**Seeing Jesus for who He is**

Text: Mark 8:27-30

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**Scriptures:** Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Mark 8:27-30

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 211, 436, 119:41-48, 216, 149b

**Series:** The Gospel of Mark (#24)

**Theme:** On behalf of the twelve disciples, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ.

**Proposition:** Jesus is the promised Messiah

**Introduction**

‘A light-bulb moment’ is an occasion when you suddenly realise something that you hadn’t seen before. The invention of the electric light bulb was so revolutionary that for over a century the light bulb has symbolised having an idea. Today we sometimes speak of an ‘aha moment’ to describe an occasion of sudden realisation, inspiration, insight, recognition or comprehension.

In our text today from Mark chapter 8 we see that Peter had ‘light-bulb moment’, an ‘aha moment’, when he came to see Jesus for who He is and then declared *“You are the Christ”* (v29). This is a pivotal time in the unfolding narrative in Mark’s Gospel. It is the moment when the identity of Jesus finally became clear to the disciples. Remember that Mark begins his gospel with the words: “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*” (1:1). Up until the event in our text, the disciples did not understand who Jesus is.

After He supernaturally calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee, they said to one another in fear “*Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?*” (4:41). After He miraculously provided food for 5,000 men and then 4,000 people and the disciples had only brought one loaf of bread with them, Jesus said to them: “*Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?*” (8:17-18). Back then the disciples had not yet had their ‘light bulb moment’.

Just before our text, Mark includes the account of the blind man at Bethsaida gradually receiving clear sight after Jesus touched him. As we heard in the previous sermon in this series, Mark may have been drawing a parallel between the way in which Jesus progressively gave sight to the physically blind man and the way in which His disciples came by stages to understand who He is. As we come to this climactic text in Mark’s gospel, we are going to see the significance of Peter’s confession of faith in Christ under three headings:

1. The identity of Christ
2. The mission of Christ and
3. The witness to Christ
4. **The Identity of Christ**

If you’re in a relationship with someone and they stop talking to you, there could well be a problem. God stopped speaking to his people Israel in the OT times. There had been a long silence since Malachi, whose name means ‘my messenger’, spoke the Word of the Lord to Israel about 400 years before. The chosen people of God – Israel - had been waitingfor God to speak to them again. They had been waiting for his promise of deliverance to come. They had been waiting for the fulfilment of the last words that the nation had heard before the 400-year silence.

The Lord God had said through Malachi that He would “*send my messenger who will prepare the way before me*” (Mal 3:1). And that He would send “*the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes*” (Mal 4:5). The Jewish crowds who followed Jesus, together with his twelve disciples knew something about the Old Testament Scriptures: Some would have heard and remembered the prophesies of Malachi read in their synagogue on the Sabbath day.

Some made connections between the authority of the prophets of old who spoke the pure Word of the Lord to His people Israel and the authority with which Jesus spoke. There were a number of ideas floating around about the identity of Jesus back then. Mark records that ‘*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."*’ (8:27-28).

Earlier in this gospel record of Mark’s he has recorded how John the Baptist appeared ‘baptising in the wilderness’ (1:4). John the Baptist went out into to countryside around the Jordan river preaching a baptism of repentance in fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophesy “*the voice of one crying in the wilderness; prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight*” (Isa 40:3; Mark 1:3). John was dressed like the prophet Elijah, wearing rough clothes of camel’s hair with a leather belt round his waist (Mark 1:6 cf. 2 Ki 1:8). As a faithful prophet, John spoke the truth, like Elijah before him. As a result John’s life was in danger, as Elijah’s had been in the time of King Ahab and his murderous wife Jezebel (1 Ki 18:13)

John the Baptist challenged Herod (a Jewish puppet-ruler working on behalf of the occupying Roman Empire) about his marriage. He had divorced his wife in order to marry his own niece, Herodias, who was already married to his brother Philip. Rather than listening to the truth and accepting his wrong-doing, Herod locked John up in prison. When John was no longer seen in public, but Jesus was performing miracles for all to see and calling people to ‘*repent and believe the gospel*’ (1:15), it is not surprising that some people thought that John had been raised from the dead (6:14). Mark records that Herod, after taking John captive, later made a rash promise to Herodias’ daughter, who had pleased him with her dancing, to give her whatever she wanted. To which she replied, “*I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter*” (6:25). So Herod had John beheaded.

Other people thought that Jesus was Elijah returned to earth. Remember that in Scripture the death of this prophet is not revealed, but that he ‘*went up by a whirlwind into heaven*’ (2 Ki 2:11b). Individual people in those crowds had some ideas about Jesus, but they didn’t really know his identity. The same is true today. Some Jewish people say that Jesus was a prophet, but not the Saviour and King promised in the Old Testament. Islam teaches that Jesus was the ‘Isa ibn Maryam ([Arabic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language): 'Jesus, son of Mary'‎), the last prophet before the ultimate messenger of God, Mohammed. Many people in the West believe that Jesus was a historical figure, a moral teacher, a good man, but not a perfect person and not divine. They believe that when he died, he stayed dead. Some people believe Jesus led a failed Jewish overthrow of the occupying Roman forces in 1st century and that after his death, his disciples made up stories about him still being alive to further their political cause. Some people say about the identity of Jesus ‘whatever’, ‘that is of no interest or relevance for me 2,000 years after he lived’. Some people say that Christianity a religion following the teachings of some long dead Palestinian is utter folly, a pursuit not even fit for infants. Advanced mankind in 21st century does not need an out-of-date crutches like this, they say.

Who do you say that Jesus is? What about the ‘crowds’ you move in, what do they say? Who do your immediate neighbours say that Jesus is? Have you asked them? Who do those you work alongside say that Jesus is? Have you asked them? Do you, do they, believe that knowing the identity of Jesus is important? Well, He does!! Having heard who other people thought He was, Jesus asked his twelve disciples on the way to the villages of Caesarea Philippi: “*But who do* ***you*** *say that I am?*” (8:29). In the original Greek, the ‘you’ here is plural ‘yous all’. Then Peter answered on behalf of them all, *“You are the Christ”.*

Notice that Jesus doesn’t disagree. In fact in Matthew’s parallel account He is recorded as saying: (Matt 16:17) *“Blessed are you… for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven*”. The disciples rightly understood Jesus to be the Christ, the promised Messiah. The Greek word translated ‘Christ’ means the same thing as the transliterated Hebrew word ‘Messiah’ - ‘anointed one’. In the Old Testament times, some people were specially anointed to be God’s representatives to his chosen, covenant people. Prophets, priests and kings were set apart for divinely appointed tasks in this way. To understand what Jesus was ‘anointed’ to do we need to consider his mission. Which brings us to our 2nd point.

1. **The Mission of Christ**

How do you think Peter was able to answer, “*You are the Christ*”? As we’ve seen from Matthew’s account, Jesus makes clear there that Peter was only able to identify Jesus in this way because God the Father had revealed it to him. The same is true for you, and me and for your neighbours, work colleagues, and the rest of the approximately eight billion people on this planet. We can only make an accurate confession of who Jesus is if God’s Spirit opens our hearts and minds to see Jesus for who he is. This is part of the mystery of God’s saving work. We sang about this in Hymn 436 earlier: ‘*Tis not that I did choose thee, for Lord that could not be; This heart would still refuse thee, hadst thou not chosen me*’.

However, for Peter (and also for us), there was observable evidence which points both to the identity and to the mission of Jesus. Think about what Peter (and the other disciples) had seen before he made this confession. Peter had seen Jesus heal a paralysed man who had been lowered through the roof of a house. He had heard Jesus declare that the man’s sins were forgiven because of the faith he demonstrated. Peter had been there when Jesus had challenged the cold legalism of the religious leaders, healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day. Peter was in the boat when Jesus calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee. He saw an unnamed woman healed of a twelve yearlong bleed and the daughter of Jairus, a synagogue ruler, brought back to life. He was there at her bedside with disciples John and James. Peter was one of the twelve disciples who set bread and fish before a crowd of 5,000 men and saw them all fully fed with twelve baskets left over.

All this, and more, as recorded in the other gospels, pointed to who Jesus is and why He had come to this earth. So Peter says to Jesus “*You are the Christ*”. He is the anointed one, the commissioned special servant of God, sent on a mission…to do what? To heal people? Yes. To speak God’s truth? Yes. To bring in a new Kingdom which would last forever, Himself being the promised King Yes. But not in the way people thought. Not as a political leader, not as a military ruler. Not as a man who would immediately fix all their problems. Not as a Messiah who would heal everyone in this life. Not as a Messiah who would bring world peace in this life. Not as a Messiah who would be recognised as a king, receive honour and recognition from everyone in this life.

But a very different mission, as Jesus explains in the following passage in v31: “*And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again*” (8:31). The ‘Son of Man’ is the most usual title Jesus used for Himself, especially expressing His humanity. Jesus tells Peter and the other 11 disciples that he was going to suffer and be killed and then be resurrected! Not what most, if not all people, then were expecting.

Yet if they had understood Isaiah, a former prophet, they could have seen some of this coming. The Messiah, a special servant of God, would be: “*despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*” (Isa 53:3). He would take upon himself the sorrows of others and would not be honoured. He would be stricken, smitten, afflicted, by God. Pieced through for the rebellion, the sin, the transgression of others. He would be crushed and punished so that others would have peace and would receive healing. The LORD God would place the wickedness of others on Him.

The Mission of Jesus, the Christ of God, was to suffer and die. Why? So that He could buy back a people for God. “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). Do you believe this? Have you publicly confessed Jesus as the Christ? I tell you, now is the favourable time, now is the day of salvation. (2 Cor 6:2). If you have confessed that Jesus is the Christ, do you bear witness to this truth to others? This brings us to our third point.

1. **The Witness to Christ**

If you look back in Mark’s gospel, you will see how Jesus told the man he had healed from possession by a legion of demons in the Gentile area across the lake of Galilee to the east to: “*Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you*” (5:19). So the man went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marvelled.

But notice in Mark 8, when Peter has accurately confessed the identity of Jesus on behalf of the other 11 disciples at Caesarea Philippi, we read in verse 30: “*And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him*”. This was a stern ‘gag order’. ‘Keep my identity and my mission absolutely confidential’. Why? Because Jesus had **not yet** finished his public ministry. His true identity and purpose were not yet fully revealed to the wider public. The disciples had privileged knowledge about Jesus. They were the keepers of a mystery, a divine secret. This was before His execution on the cross. Later in this gospel, as Mark comes to the second climatic declaration of the identity of Jesus, he will record that: as Jesus was dying, a Roman soldier, a centurion, witnessed three hours of darkness and Christ’s final breath. He confessed “*Truly this man* *was the Son of God*” (Mark 15:39).

After His resurrection, Jesus showed himself to many over a period of 40 days and gave convincing proofs that he was alive (Acts 1:2). He said to his gathered disciples before He ascended bodily up into the clouds: “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*." (Acts 1.8) The confession of the identity and mission of Jesus was the good news, the message which the growing number of disciples passed on as they spread out from Jerusalem.

Confessing Christ has been the pattern of Christians ever since. People of different nations and language groups around the world, seeing the work and words of Jesus Christ, prophesied, recorded and explained in the Bible have confessed Jesus to be the Christ as God has opened their eyes to see Him through the work of His Holy Spirit in their hearts.

If you are not a Christian today, if you have not as yet confessed Christ, let me encourage you to read the gospel of Mark as a whole. This will likely take you less than one hour from beginning to end. The witness of the identity and mission of Jesus is powerfully presented in all four of the gospels.

If you are a Christian today, and have not as yet publicly confessed your faith; let me encourage you to do so without delay. In our Reformed church-system we have what is called ‘profession of faith’ where a person both confirms that they believe in Jesus Christ as their own Saviour and Lord and also commits themselves to this local church. This public profession of faith is a witness to the church of the identity and mission of Christ.

Most people in Christchurch could not clearly explain what the words ‘*Jesus is the Christ*’ means. Who is going to tell them? Christ’s temporary ‘gag order’ (8:30) does not apply to us today brothers and sisters in the Lord! The work of Christ on the cross is completed. Now is the time to speak, not to remain silent! People in this world can see the evidence of God’s almighty creative power in the universe around us.

People in this world may see the evidence of the transforming power of Christ in our lives in how we live. But unless we speak and openly confess Christ to a dying world, then we are not being faithful witnesses of Christ. We are not confessing Christ publicly as we are called to. This is not the time for silence, but for bold speech. Jesus is the Christ of God. He did suffer many things and was He was killed and on the third day He was raised back to life. It is because of these truths, Church of the Living God, that in Christ alone our hope is found.

AMEN