

9. Who do you say that Jesus is?

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Depend on whom you ask about the identity of Jesus Christ, you can get a wide spectrum of answers:

"Jesus was just a good teacher." - People who have no idea what they are talking about.

"Jesus is not God. Before he lived on earth, he was Michael, the archangel." - Jehovah's Witness

"Jesus is a separate god from the Father (Elohim). He was created as a spirit child by the Father and Mother in heaven - Mormonism

"Jesus was not the Christ, but a man who displayed the Christ idea." - Christian Science

"Jesus is not the one true God. He is not a savior, but a spiritual model, and guru, and is now an "ascended master." - New Age

"Jesus is one of the most respected of over 124,000 prophets sent by Allah. Jesus was sinless, born of a virgin, and a great miracle worker, but not the Son of God. Jesus is not God. - Islam

"Jesus is God. But His way is not the only way to get to heaven. Just being a good person will do." - Another group of people who don't know the truth.

So, who do you say that Jesus is in your heart? Is He the Savior of this fallen world and God of this universe and He has the only way to get to heaven? Or do you agree with the comments from these group of false religions?

Depend on how you believe your eternal future will be changed radically. To know more about what the Bible says about Jesus, we will start from Mark 7:31.

A. THE HEALING OF A DEAF AND MUTE MAN

Mark 7:31-37 Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee. 32 Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. 33 And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. 34 Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35 Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. 36 Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it. 37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

The region of Decapolis which means "ten cities" was located in Gentile territory: Scythopolis, Geras, Dion, Hippos, Gadara, Pella, Rephana, Philadelphia, Damascus, Canatha

Jesus used many different ways of healing. He healed with a word, healed without a word, healed in response to one's faith, healed in response to the faith of another, healed those who asked, and He healed those He approached. Jesus didn't want to create a magic ritual that we would try to imitate and end up in a wrong way. It should never be about a formula. It should be about Jesus and relying on Him. He is God and He does whatever He wants, in whatever way He chooses.

To this deaf and mute man, Jesus was a heaven-sent healer.

B. FEEDING THE FOUR THOUSAND

Mark 8:1-9 In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, 2 "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. 3 And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar." 4 Then His disciples answered Him, "How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?" 5 He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven." 6 So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before the multitude. 7 They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before them. 8 So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. 9 Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away,

Those who try to find contradictions in the Bible often confuse this miracle with the feeding of the 5,000 which is recorded in all four Gospels. Only Matthew and Mark record this event, and it is not difficult to distinguish it from the other miracle of the multiplying of bread and fish.

The first miracle

Galilee, near Bethsaida

For Jews

Five loaves and two fish

The 5,000 had been with Him one day

12 baskets of fragments were left over

The second miracle

Decapolis

For Gentiles

Seven loaves and a few fish.

The 4,000 had been with Him three days.

7 large baskets after the 4,000 were fed.

But this confusion will be explained by Jesus Himself in v16-21 of this chapter.

It's easy for us to criticize – or even mock – the disciples for their response.

However, when we face bills stacking up against us and there is very little money to pay them, it is not that difficult for us, all of sudden, to forget our God's faithfulness in the past and start to worry for future.

To these four thousand people, Jesus was a teacher who spoke the truth and filled their hungry stomachs.

C. SHOW ME A SIGN, JESUS.

Mark 8:10-12 immediately got into the boat with His disciples, and came to the region of Dalmanutha. 11 Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him. 12 But He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation."

Jesus and the disciples crossed to the western side of the Sea of Galilee where they were met by the Pharisees who were still angry at Him because of His earlier indictment of their hypocrisy. This time they tempted Him to prove His divine authority by giving them a sign from heaven. They did not want an earthly miracle, such as the healing of a sick person. They wanted Him to do something spectacular, like bring fire from heaven or bread from heaven. This would prove He was indeed sent from God in their idea.

The Pharisees' desire for a sign from heaven was but another evidence of their unbelief, because true faith does not ask for signs. Miracles and signs are the results of God's responses to our faith in Him. True faith takes God at His Word and is satisfied with the inward witness of the Spirit.

Mark 16:17a And these signs will follow those who believe

When it comes to seeing miracles and signs from heaven, the people who left Egypt to go into the Promised Land had them every day. They had the bread from heaven everyday; they had a pillar of fire at night, a pillar of cloud for shade during the hot days in the wilderness. If that was not enough God brought them quails to eat, fresh water from the Rock that followed them in the desert. Their sandals and cloths never had worn out. Yet because of their unbelief in God, all two million people exception of two godly men, every single one of them died in the wilderness. So seeing miracles doesn't guarantee believing in God.

Yes, we are all excited about what God can do, especially miracles. Does God still do miracles? Of course, He still does. The biggest miracle we see is a lost soul coming to Jesus Christ and be saved by His grace. That happens in our church often.

To these Pharisees, Jesus was nothing but a trouble maker and He needed to be eliminated for their convenience.

D. A WARNING OF THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES AND HEROD

Mark 8:13-21 And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. 14 Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. 15 Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." 16 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have no bread." 17 But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? 18 Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." 20 "Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?" And they said, "Seven." 21 So He said to them, "How is it you do not understand?"

The leaven isn't merely yeast. This is how bread was commonly leavened in the ancient world, and a little pinch of dough from the old lump could make a whole new lump of dough rise and "puff up." So, the work of leaven was considered an illustration of the work of sin and false doctrines.

We can never be too careful about detecting and avoiding false doctrines. Only a small deviation from the Word may get into an individual or a church, but before long it will grow and infect everyone.

Satan is no dummy. He doesn't present flat out lies to us. He just mixes a little bit of lies with a bunch of truth. A good example of that in recent days is 'Seeker-sensitive churches'. It is not what they teach, it is what they don't teach to make their congregation feel good about themselves.

E. HEALING A BLIND MAN

Mark 8:22-26 Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. 23 So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. 24 And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking." 25 Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly. 26 Then He sent him away to his house, saying, "Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town."

Jesus had many unique ways to heal people as we have learned. Can you imagine this blind man hearing Jesus clearing His throat and spit at his eyes. OK, enough said about that. Let's move on.

F. WHO DO YOU THAT I AM?

Mark 8:27-31 Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?" 28 So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." 29 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." 30 Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him. 31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Jesus selected Caesarea Philippi, a town about twenty-five miles north of Bethsaida, sitting at the foot of beautiful Mt. Hermon. The town was named after Augustus Caesar and Herod Philip, and it contained a marble temple dedicated to Augustus. It was a place dedicated to the glory of Rome, and that glory is now gone, but the glory of Jesus Christ remains and will go on eternally.

It was fine for the disciples to know what others thought about Jesus. But Jesus had to ask them, what they believed about Jesus.

Jesus was much more than John the Baptist, or Elijah, or a prophet. He was more than a national reformer, more than a miracle worker. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. The word Christ means "the Anointed One, the promised Messiah." It is acknowledging that Jesus is God.

Our confession concerning Jesus Christ is a matter of life or death. The citizens of Caesarea Philippi would say, "Caesar is lord!" at their heathen temple. That confession might identify them as loyal Roman citizens, but it could never save them from their sins and from eternal hell. The only confession that saves us is "Jesus is Lord!" when that confession comes from a heart that truly believes in Him.

Peter's confession was bold and uncompromising, just as ours should be: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!"

G. REBUKING GOD? INSANE OR PURE STUPIDITY?

Mark 8:32-33 He spoke this word openly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. 33 But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

It is easy for us to laugh at Peter's foot-in-mouth disease. But let's not. The disciples were still ignorant of the true relationship between the cross and the crown. They were following Satan's way which is glory without suffering instead of God's way that is suffering transformed into glory.

Peter's protest was born out of his ignorance of God's will and his deep love for his Lord. One minute Peter was a "rock," and the next minute he was a stumbling block.

H. THREE STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Mark 8:34-38 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37 Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Jesus laid down three conditions for true discipleship:

- 1) We must surrender ourselves completely to Him**
- 2) We must identify with Him in suffering and death**
- 3) We must follow Him obediently, wherever He leads.**

Denying self is not the same as self-denial of Buddhism. But we deny self when we surrender ourselves to Christ and determine to obey His will. This once-for-all dedication is followed by a daily "dying to self" as we take up the cross and follow Him. From the human point of view, we are losing ourselves, but from the divine perspective, we are finding ourselves in Christ. When we live for Christ, we become more like Him, and this brings out our own unique individuality.

Is there any reward for the person who is a true disciple? Yes, there is: he becomes more like Jesus Christ. Satan promises you glory now on this earth, but in the end, you receive suffering throughout eternity. God promises us suffering, but in the end, that suffering is transformed into glory. If we acknowledge Christ and live for Him, He will one day acknowledge us and share His glory with us.

I. CHALLENGE

Who is Jesus to you?

Is He Christ the Messiah to you? Then do you live for Him and for the sake of Gospel? If you do, may the Lord bless you and strengthen your daily walk with Him.

If not, what is the reason, you are holding yourself back from what God has stored for you? Because of your pride or what other people might think? Turn your heart to Jesus today.

If Jesus is not your Messiah and Lord and Savior, and you think that you don't have to be saved to get to heaven, you are kidding yourself. You just have heard that what needs to be done to become a Christian. Once you surrender your life to Him, He will fulfill your heart with His purpose for you and give you peace, hope, joy, abundance of love and eternal life. Try to top that.

If you choose not to follow Jesus because of your hardened heart, I feel sorry for you. May the Lord never give you rest until you come to Him where you can find a true rest and peace.