

Martin White. 15<sup>th</sup> June 2008. Mark 8:27-29

### Encountering Jesus - Peter's confession.

When people come to visit me in Handsworth, they are amazed at how 'religious' the place is. There are huge Gurudwaras, mosques, churches and lots of other types of temple. Every day I see Buddhist monks walking near my house, I know that most of my neighbours have a faith.

One of the good things about this area is that people from all these different faiths tend to get along quite peacefully; I have good friends who are Muslim, Sikh and Hindu.

But one of the difficult things about this diversity is how confusing it can be with people worshipping different gods in different ways, with different moral codes and customs and beliefs.

I think that this diversity and confusion of faiths is something that would have been very familiar at the time the Bible was written, with lots of different faiths and beliefs - many of them mixing and people picking up different parts of different religions, adding more and more gods to the list of the ones they worshipped.

I want to talk about an incident that happened in the Bible when Jesus addressed this issue with His followers.

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Christ." (Mark 8:27-29 NIV)

Matthew continues the story, recording what Jesus said next:

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. (Matthew 16:17 NIV)

This happens after Jesus has healed a blind man at Bethsaida (a Messianic sign), and just before Jesus unveiled His Glory to some of the Disciples at the Transfiguration (which happened on Mount Hermon - just above Caesarea Philippi.)

### **Caesarea Philippi**

This was a very 'religious' place - previously called Panium - after the god Pan.

Pan was the Greek god of fear ("panic") and was half man, half goat and, people believed, used to sometimes disguise himself as a man - normally to seduce women.

As well as worship of Pan, the Roman Emperor - Augustus Caesar had also given this area to one of his supporters - King Herod Phillip (Herod the Great). He then changed the name of the town to Caesarea Philippi - named after Caesar and himself. By way of thanking Caesar, he also built a temple there dedicated to Emperor Augustus, who had given him the town.

In this temple, people would worship Caesar who was a man that, people believed, had become a god, and was worshipped all around the Roman Empire.

So Jesus took His followers to this very 'religious' place where people believed in gods appearing as men and men being worshipped as gods, and asked His disciples this question:

"Who do people say I am?"

They answer, saying:

"Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

People had seen what Jesus was doing and heard what He was saying and had seen that He was good - even to the point of being a deeply religious person, come back to life. The Old Testament had finished with the promise that Elijah would return as a herald before God came.

But they hadn't got the whole picture - even though Jesus had said and done incredible things.

I think that today, most people would know that Jesus is an amazing person.

This week I had a long talk with one of the teachers I work with who is a strong atheist, but she had to admit that Jesus was someone special.

The Granth Sahib says this about Jesus:

God has destroyed the head of the Devil through

Jesus of the world

There was a light in the heaven;

All came to congratulate Him,

Blessed be the king of all people

The destroyer of the wicked

And Saviour of the poor;

The creator of the Universe

Save me, I am your servant.

God is one; may victory belong to Him.

~Padshahi 10 Chaupai, Rahiras Sahib,

The Qur'an says this:

Like the New Testament, the Qur'an affirms that Jesus was born of a virgin, brought God's blessing and rose from the dead (Sura 19:31-35); He performed miracles: in particular that he restored sight to the blind, healed lepers and raised people from the dead (Sura 3:49, 5:11). It also says that Jesus brought 'the message of the gospel' and that he committed no sin (Sura 3:46).

The Qur'an calls Jesus 'the statement of truth' (Sura 17:24),

[Sura 3:45] The angels said, "O Mary, GOD gives you good news: a Word from Him whose name is `The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary. He will be prominent in this life and in the Hereafter, and one of those closest to Me.'

Now, like then, people recognise something amazing about Jesus, but, now, as then too, people can just add Jesus onto the list of other holy people or end up thinking that He is maybe *one* of the ways to God.

The disciples must have had many conversations with people who asked "Who is He?" They must have been familiar with people saying "It's John the Baptist; it's Elijah; it's Jeremiah. Probably they listened in as people had theological debates about what must have been the hottest conversation topics - "Who is He?"

"I think He's good"

"No, He's more than that - I know someone who had leprosy - and He healed him."

"Could He be The One?"

"But the religious leaders haven't said so; maybe He's a prophet."

Once the disciples had fed this back to Jesus, he takes His questions a bit farther and gets to the real issue.

Surrounded by all these opinions and all this religion, Jesus asks the most important question:

**"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"**

For each of us, this is the most important question we can ever answer  
**So who do you say He is?**

**Peter answered, "You are the Christ."**

Peter, who has heard Jesus teach, has seen His compassion towards people; who has seen His power and authority to heal; who has, by this point spent about 3 years travelling everywhere with Jesus; who has seen Jesus' ministry at it's height and at points when everyone left; who has seen Jesus at times of joy and success and at times of despair, is left with only one answer. "You are the Christ."

I heard someone talking about a football hero they had when they were young, and then how, in later life they got to know the person and how, in getting to know him, he seemed smaller 'in real life' and how, up close, they got to know the person's faults and weaknesses, and it ended up in some disappointment.

With Jesus though, it works the other way - the more people got to know Him; the closer they got; the more convinced they were that He really is the Christ.

In my life, it's the same - I have spent 23 years getting to know Jesus better, and the more I know, the more amazing and perfect He is.

Peter says "You are the Christ." - in other words, You are God with us; the Holy One.

Jesus doesn't deny it; He says "Well done, you know that because God told you."

There are lots of faiths and religious leaders and holy men.

- Mohammad never claimed to be God
- Guru Nanak never claimed to be God
- Buddha never claimed to be God
  - Jesus received Peter's worship.

So Peter had spent time with Jesus, he had heard the teaching, he had seen the miracles. He had lots of evidence in front of him as to who Jesus is.

But Jesus says:

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. (Matthew 16:17 NIV)

There is lots of evidence about who Jesus is - that can get us to the point where, like all the people debating who Jesus is in this account, we are amazed at who He is; but God wants us to know Jesus is much more than that. He is the Christ - God taking on flesh, come into the world He created to seek and save people who are completely lost without Him.

I could talk all day about how incredible He is, but actually, what will let us know Him and His Holy Presence in our lives and His power to save and heal us, is revelation from our Father in Heaven.

And it's His joy and pleasure to make His Son known to us.

**Pray:**

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. (Ephesians 1:17)

- Pray for secret believers who have had revelation, but are in a difficult situation with family/circumstances
- Healing
- Blessing

- Revelation