

Sunday March 6, 2022
Lesson 1: Titles Matter
Scripture: Mark 8: 27-38

Context:

Today we begin a new series as we come to the season of spring. The first unit of the series is titled “The Mark You Make,” a play on words as the lessons dive into the gospel of Mark in the season of Lent. The focus of the unit will be on discipleship in Mark and how we give attention to the various aspects of how Jesus called people to follow him. Most of the stories are presented as taking place on the road to Jerusalem, where Jesus will go to his death. Today’s lesson will focus on the identity of Jesus as Messiah and to understand what this title means for his followers.

Often this passage of scripture is seen as a turning point in Mark as Jesus moves from being a teacher and healer to one condemned to die as a “Suffering Servant.” The shift is significant and is signaled by Peter’s confession Jesus is the Christ. Once Peter confesses the truth, the whole nature of Jesus’ ministry shifts. Those who profess faith in Jesus as the Christ are the ones who misunderstand his mission and who must now be asked again if they really want to follow him.¹ Jesus will constantly challenge those who follow him if they know what the call to discipleship will mean for their lives.

The place of this event is significant as Caesarea Philippi holds two distinctions. Firstly, it is a place where foreign gods are worshipped at a Roman shrine and the declaration of Jesus as the Messiah flies in the face of these other gods. Secondly, the location stretches from Galilee toward Jerusalem, inviting those who follow Jesus to see not only Galilee, but the road to Jerusalem where there will be suffering, death, and resurrection.² This place will be where Jesus makes a mark to his disciples, the crowds, and even the Roman authorities about how his rule will surpass all others.

Yet even with Peter’s confession of Christ, there is confusion. As Jesus begins to teach about the suffering of the “Human One” (Son of Man in some translations), Peter steps up to rebuke him on this teaching. The word “rebuke” means to express superiority or authority, and thus we see Jesus assert his identity by returning the rebuke.³ Jesus does not need protection as disciples are called to follow.

Jesus is also turning the question as he moves to informing Peter and the crowd the nature of a disciple. In paradoxes, Jesus explains them how they will discover their identity by discovering who Jesus is and the way to self-fulfillment is the way of self-denial.⁴ Jesus gives the disciples and the crowd several things to consider including call, warnings, and challenges.

¹ Williamson Jr., Lamar. “Mark.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 151.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 153.

⁴ Ibid., 156.

Application

Last week in the commentary I referenced a conversation with a previous Lay Leader in my first appointment which has stayed with me throughout my ministry. The conversation turned to how we understood Jesus and what has been taught about him in the Christian church. We discussed how the American southern Christianity places a premium on knowing Christ as your Savior, the one who saves you from sin and death. Growing up in south Alabama, you only go about the length of a thrown stone, and you'll find someone asking, "when did you got saved?"

Yet as the Lay Leader and I reflected on the easiness of professing Christ as Savior, she said the one which challenged her, and she wanted to continue to grow in was making Christ the Lord of her life. I was intrigued as this was someone who I saw as extremely devoted to following Jesus and loving the church. She explained how "making Jesus the Lord of your life means giving everything to him. He is the one who holds your time, your resources, and your energy. It's so easy to make Jesus your Savior because that's about you. Making him your Lord demands something of you. I want to keep growing in this way." The conversation struck me for various reasons as what we all need to hear wherever we may be on our walk with the Lord, no matter our age or time as a Christian.

This sentiment is very much present in the words from Jesus at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus having the title of "Messiah, the Christ, the Son of Man," carry with them a weight which will change all those who say they follow him. Both the disciples and the crowd learn the journey is not easy or simple. Instead, the journey will challenge them and if Jesus is truly the Christ, the Messiah and Lord, they will have to submit their wills to him.

Before we tsk our tongues at these disciples and the crowds for their fickle nature, we too might want to look at how we use the titles of Jesus and do a little bit of a check-in of where we have grown and where we need to do some work. We can do well to call Jesus our Savior, our Lord, our Messiah, or the Christ. Yet what does this mean for our day to day lives and how we walk with Jesus?

Much like my Lay Leader alluded to, professing Christ as Lord implies, we give him everything. It means looking at our finances and seeing how it's reflected in our giving to the church as well as where we put our focus. Or for our time, we might ask if we are finding ways to serve the church and the community, even if it pushes up to be more disciplined or focused. For our behavior, we might need to examine if the way we treat others reflects we worship a Prince of Peace instead of a god of war. Lest we forget, Jesus stood amidst gods and goddesses of all sorts at Caesarea Philippi who weren't exactly moral paragons for how humanity was called to live with one another. Yet Jesus stood as loving, compassionate, just, and invited those who followed him to be the same.

The title Jesus as Lord is not the only one though. Peter also refers to Jesus as the Messiah, which translates to liberator or savior of a people. Jesus comes to liberate people from not just institutions, but themselves as well. Some of us who like power and control might believe Jesus has nothing to save us from, and yet this is where we get into trouble. How many of us like to be liked by others whatever the costs? Or how many of us are addicted to things whether it's food, shopping, or you fill in the blank of things we lose ourselves in, which can occasionally be unhealthy. The reality is all of us try to fill voids where God could save and deliver us. It means though we must submit, to acknowledge we need God's grace and deliverance.

Titles matter. We know because we put a premium on them. There's a reason why people signatures or signs or business cards with certain information. The same goes with the titles give

to Jesus. His terms remind us of the power he holds in this life and how we might be transformed by following him. Christ the Lord, Savior, Messiah, Son of Man, stands ready to lead and guide us.

What titles do you use the most for Jesus and what do you think it says about your journey as a disciple? Why do you think it is easier to profess Jesus as Savior, but Jesus as Lord or the Christ is more challenging? What spiritual disciplines help you reflect on who Jesus is in your life? How is Christ calling for you to follow him more deeply? How can the different titles of Christ change all aspects of your life?

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