea what we were doing.

The disciples heard that Jesus was the Christ, and the Son of Man. They heard the labels, but they didn't understand **what these titles meant to Jesus**. But Jesus was about to explain it to them...

Vv 31-32

<sup>31</sup> Then 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. <sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

No more parables – he just told them that he would die and rise from the dead.

You know how there are terms that we say that just don't belong together:

'compulsory fun';

'army intelligence',

'pretty ugly'

'Anarchist's club'

or my pet hate one: 'smart casual'.

Jesus is saying that the Son of Man (pause) must suffer.

But that is so stupid! No self-respecting Jew would accept that the longed-for messiah would die.

... **'dying and suffering Christ' works at absolutely no level.**

So when Peter says "you are the Christ",  
what he hears is "you will be the conquering King".

So when Jesus says you are correct, and that means I'm going to die...

Peter grabs Jesus and tells him off:

"No way – you're the Christ! This would never happen to you! Take it back."

But Jesus had a go back:

"You are acting like Satan **tempting** me to turn aside from my mission!

You are thinking like a human being, and not like God!"

That was hard for the Jews that were following him  
to get their heads around

and it's hard for us to get our heads around.

That's why Jesus uses these two titles to try help us to understand.

Jesus the Christ. THE Son of Man. He is not just some prophet.

He's not just a good moral teacher.

He's not an example or inspiration for us.

He is the Christ, God's King.

And friends we must never forget who he really is.

Our Queen celebrated a significant milestone earlier this week. Does anyone know what it was? (Wait for responses). She overtook her great-great grandmother Queen Victoria as the longest reigning British monarch and longest reigning Queen in history. By all accounts she has been an exceptional Queen and remains a humble, godly woman. She has shown to be kind, generous and friendly.

But if you were to meet her, it would be a mistake to treat her as another kindly older lady. For she is our Head of State and carries great authority.

How much more, knowing who Jesus really is, should we treat him as he deserves? Jesus is the Christ: God's King. What blasphemy it is to try and treat him as though he is anything else.

Jesus is the Christ. He is the Son of Man. May God keep us from the temptation of domesticating him.

And with Jesus' rebuke of Peter still ringing in their ears, Jesus turns to the crowd and calls them and his disciples to follow him:

**Read 8:34-38 (2 slides)**

**34** He 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.

**35** For 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.

**36** For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

**37** Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

**38** Those 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."

This is what true discipleship looks like.

If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. I think that the phrase 'take up your cross' is so familiar to us that we miss some of the shock value of what Jesus is commanding here.

I think the equivalent today would be something like:

'Whoever wants to be a Christian needs to stop living for themselves, tie yourself a noose and follow me.'

Or maybe, if you want to be my disciple, load your lethal injection syringe and come with me.

We squirm, but that's what it would have been like for those following that day to hear. When Jesus said this criminals were forced to carry their cross *to the place where they would be nailed to it*. Anyone who said them would know they are basically a dead man walking. Everyone would know that person was marching to their death. And that is what Christ Jesus is calling us to do.

And he can demand that of his disciples because he himself was marching towards *his* death in Jerusalem. Following him meant, and means, acknowledging yourself as one of his followers regardless of the cost.

What does this mean for us? What does it mean to deny ourselves?

When we have a choice to do what God wants or what we want, what do we do? Who should rule our lives?

When we make decisions about how we are going to [spend our time], how are we making those decisions?

If we are no longer working, what are we spending our time doing? Is it simply trying to make ourselves more comfortable or are we denying our own comfort and seeking to serve others, like the Christ did?

What about how we [spend our money]? Do our spending habits reflect the fact that the Jesus is the Christ and we are following him? Do we spend money to make life easier for ourselves or are we seeking to serve others with our money? Do we show that we want to support the gospel by funding those who can are especially gifted to proclaim it?

Do we show that we want to ease the suffering of others by feeding, clothing and sheltering them?

Or do we spend our money to make ourselves happy and comfortable?

What about Jesus' demand of us in verse 38? [Will we be ashamed] of Jesus Christ and his words? When we are talking with our friends about the issues of the day and they talk about how foolish you would have to be to think the way Christians do will we remain silent out of shame? When people call us things like out-of-touch or antiquated will we be ashamed of our Lord or will we stand up and defend what we believe and declare ourselves Christians.

Are you embarrassed to be known as a Christian to those who you know and love? Those 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."

Instead we need to ask God to enable us to be bold, to help us not to be ashamed.

Jesus also says,

"        whoever wants to save his life,                      will lose it  
but     whoever loses his life for me and the gospel        will save it."

Whoever wants to save his life will lose it. Friends, the uncomfortable truth is this: when it comes to being right with God, we can't save our lives.

We can't fix the problem, we can't bridge the chasm, we can't pay the price. We cannot save our life.

Christians are often hard at work doing good things. But whatever it may be, however good and godly the activity may be, **if you are doing it to try and be right with God**, that is, trying to save your own life, you will ultimately, lose your life. (repeat)

The only way to save your life is to give it up. And this is not some sort of pseudo-spiritual 'If you love something let it go' nonsense. Christ Jesus is saying that if you want your life saved give it over to him. Put your trust in him. Let him save your life. Let what he did on the cross, let his death, stand in place of yours and cover over your sin. We can trust in Christ Jesus' promise that he will forgive and it is finished.

In the end, what Jesus is calling for here is what I call "All-in Christianity", which is really the only kind of Christianity there is. There were many in Jesus' day that followed from a distance. They were interested in what Jesus was doing. Some wanted to be associated with him. Some wanted to learn from him. Many thought he was worth following but few put trusted him with everything.

And I think that is one of our biggest temptations in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Sydney. The temptation to follow Christ Jesus but at a safe distance. I know that it's my temptation. I've put my trust in Jesus and I follow him, but perhaps a bit too safely, hanging back to see how it will go with others who are bolder than I.

Jesus still says to us, there is only one way to follow me, only one way to be a Christian: give up your life. There is nothing you can do to save it.

To those of us who have done that, who have trusted the Lord Jesus to save us, who have put our life in his hands, Jesus' challenge to us is this:  
having put our faith in Jesus, having trusted him, will we then refuse to take up our cross and follow him?  
Will we truly live a life of self denial for the sake of Christ Jesus?  
Are we willing to lose our life for him?

To those of us you haven't yet put their faith or trust in the Christ, Jesus asks this of you:

vv36-37 "For what does it gain a man to gain the whole cosmos and forfeit his soul. For what can a man give in return for his soul?"

The answer is already clear isn't it?

There are really only two options as I can see it:

- Follow King Jesus and lose your personal ambitions for the sake of serving him.
- Gain as much of this world as you can manage in this lifetime; but then lose your life forever.

If this is something you feel you need to think through more carefully, or if you have questions you want to ask, come and talk to me, or Pete or the person you came with today. We'd love to help you sort this out.

Jesus **IS** the Christ. What do you need to change because of this truth?

Amen.