August 27, 2023 **BE TRANSFORMED**

Let us imagine, Jesus is standing before all of us today and He is asking us the same question He had asked His disciples on their way to Caesarea: “Who do you say that I am?” My guess is that even though most of us have placed our faith in Jesus, we would probably get several different answers to that question. And how we answer that question will reveal a great deal about what we expect Jesus to do in our lives.

The gospel passage that we have for this Sunday, Matthew 16:13-20, says as Jesus enters Caesarea with His disciples, he first asks the disciples who others believe Him to be based on what the people had seen Him say and do; His miracles, His healings, His preaching – they concluded that He was either a resurrected prophet of old or a new prophet of the same kind. So, they basically believed Him to be a religious figure of some importance.

Peter is the first to answer the question. He first claims that Jesus is the Christ. I think sometimes we tend to think of Christ as merely being Jesus’s last name, but it was not His legal name at all, but rather a title that described who he was. The Greek word from which we get the word “Christ” is the equivalent of the Hebrew word “Messiah”.  Both the words literally mean “anointed” which emphasizes the fact that Jesus had been anointed by God and given a specific God-ordained purpose.

The Old Testament Scriptures consistently promised that God would send His “Anointed One”, the “Messiah” to deliver and redeem His people. But, as we try to understand this passage, not even Peter and the other disciples had a clear understanding of what kind of redemption the Messiah would bring. Many, if not most, of the Jews were looking for a Messiah who would overthrow the Roman Empire and establish an earthly kingdom.

In some ways, things haven’t changed a lot today. There are still a lot of people looking for a political Messiah who is going to come in and overthrow the current government and make life better for all of us. That hasn’t worked very well in the past and it’s not going to work in the future, no matter who we elect to office. Some are looking for a Messiah who is going to heal their disease or fix their finances or restore their relationships. While Jesus is certainly capable of doing all those things, that is not specifically what God anointed Him to do.

Peter not only identifies Jesus as the Christ, but also calls Him the “Son of the living God”. And Jesus praised him for recognizing that Jesus wasn’t just a religious or spiritual leader, He was in fact God in flesh. Jesus makes it clear here that there is no way that Peter could have known that unless God had revealed it to him. It wasn’t something that he could have figured out on his own. I must think that Peter was feeling pretty good about Himself now that he had correctly identified Jesus as God in flesh and as Christ. But unfortunately, Peter still has some very wrong ideas about what kind of Christ Jesus had come to be.

Right after Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah there is a significant turning point in Jesus’ ministry. Up until that time, He had spent much of His ministry serving the needs of people – healing them, feeding them, and teaching them about His kingdom. But now, for the first time, He reveals exactly the price that He is going to pay to carry out His role as the Christ. Peter’s thinking about what kind of Messiah Jesus had come to be was completely transformed.

Jesus had not come merely to be a good teacher and share some suggestions about how to have a better life. Although applying the principles that Jesus taught will definitely give us a more meaningful and abundant life right here on earth. When Jesus asks us, “Who do you say that I am?” What would be our answer today? If you would like to know more, please join us in our Sunday worship at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

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