

Introduction

In 1994 I played a Nike Tour golf tournament in Denver. Because of all the publicity we had been receiving from the TV, newspaper, and magazine specials on our family, the Denver Post jumped on the bandwagon and featured a story about me on the front page of the Sports Section. While some of the features on our family that year had included segments about our family devotions and teaching times, the Denver Post did a horrible thing. The story stated that I was a cult leader on the Nike Tour.

I am not alone. There are many who are accusing Amy Coney Barrett of being part of a cult. She is part of a charismatic Catholic group, which is considered outside of the Catholic norm.

“Since President Trump nominated Judge Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, her membership in the charismatic group People of Praise has drawn much scrutiny, with some comparing it to a cult.”¹

How do you define a cult? Webster’s Dictionary defines a cult as “a religion regarded as unorthodox or spurious (false or illegitimate).” In Christendom, we define a cult as those who do not believe that Jesus is God. The Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, and the Way are all cults. They believe in Jesus, but they do not accept that He is God. As Christians, we believe in the trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In our definition, I am not a cult leader. The question of what we believe about Jesus is of extreme importance.

In our passage today, Jesus asks two questions. The first question is a lead-in to the second question. I believe this is one of the most important questions that all of us must answer. The answer to that question has eternal consequences. The first question is “who do people say I am?” The second question is really the critical one, “who do you say I am?”

37 (Mark 8:27-9:1) Who Do You Say I Am?

1. John the Baptist (Mark 8:27-28)
2. Elijah (Mark 8:28)
3. One of the Prophets (Mark 8:28)
4. You Are the Christ (Mark 29-30)

(Mark 8:27-30) “Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, “Who do people say that I am?” {28} They told Him, saying, “John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.” {29} And He *continued* by questioning them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.” {30} And He warned them to tell no one about Him.”

1. John the Baptist (Mark 8:27-28)

Our passage begins with Jesus and His disciples going to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. It is located about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida is on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee, so Jesus and His disciples had a long day’s journey. Caesarea Philippi is located at the southwestern base of Mount Hermon and there was a famous spring that flowed out of a cave

¹ Nicholas Rowan, Washington Examiner, “Four myths about the People of Praise, explained,” 30 Sep. 2020

and into the Jordan River. The site of the spring was the center of pagan worship. The primary god that was worshiped was Pan. Pan was a Greek mythological god who was half-man and half-goat. Often Pan is depicted playing a flute. The area was also known as Paneas or Caesarea Paneas, because of its association with Pan.²

(Mark 8:27) “Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi...”

Caesarea Philippi is the Sodom and Gomorrah of that time. There was lots of sexual immorality and bestiality. There was every kind of idolatry and pagan worship. There were lots of sacrifices being offered up by this cave and spring. Some of called it the “Gates of Hell.” It was the darkest of places, and it is interesting that we have two very important events that happen in this location. In our text today, Peter gets the revelation of who Christ is. The second event is in Mark 9, where Jesus and the disciples go up a high mountain, Mount Hermon, and Jesus was transfigured before them. A cloud formed and overshadowed them, and out of the cloud came a voice saying, “This is My beloved Son, listen to Him.” God reveals Himself in the very darkest of places. John MacArthur said that this passage is the high point of the entire Gospel of Mark. Everything prior leads up to it; everything after flows from it. This is the moment in time when the disciples settle the matter of the person of Jesus.”

While Jesus and His disciples are walking to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus questioned His disciples saying to them, “Who do people say that I am?” Jesus starts with other people, but He will bring the conversation closer to home in just a minute. The disciples’ first answer was John the Baptist. Then, they said that others say that Jesus is Elijah, while still others say that He was one of the prophets.

(Mark 8:27-28) “Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, “Who do people say that I am?” {28} They told Him, saying, “John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.”

This is not the first conversation about this. In Mark 6, when King Herod heard of all that Jesus was doing, people were saying that John the Baptist had risen from the dead and that is why the miraculous powers are at work in Jesus. Others were saying that Jesus is Elijah. Still others said He is like one of the prophets of old. Mark wrote, “But when Herod heard of it, he kept saying, ‘John, whom I beheaded, has risen!’” So, the answers that the disciples gave to Jesus were common thoughts and beliefs of people.

(Mark 6:14-16) “And King Herod heard *of it*, for His name had become well known; and *people* were saying, “John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him.” {15} But others were saying, “He is Elijah.” And others were saying, “*He is* a prophet, like one of the prophets *of old.*” {16} But when Herod heard *of it*, he kept saying, “John, whom I beheaded, has risen!”

We know that John the Baptist was six months older in earthly terms than Jesus. I use the phrase, earthly terms, because Jesus was in the beginning and all things that came into being, came into being through Jesus. (John 1:1-3) Jesus is eternal and has always existed. But, Jesus humbled Himself and took the form of man and came to earth to redeem us from our sins. So, as a man on

² www.wikipedia.com, www.bibleplaces.com

earth, He was born six months after John the Baptist. John was the one that baptized Jesus. Let's pick up the account in John 1:29-34, where John speaks of this. He said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John knew why Jesus had come. Then, John said that Jesus had a higher rank, "for He existed before me." John knew that his cousin was six months younger as a man, but he also knew that Jesus had always existed.

(John 1:29-30) "The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! {30} This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'"

John also said that God revealed to him that the one that he saw the Spirit of God descending upon and remaining is the Messiah. Then John testified, "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

(John 1:31-34) "I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." {32} John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. {33} "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' {34} "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

When some people make statements about Jesus, they do not consider the historical records. The records are very clear about Jesus' birth, His parents, His earthly ministry and attesting miracles, His death, and His resurrection. Herod and many others disregarded historical evidence of who Jesus is.

2. **Elijah** (Mark 8:28)

Some people regarded Jesus as Elijah. This was particularly true with those who were knowledgeable about prophecy and the coming of the Messiah.

(Mark 8:28) "They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others *say* Elijah; but others, one of the prophets."

When Jesus was transfigured in Mark 9 and Matthew 17, the disciples saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. When they were coming down the disciples asked Jesus why the scribes say that Elijah must come first.

(Matt 17:9-13) "As they were coming down from the mountain...His disciples asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" {11} And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; {12} but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." {13} Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist."

This is based on the prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6 where God promised to send Elijah before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

(Mal 4:5-6) “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. {6} He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

Then Jesus told them that that Elijah has already come, and they understood that He was referring to John the Baptist. In Matthew 11:13-14, Jesus made it very clear to them that John was Elijah. Elijah was not reincarnated. This was the spirit of Elijah resting upon John the Baptist. So, the religious leaders and many people were looking for Elijah to come, and they just did not recognize that John was Elijah.

(Matt 11:13-14) “For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. {14} And if you are willing to accept *it*, John himself is Elijah who was to come.”

3. **One of the Prophets** (Mark 8:28)

Some people said that Jesus was one of the prophets. Jesus was performing miracles and Elijah and Elisha had performed miracles. Moses was regarded as a prophet and he did miracles. If someone believed that Jesus was a good and righteous man, and was performing these miracles, then the choice would be either the Messiah or another one of the prophets.

However, none of the prophets claimed to be the Messiah. None of the prophets were without sin. None of the prophets fulfilled the hundreds of Messianic prophecies. The Messiah was not one of the prophets. The Messiah was Immanuel, or God in the flesh. The Messiah was the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace. That is not one of the prophets, but God Himself. Many of the false religions believe that Jesus was one of the prophets. The Muslims believe that Jesus was one of the prophets. But, they do not believe that He was the Messiah.

One day I was in the O-6 pod at the Cobb County Adult Detention Center, where I was a prison chaplain. I was conducting a small group Bible study and I was talking about John 14:6, where Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” I said to that group that Jesus was the only way to be saved. I said that Mohammed cannot save you. Buddha cannot save you. I also quoted Acts 4:12, where Peter preached that “there is salvation in no one else.” There was a tall, muscular man named Richard, and he interrupted me. Up until that time he was okay with everything that I said about Jesus, but when I said that Islam was not a viable way to be saved, he could not accept that. He believed, as many Muslims do, that Jesus was a prophet, but they don’t believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

(John 14:6) “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

(Acts 4:12) “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

There are many people who believe that there are many ways to heaven. In fact, according to a survey conducted by Baylor University, 69% of churchgoers believe that everyone will go to

heaven, no matter what you believe.³ In 2014, the Pew Research Center, conducted a U.S. Religious Landscape Study. They found that 65% of all “Christians” believe there are multiple paths to Heaven.⁴ These are sobering statistics.

4. **You Are the Christ** (Mark 29-30)

Jesus did not stop His questioning; He brought the question home. He asked the disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” Ultimately, this is the question that everyone of us must answer. There is no other way to heaven. There is salvation in no one else. Unless someone believes that Jesus is the Messiah, they cannot be born again and be saved. Peter answered Jesus and said, “You are the Christ.” Christ means Anointed One. It comes from the Greek word, *chrío*, which means to anoint. The Hebrew word for anointed one is *Mashiach* (Strong’s H4899). The root word is *mashach*, which means to smear, rub, or anoint. The Messiah literally means the Anointed One, in Greek and in Hebrew. We must believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

(Mark 8:29-30) “And He *continued* by questioning them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.” {30} And He warned them to tell no one about Him.”

In the parallel account in Matthew 16, we find that Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” We also see Jesus’ response, “Blessed are you Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Then, Jesus told him that upon this rock He would build His church and the gates of hell would not overpower it. Some churches have interpreted this incorrectly. The Catholics use this to say that Peter was the first pope and that the church going to be built on Peter. Some other groups say that this refers to prophecy, and that God was going to build His church on prophecy. While prophecy is important, it is not the rock that the church is built on. Jesus is the rock. Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone. Jesus is the rock that many stumble over. The church is built on Christ alone.

(Matt 16:15-18) “He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” {16} Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” {17} And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. {18} “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

Paul made it very clear in 1 Corinthians 3:10-11. He said that he was a wise master builder and laid a foundation. Another person was building on that foundation, and he was referring to Apollos, who came and led the church after Paul had planted it. He said that each man must be careful how he builds on it, for no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the foundation that we build on. He is the rock that the church is built on.

(1 Cor 3:10-11) “According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how

³ Baylor Religion Survey, Baylor University, 2011, <https://www.rotw.com/get-facts/69-churchgoers-believe-everyone-will-go-heaven-0>

⁴ Pew Research Center, U.S. Religious Landscape Study, 2014, <https://www.rotw.com/get-facts/65-all-%E2%80%9Cchristians%E2%80%9D-believe-there-are-multiple-paths-heaven>

he builds on it. {11} For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

In the preaching class that just finished up, we have been going through 1 Peter. In chapter 2, Peter wrote that we are living stones and are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood. Then, he quotes Isaiah 28:16, “Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone, and he who believe in Him will not be disappointed.” Christ is the precious cornerstone, the rock that the church, the spiritual house or temple is being built upon. Peter fully understands this, because God gave him that revelation about this in our text today.

(1 Pet 2:4-6) “And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, {5} you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. {6} For *this* is contained in Scripture: “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”

Peter goes on to talk about the choice that everyone must make. He said for those who disbelieve, the stone is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. They stumble because they are disobedient to the word and they are appointed to doom. The word believe is *pisteuo*, which means to believe, trust, be convinced of, or to have faith. (Strong’s G4100, root word is *peitho*, Strong’s G3982) The word, disbelieve is the same word with a negative prefix. So, disbelieve is really a lack of belief, trust, or faith that Jesus is the Messiah. The revelation and understanding that Jesus is the rock, the cornerstone, and that we must believe in Him is an essential part of being a Christian.

(1 Pet 2:7-8) “This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone,’ {8} and, ‘A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense’, for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed.”

Peter says that they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, the gospel message. That word also comes from the same root word and is just a different form of the word. That is significant because it is not enough to believe that Jesus is the rock; we must act on that belief. We must become obedient to the gospel message. So, believing is an essential part, and placing our trust in Christ is another important part of the gospel.

James speaks about this. He said, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.” Demons are fallen angels, and the angels were created by God. They know who God is. They know that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, they refused to subject themselves to the rule and reign of Christ. They shudder because when you reject Christ, you are appointed to doom.

(James 2:19) “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.”

The Apostle Paul speaks of this in Romans 10. He said that if you “confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved.” Notice that we must believe in our hearts. We must have the revelation that Peter had, that Jesus

Christ is the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Son of God, and that He was raised from the dead. But, secondly, we must confess Jesus as Lord. Lord means Master. We have to submit our lives to the rule and reign of Christ. We must get under the government of God. Paul ends with the same quote from Isaiah 28:16 that Peter used, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.”

(Rom 10:9-11) “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; {10} for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. {11} For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.’”

Jesus ended the conversation by telling His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ. He wanted the Spirit of God to reveal His identity to people.

Conclusion and Applications

Jesus asked these two questions to His disciples. Who do people say that I am? Who do you say that I am? The first question was really to help us have more insight about what many of the people were thinking. The second question was really to help the disciples. This is the most critical question He had ever asked them.

As we come to a close, the disciples answered the question and Peter made it very clear that he believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. The real question this morning is who do you say that Jesus is? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Do you believe that He came, died for our sins, and was raised from the dead? In order to be saved, we must believe these things in our heart.

If you do not believe this, I want to pray for you right now.

Father God, I ask You to do what you did for Peter. You revealed to Peter that Jesus was Your Son. I ask You to reveal Yourself to those that are here or are listening. You revealed Yourself to Peter. You revealed Yourself to the Apostle Paul. You are a God that does not want any to perish, so I ask You to reveal Yourself to those who do not believe in Jesus.

Maybe you are here or have been listening and you do believe. There are many protestants and Catholics that have been brought up believing that Jesus is the Messiah. But, many of those Protestant or Catholic churches have left out an important part of the gospel message. It is by faith in Christ that we are saved. It is not by works, lest any man should boast. It is by placing our faith in Christ that we are saved. We must believe, and we must then confess Jesus as our Lord. If you have never asked Jesus to come into your life and to be the Lord of your life, I want to pray with you this morning. Simply pray along with me if this is the desire of your heart.

Father God, thank You for sending Jesus to die for our sins. Thank You for raising Him from the dead. Thank You for revealing to me who Jesus is. Father, I want to receive Your forgiveness. I want to spend my eternity with You. Jesus, I ask You to come into my life. I now confess You as my Lord and Savior. I ask this in Jesus’ name.

If you prayed that this morning, let me assure you of one thing. If you asked Jesus to come into your life, He did. The Apostle John wrote 1 John 5:12-13 to give us assurance. God wants us to know that if we have Jesus in our life, we have eternal life.

(1 John 5:12-13) “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. {13} These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Introduction (Mark 8:27-30)

1. **John the Baptist** (Mark 8:27-28, Mark 6:14-16, John 1:29-34)
2. **Elijah** (Mark 8:28, Matt 17:9-13, Mal 4:5-6, Matt 11:13-14)
3. **One of the Prophets** (Mark 8:28, John 14:6, Acts 4:12)
4. **You Are the Christ** (Mark 29-30, Matt 16:15-18, 1 Cor 3:10-11, 1 Pet 2:4-8, Is 28:16, James 2:19, Rom 10:9-11)

Conclusion and Applications (1 John 5:12-13)