

Mark 8:22-9:13
Who do you say Jesus is?
Battery Point – 27 Feb 2022

Can you think of a turning point you have faced in your life? One of those sliding doors moments of decision where you have to choose to send your life in one direction, or another.

Should I move overseas or stay in Hobart?
Do I take that new job - or stay in my old one?
Do I begin this new relationship or friendship or not?
Do I go to this uni or school or that one?

From the moment of the turning point, things are different. Maybe it's a big change straight away, or maybe it's the start of a gradual change that gets bigger with each passing week.

We also have those turning points in our Christian faith. They often come when we are challenged – in subtle or obvious ways.

Me – bus in Hobart, aged 16. Girl asked, do you believe in all that Christian stuff, or is it just your parents. What do I say?

Me - first year uni, moved out of home, in a flat in Mt Nelson. Do I choose to take Jesus seriously, or will I put my energy into money and career and drop Jesus off?

Me sitting in a cold old church in North Hobart aged 22 hearing God call me to become a church leader – will I say yes or pretend I didn't hear?

Think about your life and your faith - and the big turning points. Maybe you're even at one of those moments now.

Mark 8:27ff - we hit one of those turning points for the disciples. They've spent the past 2 years or so full-time wandering around Israel's regional areas with Jesus - and now he hits them right between the eyes with this question - "Who do you say that I am?"

Nowhere to go, nowhere to hide - Jesus says to his closest followers, “who do you say that I am?” What do you think about me? Where is your faith at? How much have you really understood?

a. context

- i. Of course as readers of Mark’s gospel, his account of the life of Jesus we have an advantage. We already know the answer. Read Mark 1:1 – “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus, (the) Christ, the Son of God. (the reader already know who he is). But the people seeing Jesus in the flesh are still working it out.
 - ii. Narrative context - previous verses - blind man healed (slowly – after feeding when the disciples still don’t understand), Pharisees opposition, disciples only partially seeing).
 - iii. It’s easy to be wise in hindsight. Lots of people are writing great articles now about why real estate went up during COVID when they predicted huge drops in March 2020.
 - iv. But, without the benefit of hindsight, the gospel biography of Jesus written by Mark, when Jesus was walking and talking and doing miracles, feeding the 4000, healing – not everyone understood or believed. And for those who did understand – it was the sort of understanding that was like a previously blind man seeing people who look like fuzzy trees walking around. Does your faith sometimes feel like that? (Now we see dimly)
- b. So, in some ways, this statement by Peter is a high point. He finally gets it! One of the people around Jesus finally begin to show some understanding! (we won’t mention his immediate faux pas afterwards! Peter rapidly falls from the heights he has just scaled.)
- c. turning point (geographically and in the story told by Mark, and the other gospel writers.)
- i. moving from “Who is this man Jesus?” in the first half of mark to “What has Jesus come to do?”
 - ii. A geographical turning point – they head towards Jerusalem. After around 2 1/2 years of publicly ministry we head towards the last 6 months. We head towards the place where he will die. We go from the north of Israel (Galilee, Nazareth etc) and head for the capital – the political and spiritual centre – Jerusalem.

2. Who is this man? (You are the Christ)

People knew he was someone who stood out from the crowd. He was someone with a serious connection to God, the things he was doing. So who then?

- a. Some say - John the Baptist? Remember him? The one who came to prepare the way for God's coming king. An outspoken guy, who drew the crowds. The one who was killed by king Herod. Chapter 6 – Herod thinks Jesus might be John the Baptists come back to haunt him!
- b. Elijah? The greatest of the prophets. Amazing miracles. See the book of Kings. Malachi 4:5 (400 years earlier, the last of the prophets in the NT – See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible Day of the Lord comes). 2 Kings 2:11-12 Elijah doesn't die, but is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. Is it Elijah? Both these first two are compliments – at least compliments if your sights aren't set too high.
- c. One of the prophets? He speaks powerfully from God? That seemed fairly obvious to most people.

Lots of different replies. And this is no different today. I'm sure that in St George's Battery Point this morning in the pews, there are some different ideas of who Jesus is.

American blogger, Kevin DeYoung, a few years ago (2010 - in his Restless and Reformed blog) gave some examples of how today we might answer that question – who do you say Jesus is?

I've believed some of these at times – which ones have you fallen for?

"There's the Republican Jesus—who is against tax increases and activist judges, for family values and owning firearms.

"There's Democrat Jesus—who is against Wall Street and Wal-Mart, for reducing our carbon footprint and printing money.

"There's Therapist Jesus—who helps us cope with life's problems, heals our past, tells us how valuable we are and not to be so hard on ourselves.

"There's Starbucks Jesus—who drinks fair trade coffee, loves spiritual conversations, drives a hybrid, and goes to film festivals.

"There's Open-minded Jesus—who loves everyone all the time no matter what (except for people who are not as open-minded as you).

"There's Touchdown Jesus—who helps athletes run faster and jump higher than non-Christians and determines the outcomes of Super Bowls.

"There's Martyr Jesus—a good man who died a cruel death so we can feel sorry for him.

"There's Gentle Jesus—who was meek and mild, with high cheek bones, flowing hair, and walks around barefoot, wearing a sash (while looking very German).

"There's Hippie Jesus—who teaches everyone to give peace a chance, imagines a world without religion, and helps us remember that ‘all you need is love.’

"There's Yuppie Jesus—who encourages us to reach our full potential, reach for the stars, and buy a boat.

"There's Spirituality Jesus—who hates religion, churches, pastors, priests, and doctrine, and would rather have people out in nature, finding ‘the god within’ while listening to ambiguously spiritual music.

"There's Platitude Jesus—good for Christmas specials, greeting cards, and bad sermons, inspiring people to believe in themselves.

"There's Revolutionary Jesus—who teaches us to rebel against the status quo, stick it to the man, and blame things on ‘the system.’

"There's Guru Jesus—a wise, inspirational teacher who believes in you and helps you find your center.

"There's Boyfriend Jesus—who wraps his arms around us as we sing about his intoxicating love in our secret place.

"There's Good Example Jesus—who shows you how to help people, change the planet, and become a better you.

Any of those Jesus's the one you try to imagine? Or another Tasmanian version?

"And then," DeYoung says, "there's Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. Not just another prophet.

Not just another leader calling the people back to God.

- d. Peter - you are the Christ.
 - i. Extra in other gospels (e.pg. Matthew) about Peter being the rock ...)
 - ii. Messiah means "anointed one. Anointed King. Psalm 2, often mentioned in Mark.
 - iii. historical context in Israel's history - Waiting for a Messiah to come because of the political situation, for some this got turned into a military leader for a rebellion against the ROMAN INVADERS. (Ukraine/Russia)
- 3. 2nd big question – 2nd half of Mark - What has he come to do? (What sort of Christ?)
 - a. Don't tell anyone (why not? People might get wrong idea, Romans might get wrong idea)
 - b. Son of man must suffer, be rejected, die (Servant song - Isaiah)
 - i. Three things rolled together into one figure,
 - 1. anointed one (Messiah),
 - 2. rejected one – suffering servant
 - 3. Son of man – from Daniel 7:13-14 – the transfiguration in the last part of the reading show this Son of Man figure with all his power and glory.
 - ii. Whatever they were expecting from Jesus was too little, too low expectations. They were wanting someone to lead a rebellion – they got the king of the universe. They were wanting food rations and a doctor – they got spiritual food and health – sins forgiven, consciences cleared.

- iii. You see, a great human leader, great advances in technology, great human cooperation could make the food and health situation a bit better (as it has done in some places like Tassie, compared to Israel then) – but could it solve the emptiness we feel inside when we are broken in our relationship with God and others? When we have lost meaning and purpose in this life and COVID has demolished our hopes and foundations?
 - iv. For those people standing right in front of Jesus 2000 years ago, their sights were set too low. Just as ours sometimes are. Are you looking for one of those other model Jesus' I talked about above? Or the one who was the Messiah, Suffering Servant and Son of Man?
 - c. Response - Peter rebukes Jesus. You're the anointed king – but you've got it wrong! Imagine that – you are at Windsor Castle with Queen Elizabeth, and you have the audacity to take her aside to give her a good telling off! Do you know a Peter? Do you have any Peter tendencies?
 - d. And Jesus does likewise in return to Peter, returns serve. You are thinking from a human perspective, Jesus says, not God's. This is Satan's perspective for us – when Satan tempts us to follow a different Jesus, when he asks the Son of God to walk the easy way, instead of the way prepared for him
 - e. Must be killed – the divine necessity. Jesus' purpose for coming. Only this death and resurrection could heal us of our broken hearts before God and bring about restoration of this world. Only he could pay the price for our sins that we couldn't do anything about.
 - f. Why was it necessary? Because God cares enough to restore the relationship with him. God was the totally innocent party in a broken relationship, yet willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to rebuild it.
4. Our response (What sort of disciples does he want?)
- a. Take up cross – the shock of this. Come to the electric chair with me. Walk alongside me to the guillotine. What does Jesus mean?

- b. Lose your life for me
 - i. Living for yourself vs living for Jesus (make every part of your life Jesus' - your relationships, your stuff, your time, your energy, your goals, your character) - can't close off rooms of your house to Jesus.
 - ii. You can't die partially - it's all or nothing. You can't give part of yourself to Jesus and keep other bits (as the rich man tries to do in chapter 10). You can't choose to obey some of Jesus' words and commands and not others. No giving part of your life to Jesus and saving part for yourself. It's all or nothing. This is totally countercultural to what many Tasmanians want out of religion. Dying to their self, their own desires and opinions scares them, maybe it scares you?
 - iii. Jesus says quite simply – choose – if you are ashamed of me now – I will be ashamed of you when the final day before God comes. Be honoured by Tasmanians now, or be honoured by Jesus in eternity.

(What does 9:1 mean - not taste death before Kingdom of God comes with power?)

Either the transfiguration or death and resurrection (most likely))

Today, Jesus asks the same question to us – who do you say that I am? And he makes the same call on our lives – take up your cross and follow me. Make a choice. Choose the Tasmanian way, with all of its illusory, temporary lifestyle benefits – and forfeit your very soul/life, essence – or choose Jesus' way. It will involve sacrifice. It will involve giving things up that you want to do, things that can feel like they are at the core of your self-identity. It may even involve suffering for the sake of following Jesus. But this is the Christ – God's king, calling you.

Who do you say Jesus is? Will you follow him?

Prayer