

## Sermon 2-25-18 **A Matter of Life or Death** Mark 8:27-38

Dear Confessors of Christ:

Have you ever asked your friends or family members this question:

### **“What do people say about me?”**

- Ever?
- What type of response did you receive?
- Did the answers make you feel happy, sad or mad?

But, what difference does it really make what people think of us?

- Many times people aren't right in what they think of us anyway as they are too quick to make judgments before knowing the facts and they are too busy focused on themselves.
- The older we get the more we understand that so-called “other” people aren't thinking about us anyways but are wrapped up in themselves.

A better question to ask people in our daily lives is this:

### **“Who do you think Jesus Christ is?”**

Have you ever asked people this question? What answers did you receive?

Josh McDowell says there are only 3 answers one can give to this question.

1. Either Jesus is who he said he was the Lord and Savior
2. Jesus was lying – he really wasn't the Lord and Savior
3. Jesus was himself delusional and only thought he was the Messiah.

McDowell says the answer that many people give about Jesus is that he was a good teacher but not God. This answer is not valid for a good teacher would not lie about himself or deceive people as to his true identity. A good teacher would not do this. There is only one conclusion about Jesus. He is who he said he was. He is true God and true Man the Savior of the world. Romans 9:5

Your confession or answer to the question of Jesus' identity is a matter of life or death. “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” 1 John 2:2

The citizens of the Roman empire confessed “Caesar is Lord!” This confession would identify them as loyal Roman citizens, but it could never save them from their sins from eternal hell.

**The only confession that saves us is found in Romans 10:9-10** “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

It is remarkable that people in Jesus’ day had all these different views of his identity. Some thought Jesus was John the Baptist but how could that be? John and Jesus had been seen publicly together. They were quite different in appearance and ministry so it would seem strange people would confuse them.

Others said Jesus was one of the prophets, perhaps Jeremiah. Both of them were misunderstood and rejected by their own people, both condemned the false religious leaders and both were persecuted by those in authority.

But Jesus made it clear with his words and works that he was the Messiah, the Lord, the Savior, true God and true Man.

Still, many people in Jesus’ day did not get the message. So many people in Jesus’ day listened to popular opinion and followed it, just as many people do today. People today have opinions rather than convictions about Jesus. It’s their opinions concerning Jesus that lead them astray.

Peter’s confession of Jesus was bold and uncompromising just as our confession is to be:

**“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”** Matt 16:16

Christ means “the Anointed One, the promised Messiah.” Why did Jesus warn his disciples to keep quiet about him? Jesus time to be revealed as the Messiah to the nation of Israel had not yet come. Jesus had more teaching to do...his disciples had more to learn. To announce him now as Messiah might well result in a political uprising that would only do him harm.

Verse 31 begins a turning point in Jesus’ ministry. His public ministry in Galilee is finished and from this point on he is focused on going to Jerusalem to meet the cross.

Peter thought that Jesus would avoid suffering, persecution, rejection and death. Peter and the other disciples thought that God's rule meant power without pain, glory without humiliation. That was Peter's human way of looking at things. Sometimes, we like Peter think the same way.

Jesus' idea of the Messiah went against every idea of the Messiah which Peter had learned from his mother's knee upward. The Old Testament believers did not connect the coming Messiah with suffering even though the prophets of the Old Testament spoke of the suffering Messiah. Some Jewish rabbis even taught that there would be two Messiahs, one who would suffer and one who would reign. No wonder the disciples were confused.

Jesus made it clear to the disciples that he must suffer and die. This is something the disciples had not counted on when they heard Jesus call himself the "Son of Man." After all, this was a title for one who was glorious and victorious not for someone who would suffer and die.

The effect of Jesus words here is to shock the disciples awake to reality. But the disciples did not like what reality tasted like! In time the disciples came to understand suffering. They saw Jesus die. They themselves would all suffer and die a martyr's death...all of them...except John.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor, like most others in the German church of the 1940's when Hitler ruled Germany could have chosen to keep silent. But he did not. He spoke up. He spoke out. He became involved, was arrested, placed in a concentration camp and was killed only days before the camp was liberated by the U.S. military.

Before he died Bonhoeffer wrote a book: *The Cost of Discipleship* in which he said **this: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."**

This is the cost of following Jesus. Now most of us will not die literally for Christ but we will all live for him and in one sense that is death...death to our desires and will so that God's will may rule in us.

Luke records Jesus saying...

**"Let him take up his cross daily."** 9:23

The trouble with life is that it is so daily. It is! And it is the "daily" that does us in. Daily life with its struggles and challenges may "nickel and dime" us to death as we

live out our faith. Rather than die for the Lord as a martyr in a blaze of glory we are confronted with many small camp fires. We may think that giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1000 bill and laying it on the table. Here's my life, my all, take it Lord.

I am giving it to you! The reality of the situation is that the risen Lord sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1000 bill for nickels and dimes. Then he asks us to go through life putting out a dime here, a nickel there. Usually giving our life to Christ isn't glorious. It's done in those little acts of love five and ten cents at a time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory: it is harder to live the Christian life...little by little over the long haul.

Not all who live out their lives and "die" for Jesus are giants or martyrs. The woman who devotes her life to raising children in need of a home, the man whose faithful devotion to a mentally ill wife is quiet and steady, the congregation that opens its doors for the homeless are examples of what Jesus speaks here of "losing one's life."

Peter and the disciples are asked once more if they really and truly want to follow Jesus...even if it means a cross. Jesus says "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it."

No one possesses his or her own life. Jesus says that the only cause worthy investing one's life in the cause of the Gospel. The one who saved his life by renouncing his faith in Christ would lose it in the next world. Life's truly blessed people are those who have learned the secret of giving themselves away. The surest way to lose one's life is to give undue care to preserving it. "The best preserved thing in all of human history is an Egyptian mummy."

In the well-known play "Saint Joan" the Archbishop of Reims tells Joan of Arc that she is in love with religion. Joan replies "I never thought of that! Is there any harm in it?" The Archbishop answers that there is no harm in it but there is danger. There is. There was for Joan of Arc. There was for Jesus. If we love God above all else, there is danger, the danger of a cross, danger that our lives will be upset, or that they will upset others. Danger that we will become locked in combat with the strong powers of evil.

But it is this danger that gives zest to life. To lose yourself is not an act of desperation; it is an act of devotion. Because we live for him, we live for others.

Discipleship is a matter of profit and loss, a question of whether we will “waste” our lives or “invest” our lives.

“Losing your soul” is the equivalent of wasting your life, missing the great opportunities God gives you to make your life count. Satan promises you glory, but in the end, you receive suffering. God promises you suffering, but in the end, that suffering is transformed into glory.

In medieval Christian art it is common to see paintings of a cross with a ladder leaning up against it. What the ladder symbolizes in Christian art is Jesus’ descent from the cross. While we are climbing up our ladders of success, we must stumble over Jesus who is being carried down.

Jesus lost his life at Calvary. “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to get that which he cannot lose.” Jim Elliott

Jim Elliott and 4 other missionaries gave their lives to reach the Auca Indians of Ecuador in January of 1956. Only a few had heard of this primitive tribe until the day when the 5 American missionaries were killed trying to make contact with the Auca’s. After the attack and killings, news organizations like Time and Life magazines went down to Ecuador to report on the story. Diaries and notebooks were found by the reporters that belonged to the slain missionaries. One missionary Ed McCully of Milwaukee wrote: “I have one desire now...to live a life of reckless abandon for the Lord, putting all my energy and strength into it.”

Another missionary wrote: “I want to be a witness for Him and live following Him every second of my life.”

Within 3 years of the attack others followed and were living among the Aucas teaching them about Christ. One of the murdered missionaries son’s was baptized by an Auca pastor on the site of the attack. The Auca pastor had been one of those in the raiding party that had attacked the missionaries.

Elisabeth Elliot wrote about her husband’s death as a missionary: “The truth is that it is ours to thank Him for and ours to offer back to Him, ours to relinquish, ours to lose, ours to let go--- if we want to find our true selves, if we want real life, if our hearts are set on glory.”

In 1994 a musical/drama was written to tell this story of the 5 missionaries. It was entitled: “At Any Cost.”