

- I. This whole passage revolves around Jesus' question to the disciples. Who do you say that I am? But first he poses to them the question of who does everyone else say that I am? The disciples report that the people claim Jesus is John the Baptist, Elijah, and one of the prophets. The outsiders are not expected to get the question right, but they get half credit for their answer. Jesus was somewhat like these prophets, he healed, forgave sins, and performed miracles. But the real question is for the disciples, and for us as readers as well.
- II. Who do the disciples say Jesus is? Jesus has been teaching them since the beginning, so hopefully something has sunk into their thick heads. And surprisingly, Peter comes up with the correct answer. "You are the Messiah." Now, Peter's expectation of what a Messiah is mainly draws on the Old Testament prophets. The Messiah was to be the "anointed king from the royal line of David expected to come and free Israel from Gentile oppressors, purify the people, and restore Israel's independence and glory."<sup>1</sup> So this is the picture of messiahship that runs through Peter's head as he makes this confession of who is Jesus to him. But Jesus has a different and new understanding of what messiahship means.
- III. Jesus teaches 'that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.' This is NOT what Peter expected. Does anyone have an intense friend or family member? The one that gets a little too animated about politics, religion, or sports at parties or Thanksgiving dinner? You say one thing trying to make some simple, easy conversation, and then the conversation is off and running down one rabbit hole after another. All you asked was, "How is the family doing?" Then all of sudden they're off talking about the Supreme Court, the future of America, the problems with kids these days, and whatever other hot button issues that are too taboo for normal conversation, but they're going to shoe horn them into your conversation, or really their monologue. You're just looking for an opportunity to jump in there and tell them to pump the brakes, slow down, no need to overreact.
- IV. I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall for Peter's conversation with Jesus. Peter takes Jesus aside and urges him to simmer down. "Whoa, whoa, whoa Jesus. You need to calm down there a bit, chill for a minute. What is with all this sacrifice talk?" Again, this is not the Messiah Peter was expecting. When they arrive in Jerusalem Peter thought there would be parties fit for a king, and as an early adopter he would be on the inside. "Anyone growing up in Galilee just then knew about revolutions, about holy people hoping God would act and deliver them, and ending up getting crucified instead...[But true] Messiahs don't get killed by the authorities. A messiah who did that would be shown up precisely as a false Messiah."<sup>2</sup> First century Palestine was littered

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Johnson, [workingpreacher.com](http://workingpreacher.com) 2018.

<sup>2</sup> N.T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone* p. ???

with false Messiahs who found themselves up on the cross, and what Peter hears Jesus explain to the disciples is that they are following another one in the long line of imposters.

- V. But for Jesus this is the path the Messiah must take, and he will not chill out. It is go time. You are either with me in this endeavor or against me. Jesus is unwilling to calm down, he speaks truth without regard of the consequences. Jesus has no chill. From this point forward all roads lead to the cross. Jesus is not just a teacher, healer, friend, miracle worker who feeds the multitudes and welcomes the little children. Jesus is walking down the kingdom road and wants folks who will follow him on this path. This is the same path from last week's passage from Isaiah 35: "And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." This road of glory leads to one place and one place only. There is much glory to be found in the holy city of Jerusalem from the palace to the temple, but the way of Jesus does not lead to these places of privilege but to the lowly cross.
- VI. The path of the kingdom of God doesn't lead to self-gratification, it leads to seeking the will of God today. And to follow Christ down this road it is not enough to profess with our mouth what we are unwilling to enact with our hands feet, time, talent, and treasure. Bonhoeffer said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die." Peter has the words right, but for someone to be a follower Jesus says that is not enough. Our profession of faith in Jesus as our Messiah must exude from our very being, it must be what we are about.
- VII. In my opinion we twenty-first century Christians have traded in this rough and ready Jesus for a plush toy version. He looks like Jesus, but he's not quite the real thing. He is there when we need him, but has lost the intensity of being about the work of the kingdom. The work Jesus lays out in Matthew as caring for the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned.
- VIII. In seminary each senior had to form a group with three or four of their classmates to lead a week of chapel. Of course, each year there were those who tried to think outside the box, and do things a bit differently. Of course I was in one of those groups; we made a video series where we went around campus and a local bar and asked people, "Who is Jesus?" Many students took this as opportunity to have a bit of fun, and joke around with their responses, a few took it extremely serious and asked us to come back to them when they had time to write out a proper confession. But I had a friend who was a bit different, and refused to engage us with this question. Instead she just lived her life differently than the rest of us, she was about living out what she professed she believed. For instance, while others of us were taking positions at large congregations in suburban areas, her call right out of seminary was serving a homeless church in the city. Don't get me wrong the Lord's work is everywhere, and needed in every corner of the world, but she was the only one in my three years of seminary that took a position without a stable paycheck, who's church's purpose was to serve the least of the city. In my mind, she was

always about the work of God's kingdom. I have admired her for her willingness to take risks to follow where God was calling her, so much so that we had her baptize one of my children.

- IX. John Calvin wrote, "We are not our own; therefore neither our reason nor our will should predominate in our deliberations and actions. We are not our own; therefore let us not propose it as our end, to seek what may be expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own; therefore let us as far as possible, forget ourselves and all things that are ours. On the contrary, we are God's; to him, therefore, let us live and die. We are God's; therefore let his wisdom and will preside in all our actions. We are God's; toward him, therefore, as our only legitimate end, let every part of our lives be directed."<sup>3</sup>
- X. Who is Jesus? He is the Messiah. But what does that mean to you? Does your response affect how you live? Has it changed you in some way, shape, or form? Truly following Jesus is not for the faint of heart, it is not for those who want to remain obedient to the world. It forces us to ask the question, "Who am I? Who am I as a result of my faith in Jesus?"
- XI. I stand before you, not as someone who always makes the right choices in following Jesus, but as someone who falls short time and time again but gets back up off the mat and tries again and again to strive for perfection. Perfection in the eyes of God is unattainable by any mortal, but that is the call, that is goal of every Christian. Don't let the fact that it is unattainable dissuade you from the work that is involved. "Jesus loves us enough to call us out. He loves us enough to call us beyond ourselves; enough to give all of himself for our sake and invite us to give all of ourselves for his sake and for the sake of the gospel."<sup>4</sup> The person, the God, that we follow is one that knows the road ahead, that knows the mental and physical anguish of bearing the cross. Yet, Jesus does not let us off the hook. If we profess Jesus as Lord, then it means we must be prepared to bear the cross.
- XII. Recently I've been reading the book *Chase the Lion: If Your Dream Doesn't Scare You, It's Too Small* by Mark Batterson. The focus of the book is on the Scripture 2 Samuel 23:30 which reads, On a snowy day, he chased a lion down into a pit and killed it. But what it is really about is taking risks, dreaming big, and trusting the Lord. He writes, "I need a life goal to keep me going. I need a noble cause to keep me committed. I need a God-sized dream to keep me from getting demotivated. We don't die when our hearts stop beating. We die when our hearts stop skipping a beat in pursuit of our passions, when our hearts stop breaking for the things that break the heart of God."<sup>5</sup>
- XIII. May we always be bold and dream big in this church and in our lives, and trust where the Lord is leading even when that path is to the cross.

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<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes vol. 3, chapter 7*

<sup>4</sup> Jill Duffield, *Presbyterian Outlook: Looking into the Lectionary* Sept 16, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Batterson, *Chase the Lion*, p. 30