

"Who Do You Say Jesus Is?"

Text: Mark 8:31-38

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

A man I once knew, having just received the news that he had a terminal illness and hadn't long to live, responded to the news with this comment: *"I don't have time to die."*

My first reaction? *"I'm pretty sure you do."* My second reaction was that this was really not a good attitude or sentiment, especially coming from a man whose time of grace would soon end and who was therefore about to stand in judgment before his Lord. In his particular case, it was a statement that indicated a preoccupation with the things of earth and time, and a failure to contemplate the reality of eternity, and of man's accountability to his Creator.

We're all at risk. Satan has to be very pleased with how busy and distracted we've grown. He loves wealth, prosperity, and commotion. He's not a fan of hard times on earth. He would much rather see everyone preoccupied with a wealth of discretionary funds, good health, lots of free time, and no restraints. That's where and how he wants us to waste our time and energy. The devil wants us so busy chasing dollars and dreams that we find little or no time for that which God himself labeled as truly important. Everyone is at risk, Christians and non-Christians alike. Not even the strongest fire of faith can long burn under such a flood of materialism, temptation, and preoccupation.

While our God *might* well be working to free us from Satan's carefully laid traps when he allows hardships into our lives, he most *certainly* strives to do so in our text. There our God seeks to draw us from earth to heaven – safe above the sea of "things" that threatens to engulf us and to extinguish saving faith. These words seek to draw us from the frantic chaos of worldliness to the quiet comfort of the Savior's side. Our text reminds all of us that someday it *will* be time to die, and on that day it will have profited us nothing to have gained the whole world and, in the process, to have lost our own soul. As a teaching tool, our Savior asks the question which serves as the basis for our study this morning: *"Who do you say that I am?"* Simple question, maybe not so simple answer.

The text that will guide and instruct us is found recorded in the Gospel of Mark, the Eighth Chapter:

ESV **Mark 8:27-38** *And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people 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 strictly charged them to tell no one about him.³¹ ¶ 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 aside 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 setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."³⁴ ¶ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul?³⁸ 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 when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*

This is God's Word. In a world filled with so much talk that is worthless and annoying – so many things that are vain, pointless, and false – let these words command your full attention, for they are the words from God Himself. That our God would bless each of us through the study of these sacred words this morning, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Have you ever been so preoccupied with something that you find yourself noticing nothing else? For most men the answer is probably: *"Every time I turn on the television."* But we're talking here about *really* focused – totally absorbed to the point where the Rose Bowl parade could march past and you probably wouldn't notice.

If you find yourself trying to remember a situation in your life were that was the case, you needn't work too hard. That's pretty much exactly what Satan is succeeding in doing to each one of us for the better part

of nearly every day. The individual distractions may vary, but the resulting fixation is the same.

Our first task then this morning is to ask ourselves, honestly: *"Where exactly is my day-to-day, moment-by-moment focus? What are the things in my life that keep me running so frantically from this place to that that I don't have time or energy to notice much of anything else? More to the point, am I allowing all these distractions to keep me from the "one thing needful" and from a closer walk with my Savior, and how does my preoccupation give answer to what Jesus means to me?"*

It is self-evident that there are some necessary and unavoidable things in life that unavoidably absorb much of our time and attention – things that aren't optional. God's Word reminds us, for example, that **"if any would not work, neither should he eat."** But how many of the distractions in your life are really necessary? A better question yet, if you stand back and take a look at your typical day, during how much of that day do you find yourself in a "worldly" state of mind rather than **"setting your mind on the things of God"** (the phrase Jesus used in our text)?

With all of the fluff that assaults our eyes and ears and occupies our minds on a daily basis, it's disturbingly easy to block out the stern and damning law contained in our text: **"For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."** ³⁶ **For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?** ³⁷ **For what can a man give in return for his soul?** ³⁸ **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 when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."**

These words are like a hand grenade from our Savior. Our job this morning is to set them under our old Adam and pull the pin. Not easy to do. When we examine ourselves and our thoughts and actions day-by-day, moment-by-moment, do you think it is a good thing that, at pretty much any point during our average day, Jesus could speak those same awful words to you that he first spoke to Peter: **"Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man"**? In fact if the Apostle Peter himself, who walked daily at the Savior's side, fell into this trap, you and I can know beyond a shadow of any reasonable doubt that the danger here is real and present.

"Setting your mind on the things of man" is a symptom of what Jesus in our text referred to as **"saving (your) life."** To **"save your life"** is a tough phrase to wrap our

minds around, but we need to work at it until we do. Normally we would regard *"saving a life"* as a good thing. Jesus obviously isn't using the term in that way. He's talking here about standing at a fork in the road and choosing the same path that the world *always* picks. He's talking about clawing and grasping for every last thing this world has to offer, even when those choices harm our eternal soul by damaging or even destroying saving faith. In the worst case it means refusing what Jesus described in our text as **"denying self and taking up our cross and following Jesus."** To **"deny self"** is a very broad and inclusive term. It certainly includes denying any hope of a salvation that we could earn with our own works, but it is more than that. **"Self"** really refers to any part in us that is worldly-minded, any part of our former, un-Christian thoughts, desires, and aspirations. *That* is what our God wants us to abandon. How are we doing?

This is an extremely sobering section of Holy Scripture. How often do you lose the battle with "self"? During how much of your day do you feel like you've **"taken up a cross"** in following Jesus? During how much of our day are you **"mindful of the things of God"**? You and I don't even have time to get sick. We certainly don't have time to die. But we all *will* one day die (if our Lord doesn't return first). Our text reminds us to live with that day in mind.

Again, this is the harsh reality of the law that our sinful flesh needs to hear, but what exactly does this have to do with the question asked by our sermon theme: *Who do you say Jesus is?*

Take a look through this morning's text again and you will notice what at first seems like two unrelated events. In the first part, Jesus asks his disciples **"Who do people say that I am?"** The disciples report what they have been hearing, after which Jesus gets to the point of his questions: **"But who do you say that I am?"** Peter answered with his marvelous, inspired: **"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."** The full quote is recorded in Matthew 16:16, and in that account Jesus went on to tell his disciples that he would found his Church on the simple truth expressed by Peter.

That's the first part of our text. In the second part, Jesus had harsh words for the *very same man* he had just praised for his confession. What then do the two parts have to do with each other, or are they just unconnected events told one after the other?

They are in fact connected. The answer to *"Who do you say he is?"* is more than just a one-time confession, or one isolated answer to a

single question. In fact the full answer we give to the question *"Who do you say Jesus is?"* is comprised of everything we do and say during our time of grace. We answer the question with how we dress, how we talk, how we drive our cars and how we do our work. It goes back to what Paul said to the Corinthians: ***"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved."*** (1 Corinthians 10:31-33) Again in Matthew 5:16, ***"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*** The truth here communicated by our Savior is that what you and I do with our time of grace is our loudest, clearest confession of just exactly who and what Jesus is to us.

What then is the confession you *want* to make? What do you want your words and actions to say about your Savior? Our text provides the answer, for not only is there strongest law in our text for this morning, there is also sweetest gospel. Here there is solace and comfort for sinners like you and me. Jesus knew that even his closest men were worldly-minded, as we also are worldly-minded. Yet he willingly gave his life for sinners like us. All of the Apostles abandoned Jesus in his final hours, thereby giving the world the impression that they were, at some level, ***"ashamed of him."*** And yet our Lord came to save these very men and, more than even that, he used these very men to establish and expand his Church. Here is undeniable evidence that Jesus came not for the holy and self-righteous, but for the unlovable and undeserving. This is our answer. This is who Jesus is – the one who came to save a sinner like me.

For this Savior alone we are willing to "lose" our lives here on this earth. To ***"lose one's life"*** means not only that we despair of earning our own way to heaven by our own works; it also means that we are led to trust Jesus without question or reservation as the one who must supply every single thing that is good and positive for our salvation. It means that we have no life at all apart from Jesus. You and I ***"are not our own, for we were bought at a price."*** It means that we don't need to be preoccupied with the things of this world. We can trust that the one who saved us and now owns us will also provide us with everything for this life.

Our simple prayer is then this: that every single thing we do in this life would match the answer that we give in church. That everything we do, say, even think, would speak clearly to the world around us: *"This is who and what Jesus is to me – the one who saved me from myself."* Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16** When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." ³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴ "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ¹⁵ ¶ And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

^{ESV} **Romans 5:1-11** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. ⁶ ¶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

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The Second Sunday in Lent – February 28, 2021

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 156 (Red Hymnal)

"Not All the Blood of Beasts"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16) Our first reading tells of an early conversation between God and Abram, who is here given the name Abraham. It is important to note that God's promises here to Abraham were given before God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. This tells of the confusion that Abraham must have felt, as God's command conflicted so clearly with his promise. Abraham's course of action was simply to trust and obey. God keeps his promises.

Psalm 51 (Supplement page 28)

The Second Lesson: (Romans 5:1-11) A powerful section of Holy Scripture that really needs no introduction. Thanks and praise to our merciful God for calling unworthy sinners like us to faith. Surely one of his greatest miracles is to have loved the unlovable. One note on this reading, when we read that God saved us when we were "**weak**," that word would be better translated "powerless" or "without strength." We were not just weak when our God brought us to faith. We were helpless.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 721 (Brown Hymnal)

"Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrows"

The Sermon – Text: Mark 8:27-38 (Printed on the back page)

"Who Do You Say Jesus Is?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 145 (Stanzas 1-2) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Refuge of the Weary"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 47 (Stanzas 1-2,4) (Red Hymnal)

"Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (35) Average (30) Wednesday (20)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Teacher Ross Kok has returned the call to Faith of Markesan.

That congregation has now called Jessica Krueger, a member of faith currently teaching in a public school. Teacher Caleb Noeldner has returned his call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Messiah has now called Teacher Nathan Wales. Teacher June Schmid has accepted the call to teach in the lower grades at Messiah. Redeemer of Cheyenne voted to put in a call for a seminary graduate. Pastor David Schaller has accepted the call to ILC.

Church Council Notes – All members of the Church Council were present for the meeting on February 21. The membership of Debbie Mantz was dropped at her request. Offerings for January fell short of expenses by \$131. Using donated software, the Council is setting up a secure cloud-based One Drive system to store all church records. Next meeting 3/21.

Midweek Services – Our midweek Lenten services continue this week with a study of the virtue of loyalty.

Easter Flowers – Please see the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table. The order will be placed after the service next Sunday.