

Lesson: Mark 8:27-35

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" ²⁸ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." ³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. ³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." ³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Prayer of the Day:

Lord, we pray that your mercy and grace may always go before and follow after us that, loving you with undivided hearts, we may be ready for every good and useful work; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Alleluia. (Romans 15:4 cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

Peter is always an interesting study among the disciples of Jesus. Sometimes he gets everything so wonderfully right. Other times, everything goes so horribly wrong. Today's lesson is a perfect example of that. Right on the coat tails of such a beautiful confession of Jesus, we see that Peter has lost sight of what the Christ, the Messiah is all about. As a result, Jesus needs to set Peter straight but also take this opportunity to encourage others, yes even us to leave behind the things of the world and Chase after Christ.

Jesus doesn't seem to pull any punches does He? Peter is Satan, really? It seems like a bit much especially in the light of what Peter protests. Jesus is talking about His impending death and Matthew 16 tells us that Peter doesn't want that to happen, even vehemently denies that it will. Isn't it good to want to protect a friend? Isn't it good to want to save a friend from death and destruction?

Of course, it is but then Jesus is no ordinary friend, and He has taken on flesh and stands before Peter for no ordinary purpose. Listen to the words with which Jesus rebukes Peter again, "*Get behind me, Satan!*" he said. "*You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.*" Here in is the trouble with Peter's thinking, often the disciples, frankly it even underlies the heresies of the Pharisee and Saducee as well. They think the Messiah has come to bring an earthly salvation, to produce freedom from governments, and provide some kind of utopian existence where the people of God simply would replace current powers and rule over the unbeliever instead. In the end, it transforms God from, well God into some kind of genie that follows the whim and the will of the very people He calls His own.

Put me on the pile of those who have been there and done that. It's no secret that our numbers after the lockdown have not come rip roaring back here at worship. Now offerings have slumped, if it keeps up things will be rough as the end of the year creeps in. It's not abnormal but it's not good either. Satan is working hard to keep people away and if we aren't careful, we may find that a generation of children have learned that church wasn't so important after all, at least when the chips were down, and times were tough, the adults stopped coming.

I'd be lying if I said I hadn't had a few talks with God. That in those moments I didn't sound a bit like Peter taking God aside and offering my rebuke. Telling God that my ways were better and earthly success, numbers, budgets were far more important than whatever He had planned in all of this nonsense.

Peter, needed Jesus' stern rebuke to bring him back to his senses. God doesn't come for success in numbers, bulging budgets, or even vibrant and successful churches, at least not in all the earthly measures of such things. He came to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. He came to be the One who would crush the serpent's head. He came to great Redeemer of God's people from foes greater than Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, or Rome. He came to defeat sin, death, and Satan. He came to bring us to heaven through faith in Him. Or as Peter has so beautifully summed it up in one of his moments of clarity in our Lesson. Jesus is the Christ!

Of course, that means He must be the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. It means, *the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again*. It means the cross because it is the only way to defeat the foes that separate us from God. It's the only way to conquer the sin which rages within us and clings to worldly pleasure and ease over the salvation which God so freely provides.

Dear friends, while Jesus has broken the power of Satan, the temptations still abound. Satan knows well He has lost the war with God, but he still rages in the world around us. He wants us more than anything to lose sight of all God has done. He wants to replace it with lies of his own making which would strip God of His power and glory and us of our Salvation. So, Jesus urges *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it*.

Allow me paraphrase, following Jesus means He is first and not me. Following Jesus means because He is the most important thing in life, I would go without anything else, rather than Him. It means my wants can never trump His Word and will. It means that ultimately even if my earthly life would be lost in pursuit of Christ, or in the bringing of someone to Him so be it. I have far more than earthly life, earthly power, earthly stuff. In Christ, I have forgiveness, an honest to goodness new life in this world to live for Him and in thanks for all He has done, the hope of Salvation which His life, death, and resurrection have given to me. And should I lose sight of it, may God offer a rebuke that I might turn from the temptations of the world around me, and see the glory of His Gospel once more.

Peter's an interesting study among the followers of Jesus but then so are we. Sometimes we get everything so wonderfully right. Sometimes we get everything so terribly wrong. Thanks be to God that it is not about us or our work, our wants, or our priorities. Instead, it's all about Christ, what He has done, the salvation He brings. Today, Jesus reminds us all that the life of the Christian isn't always an easy one and because it is so different from what the world and our flesh often desire, well it will mean setting even ourselves aside to follow Him. Thankfully, as faith illuminates everything Jesus has done for us, God Himself provides the strength to **CHASE AFTER CHRIST**. Amen!