

## **"PETER'S CONFESSION CONCERNING CHRIST."**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden**

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**Text for the Sermon: Mark 8:27-30**

### **Introduction.**

Caesarea Philippi is twenty five miles straight north of Bethsaida where Jesus healed the blind man. I tell you this not because I think you have a great interest in the geography of Israel. I tell you this to remind you for a moment of the very earthly reality of the life of Jesus.

He literally walked among us. He walked everywhere He went, no horses, no chariots, no special transportation. If they walked this road in one day it was a long day's walk. At three miles an hour that would be just over eight hours, not counting restroom and meal stops with 13 people. Jesus' life among us was no walk in the park. He walked countless miles on long winding hilly dusty rocky roads. He no doubt wore out countless pairs of sandals.

Remember last week Jesus took the blind man out of the village and healed him in two stages. I think there may be a parallel between that story and this story and in the parallel a reason why Jesus healed in two stages. Jesus takes Peter and the disciples outside of the village of Bethsaida to open their eyes. And when He opens their eyes, He does it in two stages, first partially and then fully. First they see Him as the Messiah, then they see what kind of Messiah.

Caesarea Philippi was a thoroughly pagan and Gentile city as you might imagine by the name. Herod the Great had constructed a temple there to worship the deified Caesar Augustus. There were also places of worship for the Greek god Pan and the Roman god Zeus and the Syrian god Baal.

When Herod the Great died he had four sons so he divided his realm into four parts and the northern most part went to his son Philip. Philip's brother Herod Antipas was the one who killed John the Baptist.

Did Jesus take His disciples there on purpose? Did He take them into the midst of paganism where multiple gods were revered and worshipped to ask them who they thought He was? Was this a lesson in comparative world religions? Who is Jesus in comparison to all the other gods?

### **Mark 8:27-28, Who do men say that I am?**

Jesus asked what the opinion polls were saying. What was the public consensus? What were the rumors? What was the talk around town?

John the Baptist raised from the dead. Elijah the Prophet. Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

Obviously people were pretty impressed with Jesus, they held Him in pretty high regard. He had certainly gotten their attention.

It's interesting to note that the disciples only gave good opinions or rumors. There were much worse. We know that the Pharisees considered Jesus to be a blasphemer, a son of Satan, possessed by Beelzebul (Mark 3:23). His family said He was out of His mind (Mark 3:21).

Just consider all the opinions today.

A great man, a moral man, a great teacher, a philosopher, a prophet, a religious leader, a holy man. Some say He's a fiction, a myth, a non-existent person. Some don't say anything at all. They just ignore Jesus or consider Him as good as dead.

The Muslims say Jesus was a prophet in a long line of prophets, but that Mohammed was the last and greatest prophet, the one true prophet.

The Mormons say Jesus was a son of God, born of a heavenly father and a heavenly mother. He is like a second God but not the same as the Father God.

Today there are just as many opinions and more about who Christ is and what He did and said. Jesus is subject to just as many distortions and lies and caricatures.

Many know the name of Christ as a curse word. There are even many to enter buildings where Christ is being worshipped and who say Jesus came into the world to save sinners, but their hearts are far from Him.

To say that Jesus was John the Baptist or Elijah or the prophet Moses spoke of was to put Jesus in some pretty good company. Those were the elite in Israel's history, past and present.

And even today when people say Jesus is the greatest teacher or best moral example to ever live, they are saying something that may sound good and honorable, a real compliment. But actually it's a denial of who Jesus really is.

To think nice thoughts about Jesus or to speak well of Him is not enough, and is in fact not a compliment but condescending. Jesus is not honored by ignorance. He is honored by faith.

Jesus never once made a claim to be a great teacher or prophet or moral example. Jesus claimed to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus claimed to be God and the Messiah. So in the famous words of C.S. Lewis, you are only left with three choices, either Jesus is a liar, or a lunatic or He is who He says He is, He is Lord.

Jesus wants to make it clear in the disciples' eyes who He is so He begins with what they have heard, with the rumors and reports. He wants to address the opinions and false understandings.

### **Mark 8:29-30, Who do you say that I am?**

“But you ... who do you say that I am?”

Jesus intensified the question. He took them to the deeper level, to seeing and saying more clearly who He was.

It's response time. Up until now everyone has been all over the map about Jesus. Up until not the only ones to declare Jesus is actually God's Son are God Himself and some demons. Not a single human has said it.

At the beginning of Jesus' final journey on earth, He asks the disciples to make a step of faith. A step of faith when all other opinions seem to be against Him. A step of faith contrary to the popular consensus and prevailing opinions, contrary to what those who have power and authority are saying.

Faith means just that, a step of faith that is contrary to sight or the majority or the easy option.

***You are the Christ, (the Son of the living God).***

Matthew records a fuller, longer confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Either way it is a very brief confession. It's a rather remarkable confession when you consider who said it and when he said it.

Peter was a Jew and he had a very Jewish idea of what a Christ or Messiah is. The anointed one of God was a king, a ruler, a man of absolute power and authority.

And Peter was saying this about a man who was a poor Galilean carpenter, who showed no royal power, who was without a kingdom or wealth or majesty or power. He said this about a man whom everyone in power and authority hated and despised and refused to acknowledge.

The power of this confession is seen in how unpopular it was in Peter's day. More were against Christ than for Him. It was dangerous to hold Peter's position. It could be regarded as an act of sedition, treason, anarchy.

What does it mean to say that ***Jesus is the Christ?*** Christ is a title, meaning anointed one, or simply Messiah. Christ is the Greek word, Messiah is the Hebrew word. Both mean to anoint or anointed one.

In that one word is the summary of all we believe if fully understood. This is the summary of Christianity and of all true doctrine.

Calvin sums it up this way, "The designation Christ, or Anointed, includes both an everlasting Kingdom and an everlasting Priesthood, to reconcile us to God, and, by expiating our sins through his sacrifice, to obtain for us a perfect righteousness, and, having received us under his protection, ***to uphold and supply and enrich us with every description of blessings***" (Calvin, p. 185).

To know and confess Christ is to have the blessing of God, to have every spiritual blessing in heaven.

**Ephesians 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us ***in Christ*** with ***every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places***, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery

of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

No wonder Jesus responded to Peter in Matthew saying,

**Matthew 16:17** “*Blessed are you*, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

Everyone who confesses Christ is blessed. To know Christ, to believe in and confess and trust Christ is to have eternal life. Not if this is with words only, not if only with our lips, but if with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

**John 17:3** This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

All men everywhere are cursed until they are blessed in Christ. Apart from Christ there is no blessing, no good thing, no hope, no life.

Not to see Christ is to be blind, lost and in utter darkness.

To see Christ is to truly have sight, to see the light, to be in the light.

**John 1:4-5, 9-12** In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

### **Application and conclusion, Who do you say Jesus is?**

This is the ultimate question, and this is the question Jesus poses to each one of us. This is the most important question that you will ever answer.

If we are going to walk on the way with Jesus, it cannot be as a spectator but as a disciple. You are either all in or all out, there's no halfway or lukewarm.

We are at the very center of Mark's gospel and we are being asked the central question.

Faith requires a public confession. We can't hide behind popular opinion or other people's judgments. No secret ballots. If everyone around you opposed Christ and mocked Christ and held Christ in contempt, would you stand alone in confessing Him?

**Matthew 10:32-33** Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, 33 but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

In every age and generation there are countless thousands who spend their lives in speculation, inventing theories, advancing opinions, subjectively liking this idea and rejection that idea.

Year in and year out they criticize, complain, conjecture, fault find, circle like a moth around a light but never settle on any truth. They never acknowledge what is true, they can't bring themselves to confess Christ or humbly submit their wills to Him.

As I said recently, they love questions and hate answers, they like to speculate without ever sinking their mind into the true meat of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And when their days are done they die in their sin and they are completely caught off guard and unprepared to meet God face to face.

Hope and peace and joy and life are not found in talk and opinions and speculations and philosophies and religions, they are found in the person of Jesus Christ. It's personal. Christ is personal and He is personally received and experienced and felt and embraced and loved.

Jesus Christ is not a swear word or an idea or even some great teacher or miracle worker. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, who has come to earth.

He isn't to be talked about, He is to be talked to.

He isn't just to be thought about, He is to be loved and obeyed.

He isn't to be held at arm's length, He is to be embraced.

He isn't to be one truth among many, He is the way and the truth and the life.

He is to be submitted to and surrendered to, the one to whom we finally say, "Not my will but your will be done."

The turning point of my life was my confession of Christ on June 10, 1972, forty years ago. It changed everything, it changed the trajectory of my life, it changed what I wanted to be when I grow up, it changed my values and priorities.

This turning point text tells us what we must confess and know and embrace about Jesus if we will be His disciples. But what that discipleship entails comes next. Right now the Messiah is like a tree walking. Next week we will see even more clearly what the Messiah and His followers must suffer.

Who do you say Jesus is and are you willing to confess Him to men this week?

**Romans 10:9-13** If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."