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SERMON TITLE: Who is Jesus?
SCRIPTURE: Mark 8:27-38
DATE: January 23, 2022

Online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Psalm 163:1-5. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Do you ever have a circumstance where you have to explain who Jesus is to someone? What would you say if asked?

Would you describe him as a moral teacher? If he was, and we followed him, the world would be a better place.

Would we change if Jesus were a good moral teacher? Has anyone changed from Plato's advice? Aristotle's? The wisdom of Confucius? John the Baptist?

If someone asked you about Jesus, would you describe him as a prophet?

Prophets healed, but could not overcome death. Jesus healed but everyone on this earth still dies.

Would you tell someone that Jesus is the Son of God? That is what he calls himself.

People have always wondered about who Jesus is. Let's read Mark 8:27-30

Jesus and his disciples left Galilee and went up to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. As they were walking along, he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets." Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Messiah." (vs. 27-29)

Jesus then swore them to secrecy about this fact. (v. 30)

The term "Messiah" meant that Jesus is God's anointed. It is a term used for kings, but Peter's use means "the anointed one," *the King of all kings*. Matthew's version of this story says Peter added to Messiah, "*Son of the Living God*" (Mt 16:16).

That's a far cry from John the Baptist, Elijah, a prophet, or moral teacher.

Jesus accepted this title—*the Anointed One, Son of the living God*, a.k.a., King of all kings.

Let's read what Jesus said about his kingship. It would be very different from a worldly king. Mark 8:31-33:

Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead. As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. "Get away from me, Satan!" he said. "You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."

That's a heated exchange! Don't ever think Jesus doesn't get mad; that Jesus doesn't have convictions about things; that Jesus is not passionate!

"Suffering King" meant humiliation (murder/death) and exaltation (rise again from the dead) and Peter rejects it. It says Jesus talked about this frankly and in plain speech. So Peter's response was not just a reaction to one or two sentences. Jesus calls Peter's attitude humanly and "of the devil."

Jesus was marching to the beat of another drum. He had an entirely different vision of kingship. And, he said he must do this. That means Jesus was planning to die—he was doing it voluntarily. He was not going to fight to the end and then possibly lose the battle unexpectedly. This was not a risky endeavor. Not at all, it was a plan. He knew the outcome therefore we have to assume he knew the purpose of the outcome.

Peter could not handle this news.

Peter missed the rising from the dead three days later part. Peter missed the nuances of what the King of Kings' view of leadership, accomplishment, and vision were.

Peter had little understanding of who this Son of God really was.

Sometimes we only hear the cross; the sacrifice; and we miss the rising. When we do that, we miss the **POWER** of Christ. For who can die and be raised? Is not that our greatest problem? We have no power to raise ourselves.

You have heard the slogan **PAX ROMANA**. It refers to a 200-year period in which the Roman government had peace. But politicians gained this peace by suppression and violent control. Governmental leaders killed political rivals and leaders of potential uprisings. They willingly killed in order to have peace.¹

¹ Christopher Klein, "How Ancient Rome Thrived During Pax Romana," at

Jesus' suffering, crucifixion, and death would expose human political injustice. Jesus' suffering, crucifixion, and death would also expose human religious injustice. These are two powerful institutions which are driven by human need for power and prestige.

The corruption of these two most powerful human institutions show us how greatly sin affects this world. **Jesus' suffering exposes us as we truly are.**

But Peter could not handle Jesus' perspective.

You and I might be right there with Peter. It does not seem to make sense that Jesus would go to the cross. We know the story from this end but Peter did not. He just knew and understood the world's systems. Kings were kings. They could do what they want. The problem is, nothing was showing us a better way.

Plato's, Aristotle's, Confucius's sayings had not shown us a better way.

Neither did the prophets or moral teachers preceding Christ, like Elijah and John the Baptist. **We cannot fix ourselves!**

So what do we do in 2022? How do we know the best solution to a world that seems to go terribly wrong again and again?

Let's put ourselves in Peter's shoes. We are a follower of Jesus. We sign on to a ZOOM class with him each day. He tells us the exact same thing he told Peter and the other disciples. Instead of trying to correct Jesus, (which we do all the time, BTW!), let's take a different perspective and say what Peter should have said:

Jesus, I hear what you are saying. Is it really worth going through all that suffering to rise again? You are the Messiah, the King of Kings, the Son of God—why not just skip all that suffering. How is it worth it?

But Jesus said 'it is worth it. It's not like you see it. You don't see the world like I saw it before sin entered. You don't know what it can be. I carry the cross to gain something better—for you! And you will too. You will carry it like me.'

READ Mark 8:34-38

Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Remember the Heidelberg Confession – *I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life.*

As you consider this, let me ask you a question. Do you have a credit card? I was offered this card at no cost and I accepted it. It is a privilege that I can take this card to any store and by presenting this card, can buy almost anything I want. But each month I get a bill and I am held responsible to pay for what I have purchased. And so when Jesus went to the cross for us, we gain. That gain carries some responsibilities—a response to the gift I accepted, in order to actively receive the fine results of Jesus' action.

The Heidelberg puts it like this: *Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.*

It's like this. Let's say you see a map from here to Europe. You see the way—it's costly. You have to take a plane or boat to get there. Other people know this; they have traveled it. You can see pictures. But unless you actually go there, you can't experience it.

Jesus says this: if you carry the cross, that is, if you carry his vision of you and me reflecting God's image, you will gain exponentially for your family and friends too. Your love will grow for your own family and you will gain everything because I carry it with you. Then when your end comes, Jesus says, "I will see to it you will rise."

Who is Jesus? We have to know him to say, the one who can preserve your soul.

AMEN