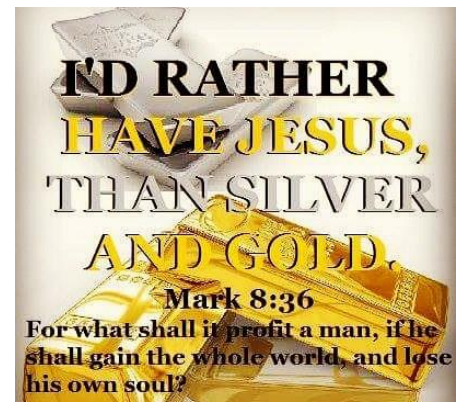


Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Psalm 22:22-30

Romans 4:13-25

Mark 8:31-38



WHAT CAN A MAN GIVE IN RETURN FOR HIS LIFE?

Review Mark 8:27-30¹: *And Jesus went on with his disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that I am?”* ²⁸*And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets.”* ²⁹*And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?”* *Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.”* ³⁰*And he charged them to tell no one about him.*

In the days of Jesus, the *villages of Caesarea Philippi* (v.27) were in the Jordan River valley about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. The territory was ruled by Herod Philip. Jews lived there along with a mixture of Gentiles, and there were many pagan gods, whose presence could be felt more than in the usual places Jesus visited. He seldom took his disciples into an area such as Caesarea Philippi.

So it was no accident that here, of all places, Jesus put the question to his disciples, “*Who do you say that I am?*” When you feel the presence of other gods, it is harder to remember who Jesus Christ is.

Jesus was also testing the effect of his ministry. Had people believed who he was? This was the crucial question. The NT is replete with sayings that *faith* – belief that Jesus is the Son of God – is the one ingredient essential for the gospel to live in the hearts of men. For example, compare Mark 16:16, Luke 8:11-12, John 3:16-18, John 8:23-24, Rom 5:1-2, and Eph 2:8-9 on this point.

The gospel lives in the hearts believers. It does not live in books, or classrooms, or decrees of governments. It lives in your heart. The message keeps spreading because every day someone, somewhere, confesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And always the crucial question has been not, “Who do people say Jesus Christ is?” but “*Who do you say he is?*”

Peter replied, “*You are the Christ*” (v.29). Matthew 16:16 records, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” Luke 9:20 says, “*The Christ of God.*” All three gospels leave no doubt about what Peter’s answer implied. It implied that Jesus, from the family of a carpenter of Nazareth, was the incarnation of Almighty God, of whom John the Baptist bore witness: “*For this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel. I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him.*”

How could Peter (or anyone) come to believe, and be convinced that Jesus is the Christ? Only with the blessing of God. Jesus said to Peter, “*Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven*” (Matt 16:17). Thus, your faith is God’s gift to you.

This decision is the most important choice you will ever make. The Bible says your salvation is *by faith* rather than by what you accomplish in life (Eph 2:8, 9). If you have come to believe, as Peter did, that Jesus is the Christ, your salvation is assured. Remember, all the disciples fell away at times, but only one was lost, and he did not believe as Peter believed. The Word of faith will always be yours to keep in your heart. The world didn’t put it there; neither can the world take it away. The Bible says, “*The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*” (Rom 10:8, 9). There are no other “ifs” outside of this statement – no other conditions. God has spoken.

Mark 8:31-33. *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.* ³²*And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.* ³³*But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men.”*

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

- *“The Son of man must suffer many things ... and be killed, and after three days rise again”* (v.31). Jesus knew what was coming. A man cannot guarantee the future. But in perfect obedience and trust, Jesus knew God’s plan would be accomplished. At this time in his ministry (also in Matt 16 and Luke 9), Jesus first revealed the road the Son of man must decide to travel. Peter took a dim view of this announcement.
- *“Peter took him, and began to rebuke him* (v.32). The disciples and the rest of the Jews believed Messiah would come in power and judgment, and save his people from their enemies. They overlooked Isaiah’s prophecy, *“He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all”* (Isa 53:5-6).
- *“Get behind me, Satan!”* (v.33). Jesus felt again, and not for the last time, the temptation that came from Satan in the wilderness, now coming from his most-trusted friend. Jesus could avoid the cross, and was tempted to do so. It is sad that sometimes a close and well-meaning friend can be used in this way by the enemy to tempt us to leave the narrow gate Jesus calls us to enter, even though it is the door that opens the way to salvation and eternal life (Matt 7:13-14, Luke 13: 24). We must always be aware of this possibility.

Mark 8:34-9:1. *And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? ³⁷For what can a man give in return for his life? ³⁸For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. ¹And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”*

- *“He called to him the multitude with his disciples* (v.34). Jesus began to teach the mission of the Messiah and what it means to follow him in this life to everyone willing to listen. Jesus is our example in this. He forgave others; we must do the same. He was obedient to the end; we must be the same.
- *“Let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”* (v.34). There are three commands here. Each has its own implications in the life of a Christian. What does each imply, as you think about it?
- *“For whoever would save his life will lose it ...”* (v.35). Everyone who lives long enough discovers this truth. Our riches and possessions that we strived for, and even our health, become useless if in our efforts to save them we have forgotten to love God and our neighbor. Jesus said, *“The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it”* (Matt 13:45-46). This “pearl of great value” is your new life in Jesus Christ.
- *“For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed ...”* (v.38). The world has always done all it can to make the gospel seem doubtful and ridiculous. You and I are called now – today – to stand up openly for Jesus Christ. We are called to take up the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18) daily, and to live out our confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. If you are going to wait until the battle is over to support the winner, who cares?
- *“... when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels”* (v.38). The Son’s confidence in the Father was unshakeable. At the cross, darkness covered the land. Nearly everyone lost hope. One of the men going to Emmaus said, *“We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel”* (Luke 24:21). He was the one to redeem not only Israel, but the whole world. When he cried, *“It is finished,”* you were saved.
- *“There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power”* (9:1). This was a startling claim by Jesus, alone in this foreign place with the entire unknown world stretching out beyond. Yet, within a generation, and against all human expectation, Christianity would have swept through Asia Minor, and Macedonia, and Greece, and on to Rome and beyond. Just as Jesus said, the kingdom of God has come with power. It is here, now, in the midst of us. Have you seen it?