



#11: Who do you say that I am? | Brad Williams | August 29, 2010

Note: Due to Labor Day next week's SSG will not be published until Tues, Sept 7. If you have a Monday group, we recommend you keep the bulletin outline from Pastor Joe's sermon notes and form the main points into questions for discussion.

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat, perhaps offering coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray, or invite someone to pray, and open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group; 5-10 minutes.)

Introduction: Sometimes our response to a single question can change our life, or the lives of those around us, possibly forever. Today we're going to ask a question that everyone, at some point or another, will have to answer. And regardless of how we answer it, it will shape the rest of our life. For the past two summers we've been walking through the book of Mark in a series we've called "Follow the Leader." Along the way we've met some interesting characters and read some amazing stories. But there's one question in everybody's mind. It's a question that everyone is asking, including us. "Who is this Jesus?" And our answer will shape the course, the direction, of the rest of our lives. [Read **Mark 8:22-38** together now.] Mark knew that someday we'd be reading this book, and the only reason he would have included this story is if there was a greater point being made. And there is.

1. Not everyone understands Jesus all at once. The blind man wasn't healed immediately. It took a couple of times. It seems that sometimes it takes multiple touches from Jesus to receive all that He has to offer. Sometimes it takes time to get it. It's not always like the experience of the apostle Paul. Paul was persecuting Christians, jailing them, killing them, and then one day he was walking down the road, and there was a light from heaven. He audibly heard the voice of Jesus and everything changed. Everything became clear, and he became the most influential Christian of all time. For some reason, that experience becomes the gold standard of what it looks like to 'come to Jesus.' But for many of us, it might be more like the man in Mark 8 being led out of the town of Bethsaida to be healed of his blindness. It might be a lot more like Peter, as we read in **Mark 8:27**. "*And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they told him, 'John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.'*" The people had been watching and listening and following. They'd heard the stories, seen the healings, and yet they were still trying to figure out, "Who is this guy?" But why were they doing this? Why the confusion? And why were people even attempting to answer this question?

2. The actions of Jesus demand that we make a decision about who He is. We can't just ignore Jesus' activity, or His claims. At some point, we have to recognize that His behavior demands explanation, and His claims deserve thoughtful consideration. We have this historical record of an individual who healed people, multiplied meals and raised people from the dead. We have recorded conversations of a man claiming to be God Himself, in the flesh. An individual, who from a rag tag group of twelve, began a spiritual revolution that continues to sweep the globe, two thousand years later. And then, then there's the cross, and the Resurrection. We have to decide something. People did then, and we have to today. They said Jesus was John the Baptist or Elijah, both of whom had died but were the only two people who had lived lives that looked anything like this. Today, people say Jesus was a good teacher or a good example. Some say He was delusional, and others say, He was exactly who He said He was. The point is that eventually everyone has to make a decision about who Jesus is, which is why in **Mark 8:29**, Jesus gets personal. "*And he asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ.'*" This is a significant statement. Literally, Peter was saying, "You are the Jewish Messiah." The Jewish Messiah had been written about for

centuries, prophesied about specifically, and Peter believed that the Christ would be the king to end all kings, and the one who would put all things right. The world would be renewed and restored through the reign of this new king. And Peter, a fisherman from Galilee, is the first to say it, the first to believe it, and the first to proclaim Jesus is the Christ. This moment would come to define his life. And it will define ours.

3. Principle: Who we say Jesus is will determine who we are. Our answer to the question “Who do you say I am?” will determine our identity. If we say that Jesus is a lunatic and that His claims are outlandish and the Bible is just revisionist history, then Jesus will have little or no bearing on our lives or identity. Who we are will be completely determined by us. Even if we choose another religious system, those systems all share the idea that it’s up to us to perform a particular way, so we are still the ones in control. It’s still our definition of our identity. Or, if we decide that Jesus was a good teacher or a prophet, then He’s like a favorite college professor. We may respect some things that He says, and He may impact some of our behavior, but ultimately, it’s still up to us to pick and choose what teachings we like or don’t like. And when we do that, we’re still the ones making the decisions, and our identity is still up to us. But if we say He is the Christ, as Peter did, then the implications are so far-reaching that our identity, the very core of who we are, will no longer be shaped by us, but instead, by Him. And here’s why. Jesus begins to describe Himself in a way that is completely earth shattering. He goes on to describe the life of one who says, “*You are the Christ*” in a way that is challenging and new. Jesus doesn’t deny Peter’s claim. He re-affirms it, using one of His favorite titles for Himself: “*Son of Man*.” By using that term, Jesus was saying, “I am that King! I am the One that was prophesied about.” But, He explains, He is not a king like any other king they’ve known. He says, “I MUST suffer” and that if we want to be a part of what He has to offer, if we want to follow Him, we have to follow Him to the cross. Our old identity has to die. **Mark 8:35-36** says, “*For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*” Jesus says that He doesn’t want us to simply lose our identity, He wants us to find a new identity by losing our old self and finding a new identity in Him and in the Gospel. He says, “I went to the cross, and I lost my identity so that you could have one. I was stripped of everything that could make me who I am, including my relationship with my Father.” And why? To pay the price of sin to free you and me and offer us a brand new identity. That is love.

C. Life Group Questions (Select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes.)

1. Was there a time, before or after becoming a Christian, when you could not fully accept who Jesus says He is, when you treated Jesus more like a wise teacher or a prophet, rather than the Christ, the Messiah-King? How was your life different?
2. In a typical monarchy, the King’s subjects do not have ultimate authority over the direction of their life and property. Do you struggle to put **Mark 8:35** into practice and the idea that we must give up who we are to become something more in Christ? What do you struggle with?
3. Give an example of how submitting yourself to Jesus Christ causes you to behave differently? How do you use your time, money and possessions differently than non-Christians around you, or do people see no difference?
4. For those working full time- if Jesus did a job-shadow with you, how would it affect your interaction with your co-workers? Would you be the same when the boss isn’t looking?
5. For those not “workin’ for the man”- if Jesus spent a week with you, what would He find out about how His subject uses the King’s time and resources? Would He be pleased?

D. Personal Application (1-3 minutes)

This week, pray for humility and spiritual direction and then make decisions and take actions that serve the interests of Jesus Christ, your Messiah-King.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4; 10-15 minutes.)

- Ask God to penetrate your heart in your relationship to Jesus Christ.
- Ask God for help in denying self-will and opening your heart to the Lordship of Christ.
- Pray that the Spirit will keep your mind focused on the will of Christ Jesus.
- Give thanks to God for all the ways that He has used His power in your life.