

"Recognizing Jesus" - Mark 8:27-38

If you have been worshipping at Canyon Community Church for any length of time at all, you should be quite familiar with Romans 10, verse 9.

... that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Have you ever heard me quote that verse? Have you memorized it?

I love that verse because it perfectly captures the simplicity of the Gospel. In order to be saved from Hell, you have to believe in Jesus. Believe He is the Son of God. Believe He entered the creation He spoke into existence and lived a perfect human life. Believe He died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins. Believe God raised Him from the dead, so you can have a living relationship with Him. Confess Him as your Lord and your God.

Salvation is by God's grace alone, apprehended by faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. It is a precious, precious gift, and I have often said that all you have to do is just believe. But if you really believe, if your faith is authentic, your faith will transform your life because God the Holy Spirit is working inside you, teaching you to submit to Jesus' Lordship. That's the first requirement of Romans 10:9, to confess Jesus as Lord.

Understanding and accepting who Jesus is isn't quite enough. Head knowledge isn't enough. You need heart knowledge. You need a heart transplant to replace your heart of stone with a heart of flesh. James says:

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! (James 2:19)

How many times have we seen the demons acknowledge Jesus?

And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ. (Luke 4:41)

So, I have to say, if you believe Jesus is the Christ and you believe Jesus is the Son of God, that's absolutely wonderful! But understand, Satan does that much. The question is, are you willing to make Him your Lord? Are you willing to submit to His Lordship? Are you willing to let Him call the shots? Are you willing to say, "Not my will, but Thine, Lord"?

We need to recognize Jesus. We need to recognize who He is. We also need to recognize the authority He has over our lives and while we can never be saved by our obedience, to the best of our ability, we need to submit to Jesus' program. We need to submit to His Lordship.

Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?" So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him. (Mark 8:27-30)

The first phrase sets the scene. Jesus has, once again, taken the disciples into Gentile territory. Caesarea Philippi is well North, and a little bit East of Bethsaida, where Jesus healed the blind man – maybe 50 miles or so. Remember, at this point in His ministry, He is focusing on the 12 Apostles, as they will be largely responsible for establishing the Church after the resurrection. He's teaching them, and as He had been doing for the past five or six months, He took them into Gentile territory to minimize the distractions.

While walking along the road, He asks the question: "Who do men say that I am?"

That's a really important question. A person's eternal destiny hinges on their personal answer to that question. Is Jesus a legend? Was He just a gifted moral teacher? Was He just a prophet? Those answers are at best, incomplete. Jesus is God the Son. He is very God of very God. He is the Agent of creation. But He is something else ... something infinitely wonderful!

So, when Jesus asks the next question: "But who do you say that I am?", Peter is ready with the right answer. "You are the Christ." We get a little more from Matthew's account.

Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16)

Now, the disciples had already figured out that Jesus was God the Son. We see this back when the seas were calmed at His rebuke.

Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God." (Matthew 14:33)

But by now, they had come to believe that Jesus was also the Christ. He was the promised Messiah, the Anointed One. He was the One who would save His people. Unfortunately, they had a warped view of how Messiah was going to accomplish this. They thought He would appear as a conquering King. They thought He would set up an Earthly, political kingdom. They ignored all of Isaiah's and Jeremiah's prophecies about the suffering Servant. We shouldn't blame them, because that was what they had been taught by all the rabbis, except for Jesus, of course.

But Peter's confession was absolutely, perfectly, right-on. It was God's truth. And although, Mark doesn't relate it, Peter was warmly commended for his confession.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:17-18)

Peter must have been busting his buttons when he heard that!

Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him. (Mark 8:30)

Because the story was not yet complete. Jesus had not finished His work. The crowds had already tried to take Him by force and make Him king. They simply didn't understand that our Lord was going to win His greatest victory on the cross. And so, He began to teach them what was going to happen.

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31)

Well, that's pretty explicit, isn't it? Jesus told them exactly what was going to happen. It was what had to happen if we sinners are to have any chance whatsoever, but they weren't ready to hear it. And poor Peter goes from the pinnacle of commendation to the most stinging rebuke you can imagine.

He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. (Mark 8:32)

Rebuke Jesus? Rebuke God the Son? Talk about presumptuous! And once again, Matthew gives us a little more insight:

Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" (Matthew 16:22)

“No, Lord! I’m not going to let you suffer. I won’t let you be killed by those turkeys in Jerusalem! I’ve got a better idea!”

Well, Peter, who are you to reply against God?

But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." (Mark 8:33)

Wow! That just had to hurt; it had to sting!

Peter loved Jesus. He knew Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. He didn’t want Him to suffer. Was that so bad?

But Jesus called him Satan!

Peter’s problem is the same one we struggle with so much of the time. We know who Jesus is. We are willing to trust Him with our salvation, with our eternity. But as if we really have a better idea than God, we try to impose our will on Him.

Our Lord has a lesson for us:

When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. (Mark 8:34-35)

To deny yourself is to step down from the throne of your life. To deny yourself is to give up any sovereignty you thought you had. To deny yourself is to let Jesus lead. Let Jesus reign. Let Jesus call the shots. Stop trying to impose your will. Instead, submit to the perfect will of the Master.

According to Jesus, it’s the only way you can truly save your life. And in fact, it is the only way you can be supremely satisfied with your life. Denying yourself and letting Jesus rule is actually no sacrifice at all because our chief purpose as human beings is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Conversely, you cannot really enjoy God unless you strive to glorify God. We were designed for worship. We were designed to display God’s glory, to announce God’s majesty. It is in our architecture. We will never be truly satisfied unless we do so.

If you recognize Jesus, if you truly apprehend all Jesus is, then that must be your sole aim, your overarching goal. And when it is, you will find peace, satisfaction and joy no matter what your circumstances. As John Piper is fond of saying: “Jesus is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” So, step off the throne of your life and let Jesus lead. Peter didn’t have a better idea about the plan of redemption and you don’t have a better idea about how this universe should be run.

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:36-38)

Jesus is the Pearl of great price. It is worth sacrificing everything you have in this world to gain Him. When Jesus returns, I don't want Him to be ashamed of me. I don't want anything in this world to get between me and my Redeemer.

Does that mean we need to sell everything we own and give it to the poor? Does that mean we need to devote ourselves to some sort of ascetic life of self-denial?

Actually, no.

The Lord has promised to give us what we need to be satisfied in Him.

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! (Matthew 7:11)

This isn't name-it-claim-it prosperity doctrine, but this is Jesus promising us whatever we need to be most satisfied in Him. It may involve the proper use of material wealth, but it might not. Satisfaction in Jesus transcends everything in this world.

Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. (Psalms 37:4)

Jesus is more satisfying than anything this world can offer! It is why Paul could say:

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:12-13)

As Christians, we will only be truly satisfied if we pursue Jesus above all else.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

If God has blessed you with material goods in this world, give thanks to Him, and then resolve to use whatever God has given you to glorify Jesus. Hold your possessions loosely, just in case He does require you to give them up. Keep the right perspective.

For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:16-17)

But what if God wants to take everything we have away? It happens to people, you know. This past summer, quite a number of folks lost everything they owned to wildfires. Hurricanes and floods and earthquakes regularly wipe entire families out. Just last week, an entire church, a Christian church, was wiped out by psychotic gunman. Those things happen, but God is still in control.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Peter, though He recognized Jesus for who He is, tried to lean on his own understanding. It did not go well for Him and it will not go well for you. Jesus knows best. It's best to submit to His perfect will.

Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones. (Proverbs 3:7-8)

Recognize Jesus for who He is. Then submit to His plan and His will. He wants the very best for you.