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Sermon Summary #21

It Takes God to Know God! Mark 8:27-30; Matthew 16:13-20

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Jesus of Nazareth, and an identity crisis! . . .

Why did Jesus ask this question in v. 13? It wasn't that Jesus was insecure and needed to boost his own ego. He wasn't lacking in self-confidence and didn't need to reassure himself of his identity and calling in life. Don't ever think that in asking this question Jesus is saying something like:

“What are they saying about me? Do they like me? Are they tracking with my message? Please tell me they're saying nice things. I just don't think I could handle the rejection.”

Jesus is **not like a frightened politician**, whether the President or Senator or local mayor who first thing each morning asks his chief of staff for the latest polling date so he can check his approval ratings.

Of course, on the one hand this question makes perfectly good sense. **Crowds have responded in diverse ways.** The people he has healed or set free from demonic spirits are more open to his claims and rate his performance quite high. I suspect the people in the city where Jesus was responsible for the destruction of 2,000 pigs are going to consider him a disaster on the economy. The religious leaders are going to have a decidedly negative opinion, as Jesus is clearly responsible for their downturn in popularity and authority among the people.

So **why** does Jesus ask this question? He is looking to **tease out and bring into the open** the beliefs and faith of his disciples. He wants to **provoke an affirmation of faith** that he can use to teach his disciples even more about his identity, his work, and his determination to build the church, the body of Christ.

The answer they give is found in v. 14 . . . The wide array of public opinion is fascinating! **(1) John the Baptist . . . (2) Elijah** (Mal. 4:5-6) . . . **(3)** Some wonder why Jesus would have evoked memories of **Jeremiah . . . (4) one of the other prophets . . .** But note that *evidently no group* was willingly and openly speaking of Jesus as *Messiah*.

Jesus responds in v. 15 “But who do YOU say that I am?” **“You” is both emphatic and plural.** Peter's response, therefore, is on behalf of all 12. He is the spokesman, representing the group.

Other questions in life are important and must be answered: “What is your opinion on abortion?” “For whom are you going to vote in the Oklahoma governor's race?” “Do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?” “Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?”

But this question that Jesus asked is altogether unique and paramount in importance. Unlike all other questions, the answer you give determines your eternal destiny. “Every soul, as it were, will be pinned against the wall of eternity and forced to answer that question.” **You, personally, must answer it.** Jesus isn't asking Peter, nor is he asking you and me, “Tell me who your mom and dad think I am,” or “Who does your pastor say I am?” Rather, he asks each of us: “Who do **you** say I am?”

Peter's response is quick and emphatic and probably loud: “You are the **Christ**, the **Son** of the Living God!”

You are the Christ, the Messiah, the long-awaited and anointed one who has been sent and set apart and endowed with power to fulfill everything the OT promised. “Christ” is not Jesus' last name! “Christ” is a title. The word “Christ” = anointed one, that person on whom oil was poured as a way of indicating he had been consecrated and set apart by God for a special purpose. In the OT only prophets, priests (Exod. 29:7, 21), and kings (1 Sam. 10:1,6) were anointed in this way. In Jesus all three converge!

You are the Son of the Living God, **not by physical reproduction but by spiritual representation**: you are the incarnation and express image of God the Father. In you we see and find Him.

And how did Peter come by this insight? Jesus tells us precisely the source and cause of Peter's confession . . . Read v. 17 . . .

Negatively: "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you" (v. 17a) / **Positively**: my heavenly Father has "revealed" this to you. The words "flesh and blood" are used 5x in the NT, once here in Matthew 16 and the other four in 1 Cor. 15:50; Gal. 1:15-17; Eph. 6:12; and Heb. 2:14. In each of these texts "flesh and blood" simply means ordinary human nature. By "flesh and blood" Jesus means human nature apart from divine enablement; mere mortal prowess; who and what we are as creatures in all our limitations; human beings without the supernatural presence of God.

Flesh and blood, just plain old human beings in the strength and ingenuity of their human nature, have come up with some pretty stunning and breathtaking ideas . . . So why can't "flesh and blood", on its own, drawing from its own insight and ingenuity, figure out who Jesus is? And of what significance is the fact that it takes God the Father to make known the identity of God the Son?

See 1 Cor. 2:14. Apart from the Spirit of God, what God has done in and through Jesus strikes us as absurd and foolish and outlandishly ridiculous. Apart from the work of God in our hearts and minds we regard the incarnation and sinless life and atoning death and bodily resurrection and second coming of Jesus Christ as silly. People to whom God has not yet revealed his Son scoff and bristle and chafe at the suggestion that they are under a divine curse and subject to God's wrath; they regard it as excessively judgmental to suggest that all people are spiritually and morally unclean and need the cleansing power of God's grace; they regard it as arrogant and intolerant that we would insist that there is one and only one way by which a man or woman can be reconciled to the Creator: through faith alone in Christ alone!

The Bible calls this reaction of the unbelieving heart "blindness". So when you ask, "Why can't flesh and blood see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," the answer is given by Jesus himself in John 3:19 - "Light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." And so when Peter exploded in this glorious affirmation about who Jesus is, he didn't get there by his own efforts or his own education or by his own exploration of facts and his own evaluation between competing religious claims. Something more than what human beings are and what human nature can produce is needed to account for why Peter or any human being suddenly sees and hears and feels about Jesus what before they despised.

We must never forget that our *knowledge of God is a gift, not a given*. What I mean by this is that we all too often presume that what we know of God is either something we gained by self-exertion, dedication, and study, or it is something we deserve, perhaps something that is our by right or entitlement. We should never treat the knowledge of God as a given. It is something He gives, and He does not give it universally. This is nowhere better seen in our Lord's words in *Matthew 11:25-30* . . .

The "things" which the Father has "hidden" from some and "revealed" to others: the significance of Jesus' miracles (vv. 20-24), the content of his teaching, **who Jesus is**, and especially the knowledge of the Father himself (v. 27).

<p>It is an important theological lesson for us to note that our Lord's emphasis in vv. 25-27 on the sovereign initiative of God in both the giving and hiding of revelation does not eliminate or undermine the moral responsibility of people. Indeed, the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum will be held to a higher standard of accountability precisely because they had been given so much but had responded so little. And following this word concerning God's sovereignty in vv. 25-27 there comes an appeal for faith in vv. 28-30.</p>
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The "wise and intelligent" are those who, if they had lived up to their reputation for being so learned, should have been the first to acknowledge who Jesus was. The "wise and intelligent" are the self-reliant who are convinced they have no need of divine wisdom. **But Jesus isn't excluding smart people from the kingdom. It isn't intellectual power he condemns but intellectual pride**. Jesus is referring to the worldly wise, those who pride themselves in their intellectual and secular sophistication, who regard belief and trust in Jesus as beneath their dignity. "Infants" or "babes" on the other hand are those who humbly acknowledge their need for divine mercy. Simply put, the

knowledge of God isn't the product of natural law or human logic or chance occurrence. **Spiritual understanding doesn't depend on human achievement or IQ or social status or political influence or party affiliation or age or gender or race or physical size or beauty. Rather, it is the fruit of divine illumination.**

Simply put: *It takes God to know God!*

Reflect on how and when God first "revealed" his Son to you . . .

So let me ask you again, today: Test yourself. Search your soul. Ask the tough and penetrating question that Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do **YOU** say that Jesus is?"

So, precisely how does God reveal the identity of his Son to us? How does he awaken in us not only a knowledge of who Jesus is but a love for him, an affection for him, a desire for him, a longing for him, a passion to honor and exalt him and to make his fame known? How does God do it? **Matthew 11:2-6 . . .**

Says Jesus: "Look at me! Listen to what I say! Watch what I do! Think about the claims I'm making for myself!" God in sovereign grace reveals Jesus to people who are looking at Jesus, reading about Jesus, listening to Jesus, thinking about Jesus. It isn't the looking or reading or listening or thinking that ultimately brings revelation. These are simply the means that God uses to open our spiritual eyes and spiritual ears that we might behold his glory. God loves to open the eyes of the blind when they are looking at his SON!

The apostle Paul said, "It is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Can you now see why we are spending so much time in the gospel of Mark and occasionally in Matthew? Can you now see the necessity, the urgency, of each week asking the same question over and over again: Who is Jesus? Do you understand why I labor so passionately to explain his words and to talk about his healings and to explore his personality and to observe how he responds to religious hypocrites and how tenderly he deals with the brokenhearted? It is because it is in gazing on Jesus, thinking about what the Scriptures reveal about Jesus, that God through his Spirit reveals the identity of Jesus and awakens our hearts to love and adore Jesus whereas before he was little more than a historical curiosity, a religious relic from a distant and irrelevant past.

Consider again . . .

- His authority over demons (Mark 1)
- His compassion for a man with leprosy (Mark 1)
- His forgiving the sins of a paralytic whose crippled legs he heals (Mark 2)
- His love for Matthew, a Roman collaborator and thief (Mark 2)
- His power over nature in stilling a storm and reproducing a handful of loaves and fish to feed thousands (Mark 5)
- His kindness toward a woman whose bleeding body rendered her unfit for society and a reject among her people (Mark 5)
- And most of all, his sacrificial love and willingness to endure hell on a cross for sinners like you and me.

Look at Jesus!

And what is the verdict of Jesus on Peter for being a recipient of this revelation from the Father?

"Blessed!"

This is no less true of each of us here today to whom the Father has chosen to make known the Son.

Our response today:

(1) Speak often of Jesus when you are with those who don't know him and can't see him for who he is. Whatever books you give them to read or cd's you ask them to listen to, above all direct them to Jesus in the gospel records of his life.

(2) Take time to pray for lost family members, friends, relatives, co-workers, that the Father would be pleased to make known the Son to them.

(3) Never let the fact that God is sovereign in bestowing saving grace and sovereign in revealing who Jesus is undermine or diminish your zeal to make Jesus known to others. See Mt. 11 . . .

(4) Be humble! Read 1 Cor. 4:7 . . . Don't boast! Read Eph. 2:8-10 . . .

(5) Rejoice and celebrate and give thanks as you think and meditate on the indescribably glorious truth that God has revealed his Son to you! Let your trust in God grow into a deeper affection and zeal because of his tremendous love to you described in this passage.

(6) Be encouraged in knowing that no matter how difficult life is right now, no matter how frustrating people are, no matter how little money there is in the bank, God has chosen to reveal his Son to you and to bring you into the joy of a saving relationship with him!