

Today we continue the series we've been in since the start of 2020, helping us to see Jesus clearly, and understand the depth of who he is and what it means to follow Him. And Jesus asks a crucial question here that takes us deep into who Jesus is and what it means to be one of His followers. In fact, this passage has as much depth to it as any in the New Testament, and has the capacity to revitalize a languishing faith, to give focus and energy to a long-time Christian, as well as encourage someone who is new to the faith to take a first step forward in following Jesus.

Mark tells us that they were in the region of Caesarea-Philippi. This is north of the Sea of Galilee about 25 miles, and about 75 miles north of Jerusalem. The region was known as the birth of pagan gods and Baal worship. It had previously been called Balinas because of the Baal worship, and later under Greek dominion, and still before Jesus' time, it became known as Panias because of the Greek god, Pan, who was supposedly born there. There are ruins of temples to both of those gods still there that can be visited today.



So here in the region of the pagan gods, Jesus asks his disciples this question: Who do people say that I am? And some well-known people of old and not so old are mentioned by the disciples. You can go back a couple chapters in Mark, to 6:14-16, and in response to Jesus' fame growing we read: **King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!" (Mark 6:14-16).** So the disciples' response here is a retelling of what Mark recorded earlier was being said about Jesus.

But it's not enough to know what *other* people believe about who Jesus is. So **Jesus asks them, "Who do you say that I am?" (v. 27).** This really gets to the heart of the matter, and the conversation suddenly turns to a depth that Jesus had not had with his disciples previously. With this question, Jesus is communicating that what other people think about who Jesus is doesn't matter nearly as much as what the men standing before him believe. And Jesus still asks this question of you and me. Who do you say Jesus is?

Well, **Peter – who is always willing to be the spokesperson for the group – speaks up and says, "You are the Messiah."** Have you ever answered a question without fully knowing the implication of the answer? If you're a gal, maybe there was a day 5 or 25 or 65 years ago that some handsome young man once asked you, "Will you marry me?" And without really realizing what all would be entailed with that, with great enthusiasm and not an ounce of fear or trepidation, you said: "Yes!" Or maybe someone once asked you, "Will you be on this committee, or lead this team, or take this job?" And perhaps you thought you knew what that role would entail, so you said, "Yes;" But after a few weeks or months or even years you realized that the road was much different than you ever dreamed it would be.

That's like Peter's response. **He and the other disciples have a preconceived notion of what the long-expected Messiah is to be about, and therefore what it would mean to be part of the Messiah's top leadership team...but their preconceived notions are not on target.** And because their thoughts about the Messiah are simply informed by the culture around them, this means all of Israel's idea of what the expected Messiah would be and do are also out of whack. So Jesus tells them to keep his identity under wraps. There's too much fake news about what the Messiah will be like and what the Messiah will do, for Jesus' Messiahship to come out. He needs to recalibrate the 12 disciples, and any others he's able to as well, before his death.

To do some of that recalibration, Jesus teaches them right there on the spot about what it means that he is the Messiah. The Messiah will lead a large grass-roots rebellion that will overthrow the Evil Empire Roman government

and establish a Jewish throne in the lineage of King David that will lead to the greatest earthly kingdom ever...and it will all come to fruition because of the courageous leadership of the Messiah, the anointed one, as he charges ahead under the guidance of the Force and uses his light saber and x-wing fighter flying skills. Oh, wait...that's more Star Wars and what Peter and the Disciples and all of Israel already thought was going to happen.

But Jesus says “No” to that and corrects their thinking: **The Messiah will suffer, be rejected by the elders, priests, and religious teachers, and then He will be killed (verse 31).** In fact, he says that these things “must” happen. But here we see the bigger picture view that Jesus takes as he also teaches them that the Messiah will rise again after three days. Death will not have the final word. But that didn't fully register with them, and even if they heard it, they wouldn't know what it actually meant. It simply was not part of their expectations for the Messiah. Peter can't handle the idea of the Messiah as a suffering servant, and begins to rebuke Jesus.

Then Jesus turns the tables: He rebukes Peter, and in doing so he identifies the problem that *every single one of us has in following Jesus*. You and I are not so different from Peter and the rest of the disciples right there in the mid 30's A.D. **Jesus says, “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (Mark 8:33).**

Isn't this too often our problem as well? We're so focused on earthly stuff...on concerns that have nothing to do with the love, grace, justice, truth or Kingdom of God...the things that concern God the most...we're so focused on other things – like limitations of time or money, or fear that we aren't capable of doing something – sometimes we're so focused on those kinds of things that we miss out on what God might otherwise do *through* us to make and shape disciples of Jesus.

It's like the cowboy who moved to the city and went to a fancy church one Sunday just down the street from his new home. After the service, the pastor told the cowboy that perhaps he ought to talk to God before coming back next Sunday, because he was wearing jeans and a cowboy shirt, and wasn't wearing a suit and tie. The next week the cowboy showed up wearing another

pair of jeans and a cowboy shirt. The pastor said, “I thought I asked you to talk to God about what you wore to church here.” The cowboy said, “I did. God told me he had no idea what I ought to wear here because he’d never been in this church.” Sometimes we are way too concerned with things that God is flat-out not concerned with.

If you and I aren’t living our lives around the things that matter to God – such as loving God with all we’ve got, such as loving our neighbors as ourselves, such as shining the light of Christ so that the people around us would glorify their father in heaven, such as always being prepared with an answer for why we believe in Jesus; such as making disciples of all nations and teaching them to obey everything that Jesus has taught us...if we aren’t concerned with *these* things first and foremost above whatever else we’re doing, then as NASA astronaut Jim Lovell said, “Houston, we’ve had a problem.”

And it’s not that this is easy. No one is saying it is. Jesus makes that clear himself as he continues. **His disciples – people like you and me – will have to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and *then* we follow Jesus.**

And remember: when Jesus said “take up your cross” they heard, “Whoever wishes to be my disciple, must take up their own instrument for administering the death penalty that the occupying Romans have brought to us, and carry it themselves.” They don’t have in mind a piece of jewelry or a tattoo or a decoration on a wall. He means be prepared for some suffering, and even some death – to things like selfishness, self-reliance, seeing mountains as impossible obstacles. These are the kinds of concerns that need to be put to death and let go of.

So, what Jesus is saying here is that: **The life of discipleship to Jesus is a life of sacrificial service: serving others in the name of Jesus.** And as you probably know, that’s exactly what Jesus did. He came from his place in the heavenly realms and gave up all that he had there to serve humanity, including you and me. And he had such a servant’s heart that he served all the way to the cross. There were no limits to His service, and he did what his heavenly Father told him to do. He was concerned with the things that

concern God. So Jesus has been there.

For people who are willing to make that sacrifice and serve as Jesus served, Jesus says **“Whoever loses their life for me and the gospel will save it” (v. 35)**. You’ll lose one life as you deny yourself and take up your cross and serve...but that actually leads to a saved life. Your own saved life. A life that is rescued. A life that has so much more depth and purpose and meaning...all because it’s a life lived with concern for the things that are of concern to God as you follow Jesus the Messiah.

And: **This all begins with this question that Jesus still asks: Who do you say I am?** Who do you say Jesus is? This is the most important question you could ever consider. If you have not considered this question before, I would encourage you to do so. If you have questions about Jesus, I would be happy to sit down some time and talk with you about those questions, and there are many others here at Rose Hill who’d be happy to do that as well.

And if you *have* considered this question, and you’ve answered that you believe Jesus is more than a man...that he is the Messiah as he defines the Messiah, and you believe he lived, died, and rose from the grave, then I encourage you to consider the rest of Jesus’ teaching here. **How are you and I denying ourselves and taking up our cross as we follow the suffering servant, Jesus the Messiah? How are we being Christ-like servants?** How are we concerning ourselves with the things God is concerned about?

A couple days ago, we saw some great models of serving as several of our deacons served at the reception after Dave Price’s memorial service. They set up the tables and chairs, prepped the food and coffee and tea and punch, made sure we didn’t run out of those things, and then cleaned up afterwards. It was several hours of service for each of them, and was a huge blessing to everyone there. Dave Price himself was a model of service. In fact, one of his grand-nephews stood up in the service and referenced this passage in talking about Dave. I went home and re-wrote this sermon because of him. He shared how Dave was a model of someone who took up their cross and followed Jesus. Dave was an incredible servant of the Lord who touched a lot of people’s lives in his 55 years here at Rose Hill. 55 years. Think about the

impact someone can have over that length of time. He did it through serving for 22 years as our clerk of Session, he and his wife led several Rose Hill missions trips to Guatemala, he was here for work parties nearly every second Saturday, he was here every month prepping our monthly newsletter to be mailed...There were other ways, too.

And he's not the only one. We've had, and continue to have, some incredible disciples of Jesus who have served in so many ways. Some have passed on, some are still here...some are "elderly," some have had to stop serving because of health, while others are still going strong – though no one is getting any younger. But I think of people like the Gesells, the Mateers, the Lanums, the Herzogs, the Bozorths, the Lovetts, the Roetcisoenders, the Franklins...I could go on and on with other people, many of whom are here this morning. And I'm sorry if I didn't mention your name or a relative's name and I probably should have...I've given just the tip of the iceberg and I need to end this sermon before too much longer...and there are many others who served in earlier decades long before I arrived. But as one person said at the memorial service for Dave Price: "there's a generation of saints here at Rose Hill who are moving on." We might say they are graduating into eternity. I've led a lot of "graduation" ceremonies the last 7 years.

**And we now have the honor and the joy of continuing to help Rose Hill be a vibrant and flourishing church for Jesus, as we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus, serving as He did.** Whether you've been here 40 days or 40 years (or more), Jesus still invites us to follow him. So, who do you say Jesus is? And if the answer is anything along the lines that professes faith in Him as more than a man...as the savior, the messiah, the son of God...Then the rest of this passage, and the rest of Jesus' life, is what it means to live out that faith, concerning ourselves with the things God is concerned about. I pray we would be doing that here at Rose Hill, and that each of us would be open to opportunities to serve like Jesus. It's what He invites us to do, for his sake, and the sake of the Gospel. Let's pray...Amen.