

“You Are the Christ”

Mark 8:27-38

Throughout His ministry, the crowds of people never truly did know who Jesus was. They witnessed His miracles of feeding and healing with the same disbelieving awe as the disciples did when Jesus calmed the storm. “Who is this who has authority over the wind and waves?” That was the disciple’s response to that miracle early in their relationship.

The disciples did progress in their relationship with Christ, as they had been with the Lord for about three years at the point we find them in our Gospel reading. However, as we see in all the Gospels and even in the first chapter of Acts, the disciples do not understand who Jesus is until after the resurrection. They don’t get it. Which leads me to think that the traditional way in which Peter’s confession is read may not be the full story.

In response to the question which the Lord posed to the disciples, “But what about you...Who do you say I am?” Peter makes what seems to be a bold and confident confession of faith by saying: “You are the Christ.” And He “strictly charges them” (from *epitimao* in the Greek); He warns them that they are not to tell anyone about Him.

Earlier in Jesus’ ministry, Jesus silenced the demons who

were announcing who He was. That makes sense given that the Jewish leaders were accusing Him of being in league with Satan. And the testimony of demons is not be the most helpful and accurate presentation of the Gospel. Hearing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth from them is an unreliable expectation.

At times, Jesus also tells people whom He has healed to not tell anyone what He has done. This also makes sense. The crowds were gathering around Him hoping for more miraculous food or to see a show of miracle and healing. “A wicked and adulterous generation seeks signs,” as Jesus will say. Jesus wants to be discovered, be revealed through the Word.

Peter and the disciples do make progress in their three years with Jesus. They went from asking the bewildered question: “Who is this who has authority over the wind and the waves?” to the point where Peter could confidently say: “You are the Christ.” Witnessing the miracles certainly made an impact. Peter walking on the water with the Lord – until he sank – certainly caught his attention (even though it caused Jesus to say, “O you of little faith. Why did you doubt?” Peter witnessed Jesus healing the blind, deaf, or mute.

These are the events that Mark records in his Gospel as occurring between the calming of the storm and Peter’s confession of faith. Which of these events opened Peter’s eyes to Jesus being the Christ, the Messiah sent from God? You could say none of them, or you could say all of them, depending on your

point of view.

There is no one event or one miracle that brought about this new understanding. The true nature of Christ is not revealed merely through His miracles. Many people witnessed the Lord's miracles and yet remained mired in their unbelief.

We could say that the understanding of Jesus being the Christ sent by God was the result of witnessing the miracles; however, this needs to be understood in the proper context. The miracles only point toward Jesus being the Christ because they are a part of the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The Psalmist wrote: "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing [Ps. 145:15-16]. And Jesus feeds the people 4000 or 5000 at a time.

And when Isaiah foretold the coming of the Christ, he said of that time: "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy [Is. 35:5-6].

Last week, I mentioned how in Mark's Gospel, Mark makes it clear that the Gospel is not something you can understand before you believe. Faith comes first.

Were the disciples believers? They can confess it – "You are the Christ". So they believe He is the Christ. The problem is, when you read the rest of the Gospel, when you read the other three Gospels and Acts, it becomes very clear that Jesus silenced the disciples for the same reason He silenced the demons. There

was an unreliable expectation that the whole truth would be proclaimed.

The disciples don't understand who the Christ is until Jesus opens their minds to the Word of God after the resurrection. After Peter makes His confession of faith, Jesus basically says, "You aren't allowed to talk about who the Christ is until you understand who the Christ is."

And He begins to teach them that the Christ must suffer, be rejected by all the Jewish leaders, be killed and after three days rise again. He says this plainly.

And Peter takes Him aside and demonstrates exactly why Jesus will not allow him to tell others about the Christ. He rebukes Him (from *epitimao* in the Greek – same word). Peter can confess that Jesus is the Christ, but he has no idea who the Christ truly is. So Jesus "*epitimao's*" him and says, "Get behind Me Satan."

If your children ever ask why we have to go through years of confirmation, why hearing the Word of God every week is so important; if they ask, this is why.

After three years of being with Jesus, Peter was still focused on life in this world. Peter did not understand the cross and the resurrection even though Jesus spoke plainly about this. He would speak about this over and over again as they journeyed toward Jerusalem. The disciples will not "get it" even after they see the empty tomb. Not until the Word of God was opened to them could they truly confess their faith in Christ. Amen.