

July 26, 2020

## **"Who do you say that I am?"**

**"Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say that I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."**

**"But what about you?" he asked, "Who do you say that I am?"**

Mark 8:27-29

The very first written account of the life of Jesus is believed to have been written by a young disciple named Mark. This same Mark likely played a small part among the followers of Jesus, traveled with the Apostle Paul but turned back, was befriended by Barnabas, and very likely worked closely with the Peter before the end of that Apostle's life.

Mark begins his story with, **"The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God."** Mark tells us at the very beginning that his little book will all be about the good news of Jesus and he makes it clear that this Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

In the eighth chapter Jesus and the twelve have traveled north out of Galilee to the area around Caesarea Philippi. Unlike most of the other places Jesus visited this community is quite young and was literally built from the ground up to honor Caesar and the gods. It was, in Jesus' day, a beautiful place full of temples to various gods and goddesses and was therefore a center for religions of every type.

Against this backdrop Jesus asks the twelve, **"Who do people say that I am?"** They were obviously tuned into the gossip because they quickly supplied the stock answers. But then the Lord asks, **"But what about you? Who do you say that I am?"** We can almost see them looking anywhere but at Jesus, hoping that he won't call on any one of them for their answer. But bold, impetuous Peter pipes right up, **"You are the Christ!."**

In a very real way Jesus is asking the same question of each and every one of us every day. **"But what about you? Who do you say that I am?"** I am convinced that we need to approach our study of Mark's good news, asking ourselves this same question, **"But what about you, (Mike)? Who do you say that I am?"** So, as we continue in this study I want to challenge each of you personally to think about your own answer to this question.

I believe that in our study of Mark's gospel, as we continue to ask ourselves this question, the young author will give us some valuable insights into the very nature of **"...Jesus Christ, the Son of God."** In the his first chapter Mark introduces us to Jesus the healer. After his baptism and temptation Jesus moves north into Galilee preaching and healing. After healing Peter's mother-in-law of a fever the Master is beset with those who need healing and he works late into the night meeting those needs.

So, Mark begins his story with accounts of Jesus the healer, but at the end of this first chapter he shows us a more indepth picture of Jesus as the healer. A man with leprosy comes to Jesus and begs on his knees, **"If you are willing, you can make me clean."** Mark then writes, **"Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man."**

No one in Jesus' day would have, under any circumstances, let a leper come near them and no one would have dared touch a leper. But Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, moved by compassion touched this man.

It is easy, I think, for us to read about the stories recorded in the Gospels that show us Jesus the healer and to believe that he was just that. But Mark reveals an added piece to the puzzle of Jesus' nature and character. Jesus was not just a healer. Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God was a compassionate healer who could be moved to do even the unthinkable to help another human being.

In asking us, "**Who do you say that I am?**" Jesus is, I believe, not just showing us that he is a healer. I think Mark is showing us that Jesus was deeply moved by compassion and it is that compassionate nature that we are being asked to place our faith and to be in turn.

I believe, that Jesus was deeply moved by compassion for the hurting and the suffering and the dying and it is that compassionate nature that led him to heal. If I would be Jesus in this world I believe that I must allow myself to be moved by compassion. It is in my capacity for compassion that I can most clearly reflect my Lord.

