

## **“Is the right answer enough?” Mark 8:27-38**

**And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. 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. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “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 gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”**

Today we have for our meditations one of these conversations which challenge us to the very heart. Jesus asks this very simple question. “What do people say that I am?” What about today?

What do people today say about Jesus? That He was a historical figure, no one can really doubt that, an influential teacher, a moral example, a great personality. But what do you say, who is this Jesus?

Obviously, we just heard the answer that Peter provided. That Jesus is the Christ. Okay. But is that enough to know the right answer? And what does this mean that Jesus is the Christ?

We can see from how things developed between Jesus and His disciples, and especially between Jesus and Peter, that even the disciples had very different ideas about what it means that Jesus is the Christ.

The first disciples had come from among the Israelites. They were the people to whom God had revealed His plan of salvation. They were the people to whom the covenants, the law, the worship, the promises had been given.

They knew that in the fullness of time God will send us the Saviour, His Anointed One, that is, – the Christ, to fulfil the promise that was given to Adam and Eve, and then repeated to Abraham and Moses and David and Isaiah and many others.

They knew about the Christ, but even they had got it wrong. Most of them were waiting for someone who would deliver them from their enemies and would give them freedom and good life.

Deliver from enemies and give freedom. Sounds about right... Except they got the enemies part wrong. They thought that the Christ will deliver them from their earthly enemies, from their Roman oppressors.

Jesus had indeed come to deliver them from enemies and to give them true freedom. And not only them, but every single human being born under the Sun, all of us including. But not from those enemies, whom we often perceive as our enemies, but from the ultimate enemies against whom we stand no chance.

That is, from death, sin, devil and hell. The disciples had, we could say, very limited expectations. Small hopes. Tiny ambitions. Just kick out those Romans and give us to sit at your right and at your left when you assume the power.

They couldn't even comprehend the greatness of Jesus' mission and the greatness of His gift to humanity. To be delivered from death and sin and hell and to be reunited with the Triune God.

And we as Christians often fail as well. What do we hope to receive from Jesus? Even many who identify themselves as Christians settle for ideas like ... He teaches us what is right and what is wrong.

He gives us good example how to love others. If we behave well, He will bless us and will give us good life. Maybe a better job, a larger house, maybe a better health. Maybe He will even deliver us from our enemies, that is, our annoying relatives or neighbours. Too small...

Sure, God the Father provides for us our daily bread, but what Jesus has in mind for you, what He has prepared for those who love Him is something that as Paul wrote "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, not the heart of man imagined..." something much, much greater.

To Paul the apostle a glimpse of what is to come was revealed. He couldn't put it in words. But he could say that the suffering of this age [and he knew about sufferings more that all of us together] are not even worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to those who love Jesus.

To John the apostle the vision was given what our life will be like when Jesus returns in His glory. Thus John tells us about the New Heavens and the New Earth, where Jesus Christ, the Son of God will dwell among us.

Where there will be no more pain, nor suffering, nor death... but pure joy and blessedness, for Jesus Himself will dwell among us and we will see Him as He is. If you ever wonder what that place and that life may look like, remember, however good your imagination, you will be so surprised when you get there.

For it is the Almighty God preparing that place for you. The One, who was ready to suffer death on the cross to have you with Him. He is creating this New Earth and the New Holy City for you and for all His beloved. The fact that there

will be no more death alone blows our minds. Let's just make sure we get there with God's help and see it for ourselves.

The disciples failed to comprehend the greatness of Jesus. And we often do too. But they also failed to understand how Jesus will accomplish His rescue mission. We read that once they had identified who Jesus was, He began to explain the details of His mission.

“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.” What do you mean, Jesus? You have come to bring us victory!

Now you are saying that you will be defeated and killed? How can one see suffering and death as victory, as triumph? Peter couldn't, the disciples couldn't, and we often struggle as well.

Peter was so shocked that He even rebuked Jesus. And then Jesus rebuked Peter back: “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

Even after His confession that Jesus is the Christ, Peter simply couldn't comprehend who Jesus truly was and what He was about to do. The Eternal Son of God, who has life in Himself, who is the very source of true life, had taken on human flesh, and was about to give up His life in exchange to ours.

We don't have life in us. We keep receiving it. And because of our sinfulness, at the end death swallows us, and we stand no chance against it. But Jesus has true life in Him, and even if He allowed to be murdered on the cross, death stood no change against Him.

The tables were turned, the Lord of Life Himself swallowed death and rouse again victorious. And now, as you receive the Spirit of Jesus, you are united with Him. And death will have no power to hold you. As Jesus was raised in the power of the Holy Spirit, in new resurrected body, so will be you, and all God's chosen people.

This is how Jesus did it. He didn't fight against people, as we are simply captives of sin. He faced death itself, our ultimate enemy, and defeated it and gave us ultimate freedom, – freedom from the fear of death. Now for us the death of this mortal body is simply the beginning of our life with our good Lord, which will be infinitely better.

But what about now? What does Jesus expect from us in this life? This is where it gets hard. We truly love ourselves. We love to care for ourselves. This is, why what Jesus commands us at first sounds impossible. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [...]

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Can you feel the gravity of Jesus’ demands? It is not enough just to know that Jesus is the Christ. This is not about being nice and moral, even if that’s how many have degraded Christianity. Everyone can do that.

Jesus demands us to change our ultimate allegiance. He demands us to change our hearts, our priorities and our entire lives. He commands us to deny ourselves. To die to our old self, and to raise to live for Jesus.

Meaning, to put Him in the center of our lives. How? In theory it is rather simple. Whatever you do you think not about what you would want or prefer, but how to be faithful to Jesus, how to please Him.

And how can we please Him? We don’t need to guess or come up with our strange ideas. The Bible describes what Christian life is to be like, it reveals how we are to walk so that we could indeed be the light to the world.

How we are to love all people. How we are to be chaste in our lives. How we are to treat our spouses, with love and respect. How we are to treat our children, leading them to Jesus. How we are to treat our enemies, praying for them.

How we are to use all the material blessings that God has given to us. As His and not as ours. How are we to live as the body of Christ, the Church, listening to the Word, cherishing the truth and rejecting all false teachings, daily growing in our understanding, supporting one another, praying for one another.

How we are to witness about Jesus to all people in our lives. How we are to lead our whole life with Jesus in its center, always trying to please Him in all that we think and say and do. This really sounds hard... like taking our cross.

For we don’t want to deny ourselves, we want to do things our way. Believe our way, worship our way, live our way. We don’t want to put Jesus first, and even less we want to suffer any inconveniences because of Jesus.

We want to fit in. We want to be accepted by this, as Jesus says – “adulterous and sinful generation”. To believe what the world believes, to speak as everyone else and to act as everyone else.

We don’t want to be embarrassed for being too Christian, too religious. We don’t want people to turn away from us because we are different and think and act differently, as Christians. And so consciously or not, we often do deny Jesus and show that we are ashamed of Him and His words.

We fear more what people will think, not how to remain faithful to Jesus. We all fail. We all need God’s help. This is, why the Triune God invites us every week to come to Him, so that He can encourage us. So that He can assure you of His love and to fill you with His Spirit.

He knows we can't be Christians on our own. Only when we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Only when we hear again and again, that Jesus wasn't ashamed of us and didn't deny us even when facing death.

That He was ridiculed, spit on and crucified naked. That He endured all of this because of His love for you. When we are reminded of His affection, when we experience His presence, we are changed.

Then we want to respond to Jesus' love and follow Him, whatever the cost. Then Jesus' love washes away every fear and we are enabled to rejoice even when we suffer for His name's sake.

For we also know, that He is waiting for us, and that He has already prepared for us this wonderful place, that no human heart can even imagine. I pray that we can make it there together.

With countless other brothers and sisters. To be reunited with our loved ones, and to experience that, indeed, our crosses in this life are not even worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed. Amen.