

Introduction

How many times in your life did you say or how many times in the life of your child did you hear them say, "But everyone else . . ." "Everyone else gets to do it!" "Everyone else has one." "Everyone else is going." And you were told or you said, "If everyone else was jumping off a cliff, would you do that just because everyone else was?" There is something within us that promotes a desire to not appear foolish and so when in doubt, people tend to just go with the flow. There is a power in public opinion and public perception. But conventional wisdom can be mistaken as would be the case among the millions who once thought the earth to be flat and before that who thought the earth to be the center of the universe. This morning we look at one of the gravest examples of conventional wisdom gone astray.

[Read Scripture and Pray]

Conventional wisdom said Jesus was a prophet, but his disciples knew better. Peter declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It is of first importance as we go about our study of this text that we understand something of the word, Christ. It is not a name but a title. We may be tempted to think of it almost like Jesus' last name as in Jesus Christ. But then we encounter instances in the New Testament in which the order is reversed, Christ Jesus. It is then apparent that Christ is not part of the name of Jesus of Nazareth but rather the statement of an office or a role or position that he fills. In fact, Christ is a Greek word that translates the Hebrew word Messiah. Had Matthew recorded the declaration of Peter in the Hebrew language, it would have come across in English as "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

The Hebrew title Messiah and the Greek title Christ mean "anointed one." It is one set apart by God for a special office. In the Old Testament persons in three offices were set apart by anointing—prophet, priest, and king. But the Old Testament prophesied a coming Deliverer, chosen by God to redeem Israel. He would be anointed by the Spirit. Isaiah 42:1 says, "Behold my servant whom I uphold, My Chosen in whom my soul delights; I

have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.” In Isaiah 61:1–3, we read, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit.” This Deliverer the Jews called the Messiah or the Christ. He was the Immanuel hope for which their hearts longed and looked.

Now with this in mind, we notice that Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi. It is a place of historical significance but the reason Matthew mentions it is probably to point out that Jesus has brought his disciples once again to a region beyond the purview of most Jews. It was a place where they could be undisturbed for the purposes of instruction. And it was here that Jesus gives them an exam of sorts now about 2 and a half years into his 3 year public ministry. Were they grasping who he was and were they ready to stand for him in the midst of those who would disagree?

As we closed out the previous section of the text last week, I emphasized the point that you can’t shy away from doctrine if you truly love Jesus. You can’t say, “I don’t want to get all tangled up in doctrine, just give me Jesus,” because even the fundamental question, “who is Jesus?” has no answers other than doctrinal ones. And Jesus himself brings this fact to our attention here as he is the one who starts asking the questions.

Let’s notice first

I. What Everyone Else Was Saying

When Jesus and the disciples came to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” Jesus is supplying the answer the people ought to be giving. When Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man, he is using a messianic title from the Old Testament. It was one that the Jews veered away from because it stressed his humanity, but Jesus used it more frequently than any other to refer to himself. It

derives from Daniel 7. That chapter refers to one from heaven who is sent from the Father into the world who then returns to receive a kingdom.

But the people of the land—family, friends, neighbors, and the crowds—were not referring to Jesus as the Son of Man. What were they saying? What was the conventional wisdom among the common folks? The disciples began to call out what they had been hearing. “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

In essence whatever they were saying, whether it was identifying Jesus as a past prophet returned or another prophet, they were saying Jesus was merely that, merely a prophet. Perhaps he was the forerunner of the Messiah. But the crowds were not saying that Jesus was the Messiah. There was a frenzied attempt by the crowd that Jesus had fed to take him by force and make him king to throw off the Roman tyranny, but once he resisted their attempt, they no longer regarded him that way. The bottom line is that people were saying nice things about Jesus. They were holding him in high regard and were applauding his greatness. But they were unwilling to proclaim him Messiah.

People today are so much like the masses from the days of Jesus’ earthly time. They will claim good things about Jesus. They will say he was a prophet. Even Islam holds that Jesus was prophet. And people in our time will grant that Jesus was a great moral teacher, and a doer of good. He is put on the level with other religious leaders and do-gooders. But there is a problem with all these accolades, no matter how well-intentioned. If he is merely what they say, if he is merely a prophet, he is a false prophet. And if he is merely a good teacher, he is a lying teacher for he himself claimed to be much more.

We turn from what everyone else was saying to

II. What the Disciples Said.

Jesus now called his disciples forward to be tested. This was a group exam. Jesus posed the test question; he said to them, “But who do YOU (pl.) say that I am?” This was not a question for each of them one-at-a-time. It was a question for the group as a whole. It is expressed in the simple word YOU which is in the plural.

Simon Peter answered on behalf of the group. Peter had his moments both good and bad. When he shined, he was really spectacular, and when he was down he was way down. If Peter's darkest moment was when he denied Jesus, this was probably his brightest. Bold and assured, he declared, "you are the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Peter recognized Jesus was more than a prophet. He was more than a good teacher. He was certainly not in league with the devil as the Pharisees had accused. No, he is the Anointed One sent to bring release, sent to bring the year of God's great favor. He is not a prophet pointing to another. He is the one to whom all the prophets point. He is the great prophet, priest, and king. He is the one who comforts our hearts and heals our soul's diseases. He delivers from captivity and brings joy for mourning. There would never be another. He was THE HOLY ONE of God—himself being God's Son.

Did Peter understand everything about Jesus as Messiah? Certainly not. He still did not get that Jesus would have to die and be raised from the dead. He did not yet have a well-thought theological understanding of the Trinity. But he was right in what he understood at that time.

By the way, when people come to Jesus they are often lacking in various aspects of understanding with regard to the fullness of who he is. But here are a couple of basics they simply must know. He is the Son of God and he is the deliverer sent from God. There is no other.

There is one Messiah, one deliverer, and it is Jesus. There is no other name that has been given among men by which we must be saved. He is the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through him.

The New Testament harps on this point over and over. It is the point of Matthew from the beginning of this gospel. From the very outset, Matthew said he was writing "the book of the genealogy of JESUS CHRIST, the son of David, the Son of Abraham." And his efforts from that point forward are determined to demonstrate biblical proofs that the Messiah to which the Old Testament scriptures point is in fact Jesus. It is stunning as we turn to John's gospel and read why he wrote it. At the conclusion of his epic work,

John declared, "Jesus did many other signs which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." You must believe Jesus is the Messiah. You must believe in him if you would have life. Eternal life comes alone from a Messiah who came not to merely overthrow earthly kingdoms, but to satisfy the holy wrath of God, to defeat the power of Satan, so as to raise up a people to himself, on whom to lavish kindness for all the future ages to come.

I want to show you one more thing. When the apostles began boldly preaching the gospel in the book of Acts, their message was that Jesus is the Christ, and that people needed to turn to him. Peter culminated the great sermon on the day of Pentecost with these words, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified." Paul preached in like manner. When he came to Thessalonica, he went to the synagogue and reasoned with the people from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. Being persuaded there were those who believed.

Are you believing in Jesus today? Not a prophet, not a miracle-worker, not an ethical teacher, but the Son of God, the lamb of God, the Prophet of God, the Priest of God, and the King of the Universe—the Messiah. If you would have life, you must believe in him.

Let's turn next to

III. What Makes This Recognition Possible.

How can a human being grasp that Jesus is the Christ? When so many fail to get it, how is it that some do? Jesus clearly wants his disciples to understand how it is they can see Jesus for who he really is when so many others do not.

He is God's Son. We are man's sons and daughters. But God the Father of Jesus, very God himself, is the one who has cleared up our darkness so we can see and so we can believe. Jesus declares, "Blessed are you Simon son of John, Simon Johnson. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." You Simon are the son of a man but you have recognized the Son of God. Manhood has nothing to do with that

recognition. It has everything to do with God, My Father having grace upon you and blessing you with this recognition.

Jesus is glorying here in that mere human beings have been blessed by God to know and grasp that Jesus is the Christ and have life through him. It is not by human ingenuity that people come to a right recognition of the identity of Jesus. It is by God's grace. It is not through reason or persuasion by human beings that other human beings become convinced that Jesus is the Christ. Man's mind and heart are so darkened to the ways and things of God that he WILL NOT come to embrace Jesus as Messiah from their heart but by the revealing and gracious work of God.

You and I if we have come to know Jesus as the Messiah, it is because of the direct revelatory intervention of God. It is like Paul says to the Ephesians. "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience... and were by nature children of wrath. BUT GOD, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace have you been saved." That is what Jesus is saying to Peter. If it were not for the intervening grace of God, you would have the same distorted and nonsensical ideas that everyone else has. You know who I am, not because of you but because of the grace of God.

It is the same with everyone who has ever believed in Jesus. If you have come to genuine, saving faith in Christ (the Messiah) it is not because of flesh and blood. It is not because of your superior brain function. It is not because of apologetics. It is not because someone approached you in a kind way. It is because God has had mercy on your soul. The God who said, let light shone out of darkness has shown in your heart to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Finally, this morning, I point you to

IV. What This Gracious Revelation Means.

In light of what Jesus says, I am going to give three points of application.

A. The Gracious Revelation Means we should be absolutely engulfed in humility. When I use the pronoun WE here I am talking about we who have received the marvelous blessing of God to be brought out of darkness into the light, who have seen the light of who Jesus is. We need to see ourselves for who we are. We are nothing more than dust that has been plucked out of the pile before it was thrown in the fire. God has not turned the light on in our hearts because there is anything superior about us at all. How can I receive the most amazing gift in the history of creation and turn around and act like I earned it.

How I treat other people, how I treat the lost and the saved is a reflection of how deeply I have come to know what a pauper I am without God's grace. The better I know it, the more humble, the less judgmental, the more servant-hearted I will be.

B. Not only should I be engulfed in humility, I should be overflowing in praise. This gracious revelation means the kindness and goodness I have been shown by God is totally ill-deserved. He is a God who pardons sinners. Why he even raises those sinners up from death in order to see ourselves for who we are! Our song should ever be, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us this way! Our lips should praise him. Our reverential spirit should honor him. Our live should reflect him. All the glory for our enlightenment and rescue is his!

C. This gracious revelation means I should take great care in the way I go about evangelism. Paul later came to understand the sovereign grace of God. He came to understand the darkness that envelopes every human mind, and it affected the way he approached the task of making disciples. You do not approach the lost world the way you approach just about any other matter in the world. The approach we generally take to address a problem is to study it. If we want to increase sales of a product we are going to figure out what will motivate people to be interested; what will convince people they need the product. Then we will market the product. We will trust in our ability to make it desirable, to make it enviable, to make it popular.

But this is not the way we are to approach making disciples. If we resort to tactics that reach people on the basis of their fleshly desires, we will bypass the one thing that must take place for them to actually be a part of God's family—a work only God can do—the work of revelation and regeneration. The apostle Paul understood this so well. The one thing he did not want to happen is to have people ultimately believing because of his methods. He did not want people to be manipulated. He explained his method. And it is one we need to follow:

2 Corinthians 4:2

We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Great patience and trust are needed as we bring Christ to world that will not see him apart from the gracious work of God

Conclusion

Believing in Christ as he truly is will mean being resistant to conventional wisdom. If you really want to know him as he is, you will need to follow the light of God's word not the flow of the crowd.