**YOU ARE THE MESSIAH**

***Mark 8:22-30***

***“‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah.’” (v. 29)***

How many chapters are there in Mark’s gospel? Sixteen! In the midst of his gospel that we’re going to study today, Mark introduces the most important question and confession in each of our lives: ***“Who do you say I am?” “You are the Messiah!”***  Let’s think about the meaning of this conversation. May God help us to deeply understand Jesus’ question and answer very personally!

1. **Do you see anything? (vs. 22-26)**

Verse 22 reads, ***“They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.”*** Leaving the region of Dalmanutha on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus crossed to the other side to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to Jesus. We don’t know exactly when the man lost his sight. But the moment he lost it, he lost everything. His best and only option was to beg for a living. His physical blindness must have affected his mind and soul, making his worldview very gloomy, despairing, and hopeless. He felt his life was surrounded by utter darkness and he was abandoned even by God. But God did not abandon him, nor was his life hopeless. Like a light shining into darkness, Jesus visited the place. Furthermore, he had good friends. Like the friends of the deaf and mute man in the previous chapter, they put their time and effort to bring the blind man to Jesus and begged him to touch the man. They had compassion on their poor friend and had a wonderful dream that the blind man would see the beauty of God’s creation through Jesus’ healing. In the gospels, we can see many compassionate friends who brought their helpless friends to Jesus. They are truly blessings for their powerless neighbors. May God help us to have the love, faith, and prayer for the needy like these friends!

Jesus ***took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village (23a).*** Jesus wanted to have a one-to-one relationship with this man. Then he spat on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him. Jesus showed his love as he led him by the hand, touched the man’s eyes and put his hands on him. Jesus also nourished the man’s faith by these actions. Then Jesus asked, ***“Do you see anything?” (23b)*** This man never thought of seeing anything. But Jesus helped him to try now to see anything by faith. The man looked up and said, ***“I see people; they look like trees walking around.”*** Wow! His eyes were opened; he began to see. Yet, his vision was blurred. To him, Jesus’ disciples looked like walking trees. ***Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes.*** The man fully entrusted himself to Jesus’ healing touch by faith. ***Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly (25).*** Now he could see blue skies, bright sunshine, waves of the Sea of Galilee, hills and rivers. He could freely walk, jump, and run. Everything was new. His life would never be the same. Now he could work for his family and community. He could serve God and his needy neighbors. Most of all, he could see Jesus’ merciful and peaceful face smiling at him. One thing he could not forget was that once he was blind, but now he could see and have new life through Jesus. He could know Jesus’ power and his grace. Jesus was his Savior, who brought him out of darkness into God’s wonderful light.

In the Bible, sight is often a synonym of spiritual understanding. God created man to have both body and spirit so that he could live in both dimensions. Since the creation of the world, God revealed his eternal power and divine nature clearly through what he has made, so that we can see and acknowledge God’s glory (Ro 1:19-20). Psalm 19:1 says, *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”* But man lost his spiritual sight due to his pride, his doubt in God’s love, and his rebellion against God. As man’s eyes were opened to evil, his spiritual eyes became increasingly darkened and ultimately blind. Our spiritually blind eyes affect all areas of our lives (Lk 11:34). Apart from God, we had no life, no direction and no fruit. We were like prisoners dying in a deep dungeon without any hope.

But thankfully God promised to restore our spiritual sight by sending the Messiah to free his people from their bondage to darkness. Healing the blind man was a sign of the Messiah (Isa 35:5). Jesus came to the world to give us sight. How can we receive it? Most importantly, we must acknowledge our blindness and our need for healing. Like the blind man in today’s passage, we must entrust ourselves to Christ’s guidance by faith and follow him. As Jesus opened the blind man’s eyes gradually based on the man’s faith and needs, our spiritual eyes can be opened gradually as we follow Christ. Jesus says in John 8:12, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* Jesus is the light of the world, who gives sight to all who come to him and follow him.

1. **Who do you say I am? (vs. 27-30)**

In the spiritual sense, the previous event is closely related to this next part. After healing the blind man, Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi, a beautiful resort place located on the southern slopes of Mount Hermon. This area is famous for hot springs that provide many therapeutic benefits. The disciples must have been excited with a vacation mood as they traveled far away from the Jewish religious leaders and the demanding crowds. But Jesus withdrew to this remote place to prepare himself for his impending crucifixion and to teach his disciples about his mission which would soon be fulfilled in Jerusalem.

***On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” (27b)*** According to Luke, Jesus was praying in private when he asked this question (Lk 9:18). Jesus prayed that God might help the disciples to know and confess who Jesus is. The disciples had finished the course of learning from Jesus and were taking the final exam. Question one was a pretty easy one. They replied unanimously, ***“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” (28)*** In general, people of Jesus’ time saw him as a great prophet. The prophets were historically known to his people as the holy men of God and messengers of God’s word. Among them, Elijah and John the Baptist were the most prominent because they had exceptionally powerful manifestations of the Spirit of God in their lives and ministries. Each of them lived in a most difficult time, yet they did not yield to the power of evil. Rather, they overcame the world with God’s Spirit and delivered God’s word to their people. In short, most people of Jesus’ time saw him as a great man of God. It is true that Jesus is the greatest man in history in every respect. But if one sees Jesus only as a great man, he does not know who he really is.

Jesus expected more from his disciples. Verse 29a reads. ***“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”*** In the Greek, the word ***“you”*** is strongly emphasized. Regardless what others had said about Jesus, Jesus wanted his disciples to make a very personal confession based on their experience with him. The disciples had followed Jesus for almost three years. They had seen Jesus heal men with leprosy, paralysis and demon possession. They had seen him calm the furious storms at sea and walk on the water. He even raised a dead girl! They had seen him feeding the 5,000 and another 4,000 with a few loaves and fish. Recently, Jesus healed the deaf and mute and blind. The disciples’ spiritual eyes had been gradually opened. So now what did they say about Jesus? Look at verse 29b. ***“Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah.’”*** So far, Peter had flunked in every test of faith. But this time Peter gave the correct answer and got an A+. We call this “Peter’s confession of faith.”

What then does ***“the Messiah”*** mean? “Messiah” in Hebrew is equivalent to “Christ” in Greek. They both mean “the Anointed One.” In the Old Testament, when God ordained some specific people like kings, high priests, or prophets for his special purposes, he anointed them with oil. It was the symbol that they were sent by God to intercede for his people, to save them from their enemies, and to establish peace and justice. All human offices anointed with oil, however, had great limitations because Man’s fundamental enemy is Satan and problem is sin and death. Until this problem is solved, man cannot have real peace and happiness due to their broken relationship with God. All men lived helplessly under sin and died. Since human kings, priests, and prophets were all sinners just like us, they could not save man. They ultimately foreshadowed the Messiah, *the* Anointed One. Since the Fall of Man, God promised to send the Messiah who would crush Satan, deliver mankind from the power of sin and death and establish his eternal kingdom through his death and resurrection.

Throughout Old Testament history, God unveiled his world salvation plan. God promised that the Savior would come through the line of Abraham and King David (Ge 22:18; 1Sa 7:14). Furthermore, Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be called, *“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6b).* Jeremiah prophesied that he would be called, “The Lord Our Righteous Savior” (Jer 23:6). This Messiah would possess a divine nature and be perfectly fit for saving and ruling human beings eternally with his righteous and justice. In addition, the Messiah would be the Lamb of God, who would shed his blood to take away the sin of the world just as the Israelites in Egypt were liberated from their slavery to Pharaoh by the blood of the Passover Lamb.

By saying, ***“You are the Messiah,”*** Peter acknowledged that he and his nation of Israel were in a miserable and helpless condition. He confessed that they eagerly waited for the Savior who would rescue them from the misery. He believed that God finally sent the Savior. So he confidently declared, **“Lord, you are the Promised Savior.”** Peter’s understanding of the Savior must have no doubt been limited at this point. But Jesus was so pleased with this confession and in Matthew 16:17, he replied, ***“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.”***

Peter’s confession is the essence of the Christian faith. By confessing ***“You are the Messiah!”*** each Christian is saying, “Jesus, I am a helpless sinner. I cannot restore my broken relationship with God with my own power and righteousness. I cannot save myself from the power of sin and death. I need God’s grace and mercy only. I need your help. You are the only One, whom God sent to save me.” Our confession is an expression of our utter helplessness in ourselves and personal faith in Jesus. As a newborn baby grows, he recognizes his parents gradually. It is the most joyful occasion for any parents when their baby suddenly pronounces, “Daddy!” Or “Mommy!” It is the simplest confession of love and of utter dependence on his parents. Likewise, God is so pleased by one’s humility and faith revealed in his or her confession. Romans 10:10 says, *“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”* In this way, God saves us and gives us eternal life and the kingdom of God. This confession is a matter of life and death. For those who have never made this confession, today is the day to do so. For those who have made this confession, today we can renew it in our hearts and confess it newly like an innocent child.

Furthermore, based on this affirmation of faith in Jesus, Jesus continually builds up a firm relationship with each of us. We are united with Jesus and Jesus guides, nourishes and rules over us as our Everlasting Father and eternal King. Based on this confession, we can follow Jesus despite people’s opinions and challenges in this world.

“Amazing Grace” is probably the most beloved hymn of the last two centuries. Some of the lyrics drew my attention as they relate to today’s passage, “I once was lost, but now am found; **Was blind, but now I see.**” As you may know, this hymn was written by John Newton, a former British slave trader. In 1748, at the age of 23, during a voyage from Africa to England, the ship that he was aboard was caught in a terrible storm off the coast of Ireland and almost sank. Newton prayed to God, “Lord, have mercy upon us” and the cargo miraculously shifted to fill a hole in the ship’s frame and the vessel drifted to safety. Newton took this as a sign from the Almighty and marked it as his conversion to Christianity. But he did not radically change his ways at once, his total reformation was more gradual. He continued in the slave trade for a time after his conversion. In 1754, he suffered a serious illness and retired. After leaving the sea, Newton held Bible studies in his Liverpool home. Influenced by both John Wesley and George Whitefield, he adopted a godly lifestyle and became increasingly disgusted with the slave trade and his role in it. He was ordained into the Anglican ministry in 1764, at the age of 39. His preaching was so popular that the church could not accommodate all those who flocked to hear him. For almost every week’s service, he wrote a hymn to be sung. In this way, he wrote 280 hymns to accompany his services. He wrote the words for “Amazing Grace” in 1772 deeply repenting of his involvement in the Slave Trade.

In 1788, in his early sixties, he published a blazing pamphlet called “Thoughts Upon the Slave Trade.” It graphically described the horrors of the Slave Trade and his role in it. Newton apologized by making a public statement so many years after participating in the trade: “It will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders.” The pamphlet was so popular that it was reprinted several times and sent to every member of Parliament. As a result, under the leadership of William Wilberforce, the English civil government outlawed slavery in Great Britain in 1807. In that year, when the act to abolish the Slave Trade finally became law, John Newton, nearly physically blind and near death, “rejoiced to hear the wonderful news.”

Newton lived to be eighty-two years old, but his spiritual eyes never ceased to be opened more and more. Through all the years of his ministry and fame, Newton never forgot how far he had come. He regularly read Deuteronomy 15:15, *“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.”* Newton never ceased to be amazed by God’s grace and told his friends, “My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior.”

Though we were never slave traders, we can each confess that we are all sinners just the same and that Jesus is my Savior. The evidence of our spiritual blindness is that we don’t know who we are and who Jesus is. On the contrary, the evidence of our spiritual growth is that we better acknowledge our sinfulness and utter helplessness in ourselves and more fully depend on Jesus as my Savior. As John Newton’s eyes became opened more and more, he more fully enjoyed God’s amazing grace and followed his Lord firmly for the rest of his life. Now Jesus asks each of us out of his love, ***“Who do you say I am?”*** May God help us to confess, “Jesus, you are the Messiah, my Savior and Lord.” May God continue to open our spiritual eyes to know Christ deeper and follow him based on his amazing grace!