

9. Man in the Dock: Who do people say that I am?

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[0 : 00] And with me, if you would, to these words that we read in Mark's Gospel, chapter 8, page 844, if you have one of our visitor's Bibles. Now, our question today in verse 29 of Mark, chapter 8, I suppose, really is the ultimate question of them all, isn't it?

It's the question that every other question that God asks men and women ultimately really boils down to. Who do you say that I am?

It's the great question. It's the question of the identity of the Lord Jesus Christ. But I want you to notice that what this passage makes absolutely clear is that this is never merely an academic question.

That is, the answer can never be one merely of factual accuracy, but an attitude of indifference. No, the answer to that question, if it's really understood, always has very, very deep and profound implications.

It's where the answer to that question leads you that is of vital importance. And it's the answer, it's where that answer leads you that ultimately shows up whether you've grasped the question properly at all, whether you've really understood what it means.

[1 : 30] So I want to look at it this morning under three headings. First of all, the great public question and the popular verdict. And then the pressing personal question that Jesus makes in verse 29 in the confession of Peter.

And then finally the strange command of Jesus that we find following the answer that's given by Peter. So first of all, let's consider the public question and the popular verdict.

Now, as you know, chapter 8 comes bang halfway through Mark's gospel. And since Jesus has burst onto the scene, the story that Mark tells has been one of extraordinary authority, hasn't it? Jesus has an amazing and a unique authority as a teacher, as a healer. He has authority over the demons, over sickness, as a miracle worker, even over nature itself.

Just look back to chapter 1, just to read a few verses there to make this so very clear. Look at chapter 1, verse 27, for example.

[2 : 39] And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him. Look down to verse 32.

That very evening at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city gathered together there at the door, and he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.

If you read on in the story, just a chapter or two, you find that he is the one who has authority over nature itself. Stilling of the storm. Multiplying loaves and fishes.

Indeed, he is somebody who speaks with all the authority of God himself. That's obvious everywhere. Just look at chapter 2 again, verse 5.

Jesus said to the paralytic, remember who had been let down through the roof, My son, your sins are forgiven. Now some of the scribes, the teachers of the law, were sitting there questioning in their hearts, Why does this man speak like that?

[3 : 46] He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? Well, Jesus claiming the very authority of God.

By the way, that's the answer to foolish people who say, Well, Jesus never actually claimed to be God. Just need to read through the Gospels, to see that on almost every page he makes claims that are absolutely clear.

That's why they crucified him. It's astonishing when you read a book by an Oxford professor like Richard Dawkins, and he throws in the most ignorant statements like Jesus Christ himself, never

even claimed to be God.

Goodness. People read Professor Dawkins' papers with the same carelessness as he reads the Bible, he never got where he is, would he? Absolutely ignorant. And all of this display of Jesus' authority is done absolutely publicly, isn't it?

In the public view. And so the question for the public, for the people is, Well, who is this man? And what's their verdict?

[4 : 50] Well, look at chapter 8 again, and verse, well, verse 28. It reveals, I think, that the people were in fact very perceptive, weren't they? They weren't fools, these people.

They were recognized when they saw it as supernatural ministry. Now, we mustn't get the impression that the people that we read of in these gospel stories were primitive people. Absolutely not. Very likely, these were very highly educated people, or many of them were. Galilee, where Jesus was carrying out this ministry, was a hub of the trade routes of the ancient world, of the Roman world.

These people very likely spoke multiple languages, Aramaic and Hebrew, as well as Greek, and very possibly Latin. Any of you can speak four languages? These were people who had read literature from all over the ancient world.

If you go onto the internet and just look up some of the archaeology for, well, a place like Sepphoris, for example, a great Roman city just a couple of miles from Nazareth where Jesus was brought up.

[5 : 59] You'll read of the theatres, you'll see the pictures of the wonderful mosaics, you'll read of the cultural life of that place. Now, these were not ignoramuses that we read of in the gospels, but cultured people.

And they knew, when they saw Jesus Christ and what he did, they knew that what they saw and heard was highly extraordinary. It was precisely because supernatural things were not commonplace that they saw Jesus and were astounded.

And that's reflected in their response in verse 28. Look at it carefully. Who is it that they say this man must be? Well, some of them Elijah, or John the Baptist, or another prophet.

Matthew tells us they named Jeremiah. Now, what do you notice about these people? Well, first of all, they're all dead, aren't they? Some of them very long dead.

They're all the great figures of the Bible's history, aren't they? Elijah, Jeremiah. They were all people who were greatly opposed by the establishment in their own day, and yet they were powerful men of God.

[7 : 09] And you see, the people of Nazareth, the people of Galilee in those days, they saw in Jesus something so extraordinary that the only way that they could explain it was by coming up with some kind of supernatural explanation.

Here's a man who has been raised from the dead. That's what they're saying. If it was John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or somebody like that.

Here's something absolutely supernatural that's standing in front of us. You see, when you ask the question, who is Jesus Christ, and people actually bother to look at the evidence of what he said and what he did, well then, people have to admit that this man is extraordinary.

No ordinary explanation possible will do for Jesus Christ. And you can see that the people, as so often, were way ahead of the leaders.

Look back to chapter 3, verse 22, you'll find that the scribes from Jerusalem, the religious establishment, they came down and their answer to the question, who was Jesus, was, well, he's possessed by the devil.

[8 : 18] That's how he's doing these works. But no, the people, the ordinary people who saw and listened and reasoned, well, they knew better. That's often the way, isn't it?

It's true today. So often, it's the ordinary people who seem to have a much better finger on their pulse than the people of the establishment, our rulers. That's the great cry across Europe, isn't it? We're being ruled by bureaucrats and people who are way out of touch with the normality and the reality of people's lives. But it's all too often true in the church as well, isn't it?

I suspect you'll find today that very often it's the people in the pews who are much clearer, alas, about the truth of the gospel of God than the clergy in the pulpit. And that's a cause for shame. And of course, that's what explains the decline, doesn't it, in so many churches and denominations in our land. But that's the popular verdict here to the great question of who Jesus is.

[9 : 16] Jesus is extraordinary, he's supernatural. And if we're honest, and if we face up to the evidence, well, we just have to find some kind of supernatural explanation of him.

But listen, that observation on its own is not enough. And Jesus won't let you get away with this kind of, oh well, some people explain it this way with that kind of answer.

No, Jesus wants more. So in verse 29, he turns to his disciples and he says, yes, but who do you say that I am? So let's think about that pressing personal question and Peter's confession.

See, Jesus never, ever deals in generalities. Jesus isn't interested in opinion polls. He wants a personal response to himself and to his message.

And so he points the finger at each one of those who purport to follow him and he says, but what about you? And that's the same then as it is now. Remember I mentioned the other day Billy Graham some years ago when he was on the Terry Wogan show and he kept turning to Terry Wogan and thinking, what about you Terry?

[10 : 30] What do you make of Jesus Christ? And the great Terry Wogan was not a little discomfited. So Jesus turns his spotlight, doesn't he, on the disciples. They've seen more than everybody else, haven't they?

They've heard more than everybody else. So are they ready for the big test? Who do you say that I am, says Jesus? That's the question. Now it is not an opinion poll, not, do you believe in God? Or do you go to church regularly? That's the sort of question you get and the answer is yes, once every six months and that counts as part of the statistics. No, Jesus asks a very acute, a very specific question.

Who is Jesus of Nazareth? Who do you say that I am? What is my real identity? And more to the point, what is the implication of that for the world and for your own life?

That's the question. Well, what of the disciples? Well, I'm afraid the context isn't very encouraging, is it? Look back at verse 17 again, all those questions that Jesus asked them.

[11 : 41] Do you not perceive or understand? View eyes, but do you not see? Having ears, do you not hear? Do you not remember? When I broke the loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets? And the four thousand? Do you not yet understand, says Jesus?

Despite all of their privilege, despite all the extra tuition, all the special remedial classes that Jesus had given these disciples, still, verse 21, they don't understand.

Jesus says, they've got eyes, but they're blind. They've got ears. They can't hear anything. Doesn't look very promising, does it really? But then, suddenly, in verse 29, Peter seems to have a brainwave, doesn't he?

You, says Peter, are the Christ. That is, you are the Messiah. You are the Son of God. Now, how did Peter get that so suddenly, so clearly, so wonderfully?

How did he go from being blind, like the others, in verse 21, to, in verse 29, suddenly seeing the truth of God? Well, in Matthew's account, Matthew 16, he records Jesus' words to Peter.

[12 : 56] He says this, Blessed are you, Simon, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father, who is in heaven. You see, the real truth, about the things of God, can only be grasped, by God's, divine illumination.

He has to open blind eyes, to make them see. He has to unstop their fears, so that they can hear.

That's what Paul says, isn't it, to the Corinthians. God must say, let the light shine in the darkness, to give us the light, of the knowledge, of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.

Otherwise, we're in darkness. And of course, that is exactly the point, isn't it, that Mark is making for us here, in this story, by recording this little, miracle story, in verses 22 to 26.

You see that? Have you ever wondered, why that story is there? You don't really need it, to be there, do you? If you look at verse 21, you could go straight, from verse 21 to 27, couldn't you?

Wouldn't really spoil, the story at all. Why is this here? Well, it's here, obviously, as a graphic picture, as an illustration, of exactly what's going on.

[14 : 09] Jesus, is opening blind eyes, to the truth. See, when we see that, when you understand, why, Jesus has done, what he's done, and why Mark, has recorded it like that, it helps us to understand, something that is otherwise, very, very strange.

Verse 30, isn't that a strange verse? Just think about that, under this third heading, the strange command of Jesus. Don't tell anyone, says Jesus.

Strictly, he charged them, to tell no one about him. Now, isn't that the opposite, of what you would expect? Isn't it? It's the opposite, of what I would expect.

Peter has finally, understood the whole thing. Don't you expect, Jesus to say, bravo, he's got it, at last, hooray, go out and spread the word, tell everybody, tell everybody, who I am. But Jesus is exactly, the opposite. Why on earth, would he do that? Well, the answer, lies in the words of Jesus, that follow on, but also, it's illustrated, by this little story, of Jesus healing, of the blind man.

[15 : 24] Jesus says to Peter, keep quiet, because, because, he hasn't yet, really and fully, understood, who, Jesus is, and what his identity, means.

And until he does that, he's only got, half the story. He's still in a blur. He's still only, well, like a man seeing, trees walking. He sees, but he doesn't yet, see clearly.

Because he doesn't see, the implications, of Jesus' identity. He doesn't see, either what Jesus, really came to do, and how he came to do it, or what that means, for those who would be, followers of Jesus Christ.

And that's why, this miracle story, is here. It's a visual aid, to teach us. You've got to have, the whole truth, not just half. It's an extraordinary story, isn't it?

Just look at it. It's the only place, in the whole Bible, where Jesus, heals somebody, in two parts. Now, do you think that's because, he was having an off day? Did he not get it right, the first time? Of course not.

[16 : 32] He's doing it like that, to make a point, isn't he? You need to see, but you need to see, with total clarity. Half sight, just isn't any good, as far as the gospel, is concerned.

And that's what he goes on, immediately, to teach his disciples. Here, look at verses 31 and 32. And he began, to teach them, that the Son of Man, must suffer many things, and be rejected, by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days, rise again.

And he said this, plainly. You see, if Jesus is, the Christ, the King, the Messiah, then that has, two unavoidable, implications.

and you have, to understand that, or you've only understood, a blur, which is nothing. First, you must see, that he's going to be, a suffering saviour.

He's not going to be, any kind of king, that the world recognizes. Jesus' display of power, as the king, is the very antithesis, of the world's display of power.

[17 : 40] He's not going to be like, a political leader, taking the stage, at the party conference, as we've seen last week, and no doubt, we'll see this week, telling us how great they are, and looking for our votes, and talking himself up.

No. Nor is he going to be, the kind of powerful leader, that shows his might, and his muscle, to the world, by talking about, the nuclear weapons, he's building up. No.

That's what the world, recognizes as power. But you see, that kind of thinking, is still absolutely blind, to the real glory of God.

And Peter, you see, is still at least, half blind. And that's why, in verse 33, Jesus is so devastating. Have you ever read, a more devastating verse?

How would you like Jesus, to say that to you? Get behind me, Satan. Jesus says to Peter, that's the world's thinking, Peter. That's, the way of man.

[18 : 42] And ultimately, the devil is behind that. That's why, Peter has this, stern rebuke. It seems so unfair, to poor Peter, doesn't it? He's just come up, with the answer.

And Jesus is saying, get behind me, Satan. But Jesus says, don't speak. I will not have you, going out, and preaching a gospel, without the cross.

And a gospel, that proclaims Jesus, but doesn't proclaim, with absolute clarity, and clear sight, the meaning, of the cross. No cross, no Christ, and no message, says Jesus.

And no message, of the meaning of the cross, no gospel. Shut up, don't speak. Because the gospel, is not just, Jesus is the Christ.

Jesus is the king. Jesus, is powerful, to heal, and to cast out demons, and to bring health. No. Not according to Jesus.

[19 : 46] According, to Jesus himself, the gospel, is Christ, and him crucified. Look at verse 31.

That's why, immediately, he began, to teach them, that the son of man, must suffer, many things, and be rejected, by the elders, and the chief priests, and be killed, and after three days, rise again.

And he said this, plainly. And he repeats it, plainly, again, and again, and again. Look down to chapter 9, verse 30, and 31.

For he was teaching, his disciples, and saying to them, the son of man, is going to be delivered, into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he's killed, he will rise, after three days.

He says it again, a little bit further on, in the journey. Look at verse 33, of chapter 10. See, he says, we're going to Jerusalem, and the son of man, will be delivered, over to the chief priests, and the scribes, and they will condemn him, to death, and deliver him, over to the Gentiles, and they will mock him, and spit on him, and flog him, and kill him.

And after three days, he'll rise again. Look down to verse 45, it's such a key verse, isn't it, in the gospel of Mark. For even the son of man, came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life, as a ransom, for many.

[21 : 05] And you need to know, says Jesus, that I came, to give my life, as a ransom, for many. That's the implication, of saying, that I'm the Christ.

That I'm the Messiah, the Son of God. That's what it means. I came as a ransom, as a sin bearer, as the one, who forgives sins, but only, by bearing away sin.

Only by dealing, with the wrath of God, that is against sin. Only by dying, and suffering, as a ransom, as an atonement, for sin. And anything else, you see, Jesus is saying, well, it might look like, the same gospel.

But in reality, no, it's not. It's just a fuzz. It's just a blur. It's men like trees walking. And ultimately, it's not from God.

It's from the devil. And so you mustn't speak it, and you must get behind me, Satan. That's what you think, the gospel is. He says that to Peter, with all the credentials, that he had.

[22 : 16] To the Peter, who had just confessed, that Jesus is the Christ, and that was Jesus' word to him. But no, you see, because even Peter, if he resists the truth, about the real meaning, and the real purpose, of the suffering, and death of Jesus, as an atonement, for sin, well, even he, must be rebuked, and silenced, by Jesus himself.

Tell no one, that message, says Jesus. Tell no one, of a Jesus, without the cross, without the centrality, and the purpose, of the cross, as a death, for sins.

Because a message, without that, however much it makes, of Jesus as Messiah, is not a message of God, it's a message, of the devil, it's of Satan.

Because it won't save anyone. It can't save anyone, because, if it doesn't have the cross, as an atonement for sin, then God's wrath, is still against sin, and sin has not been dealt with.

And if you're still blind, to that, says Jesus, you're still blind, to the real, and liberating truth, of the gospel. That through his sacrifice, for sin, our sins are actually, and forever, removed.

[23 : 31] He gave his life, as a ransom, for many. It's the first, unavoidable implication, of really seeing, who Jesus is.

It's seeing, that he is, a suffering savior, who came, that he might die, as an atonement, for sin. And Jesus, says to us, and says to us today, as much as he said, to his disciples then, if, we can't preach that, then we're still blind, and we mustn't speak.

Tell no one, unless you can tell, that true gospel. And that's why, friends, people have, found it necessary today, to take a stand, and to distance themselves, from those, even within the professing, evangelical scene, who will not proclaim, the message, that Jesus insists, that we must proclaim, about the centrality, of the cross, as a ransom, as an atonement, for sin.

Just one example, for example, is, the way that UCCF, the Universities, and Colleges, Christian Fellowship, have, have been forced, to separate, from the Spring Harvest movement, and start a new, Word Alive, and not run it, with Spring Harvest, anymore, because, they weren't willing, to have Steve Chalk, speaking at Word Alive, on the platform, when he was denying, the central doctrine, of Christ's death, as an atonement, as a substitution, for sins.

Now, some people have thought, that's very extreme, and that's wrong. I don't think you'll find, it's as extreme, as verse 33, is it? Get behind me, Satan. But that, is, the severity, with which, Jesus, treats, vagueness, and half truth, about the Gospel.

[25 : 24] According to him, no matter who you are, if that's what you're doing, you're Satan's tool. Isn't that devastating? No, if we're blind, to the central purpose, of the death of Jesus Christ, then you may be, have him as a teacher, you may have him, as an example, to follow, but he cannot be, a savior.

Because your sins, are not truly, and really dealt with. He has not actually, taken away, your sins forever. And that's the greatest, need that we have, and it's the greatest, thing that we all, can find

in the Gospel, of Jesus Christ.

There's no cross, there is no Christ, and there is no forgiveness, and therefore, there's no real hope. Now, if Jesus is, the true Messiah King, then he's a servant king, he's a savior, who suffers, that we might be forgiven.

But there's a second, unavoidable implication, of Jesus' true identity, and again, that explains, why we'll not have, a half truth, preached to the world. It's plain, in verses 34 and 35.

Jesus, not only, is a suffering savior, but he is, a sovereign savior. He calls, every subject of his, to follow him, always. You see, you may know, an awful lot about Jesus, but Jesus says, that you're still, partially blind, you're still, in a hopeless state, until you've seen, that Jesus really is, Lord of all. [26 : 53] And that is, that he calls you, to follow him, in his mission, both now, and forever. And that too, is an intrinsic, essential part, of the gospel itself.

Look at verses 34 and 35. If anyone, would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever, would save his life, will lose it.

But whoever, loses his life, for my sake, and the gospels, will save it. You see, he's saying, isn't he, that you can't be, a disciple of Jesus Christ, without walking, in the way of the cross, with him now, in this world.

You can't be, a Christian, without denying yourself, now, in this world, without losing your life, now, in this world. It just can't be, any other way, because the way, of the cross of Jesus, does fly in the face, of all this world's thinking, doesn't it?

In this world, the way on and up, is on and up, isn't it? In material terms, a better job, better house, better car, better pension, all that sort of thing. In intellectual terms too, better education, better experience, better philosophy, all of that.

[28 : 06] Even in spiritual terms, more and better awareness, and experience, and peace, and enlightenment, and all the rest of it. But Jesus says, you see, the way up, in my kingdom, is down.

It's the way of the cross. It's the way of loss. It's the way of derision, and scorn, and hatred, and flogging, and spitting. Yes, in many cases, quite literally, but at the very least, in a metaphorical way, and figuratively.

And that's part of the whole truth of the real Christian gospel, isn't it? And no, Jesus says plainly, I won't have you opening your mouth about my identity, unless you tell people the whole truth.

No cross, no Christ, for Jesus, no cross, no crown, for my disciples. And Jesus will not have the scandal of a prosperity gospel.

A gospel that uses Jesus' name, and seems to proclaim Jesus, but will have nothing of the real way of discipleship that is the way of the cross. No, you see, just as a gospel that denies the place of the cross is demonic, well, according to Jesus, so also is a gospel that denies the way of the cross as the genuine call of discipleship.

[29 : 30] And here, the prosperity gospel is all around us today, isn't it? And roaringly successful. Surprise, surprise. Yes, of course, we see it in the crassness of some of the health and prosperity teaching you get, especially in the United States, and indeed, sweeping Africa today.

But there's plenty of subtler forms all around us, aren't there? A gospel that looks and sounds like the gospel of Jesus, but the real focus, no, it's not, is it, on suffering?

It's not on self-denial. It's not on losing. It's on healing. It's on self-fulfillment. It's on finding our destiny now in this life.

But that's the opposite, isn't it, of Jesus' words. Look at verse 35 again. Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will find it.

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Jesus' focus in everything he says is not about finding fulfillment in life now, is it?

[30 : 40] That's worth nothing, he says. Nothing. His focus is on something infinitely more precious. It's on the future, isn't it? It's on the great day when Jesus returns with his holy angels to reign forever.

You see, just as a gospel without the cross of Jesus at Calvary is no gospel because it gives us no assurance of real forgiveness, so also a gospel without the cross of Jesus in our experience now is no gospel.

because it offers according to Jesus no real hope for the future, does it? And that's what really matters, is the future. You see verse 35, look at it again, it's so clear.

Jesus says, you just can't have this world's treasure and glory and values now and have his kingdom. It's either or. Either, he says, you save this life's pleasures and you lose your life, or you lose this world's prizes and you find your life.

and in verse 38, it's just the same, isn't it? Either, he says, we'll be ashamed of Jesus and his gospel now and we'll have no cross now, but we'll have no crown then in the future.

[32 : 01] Jesus will be ashamed of us on that day. Either it's that or it must be the opposite, mustn't it? For every believer who chooses the real gospel and the real way of Jesus now, for you, if you've turned your back on this world and its ways and its joys and its values and its prizes and its rewards, you have borne and are bearing the reproach of the Lord Jesus and the scorn of his cross now, then the opposite must be true of you, mustn't it?

That he will never, ever be ashamed of you when he comes, as he says, in the glory of his Father and with his holy angels. So as we close, just let's come back to that question.

Who do you say that I am? See, the answer lies not just in knowing Jesus' identity and what that says, but it's knowing what that identity means, isn't it?

You see, the evidence, the evidence for everyone who's willing to consider it is as clear as they, unless you're the most utterly biased and the most willfully ignorant. To any honest inquirer in the scriptures and in history, there's only one answer about Jesus of Nazareth.

He is the Christ. He's the Son of the Living God. But that answer, that intellectual answer alone is not enough.

[33 : 36] Just men like trees walking. No, the really crucial question that Jesus is asking every single one of us is this, what are you doing with that understanding?

You see, you show your understanding of who Jesus is by embracing with all your heart the message of the cross, the message of a Savior crucified for your sin.

And by embracing with all your life and with all your will the way of the cross, following your Master as your sovereign Lord in this life. Anything less than that, anything less, well, it isn't really a gospel at all, says Jesus.

Like trees walking. Not the things of God, says Jesus to Peter, it's the things of man, it's the things of this world, and ultimately, ultimately, alas, behind all of that, it is the things of Satan.

So let me say this to you this morning, perhaps you're just beginning to see, just beginning to see something in this Christian faith, but you're not yet clear. Don't be satisfied.

[34 : 49] Don't be satisfied with that. Don't be satisfied with seeing men as trees walking. Jesus Christ wants to finish the job properly with you. He will speak plainly to you as he spoke to his disciples.

Listen to him. Listen to him and ask him to open your eyes to the truth about the real gospel, the whole gospel of Christ crucifying.

And listen and ask him to open your ears to the true call as he asks you to take up his cross and follow him as a sovereign Lord. And if you do that, then he will make you see clearly.

That's what he came to do. That's why he came into this world. Listen. Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again and he opened his eyes and his sight was restored and he saw everything clearly.

Friends, that is what Jesus Christ came to do for you and for me. don't stop until you're there.

[36 : 02] Let's pray. Gracious God, our Father, we thank you for the truth and the clarity and the wonder of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ who came to be a servant king, to lay down his life that we might live and to be a ransom for many.

That our sins may be truly carried away, that our guilt may be expunged and that our hope might be bright and unassailable. people. And help us also to hear him as he calls us now to follow him, to give our lives to him and to walk his way now so that on the great day when he appears in the glory of the Father with all the holy angels so that on that day you will never be ashamed of us.

So help us, we pray for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.