

Sermon Passage: Mark 8:27-35

Title: *What about You?*

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### CUE VIDEO "Plastic Jesus"

Jesus intends us to have the best life possible, in fact, his life living through us. And yet, so many Christians have so little in common with their Master. Why is that? What are we missing? What does it mean to be a follower of Christ?

### PLAY THE VIDEO "Plastic Jesus"

Let's pray together as we begin. PRAYER: God of the scriptures, reveal yourself to us today. We don't want a plastic Jesus. We want to know the real one. In his name we pray. Amen.

#### I.

Every Wednesday night I meet with a group of parents, mostly in the 20's and 30's, but there are some of us who are a little older. We are part of the Big Wednesday ministry, so the parents come to this group while their children are attending their own programs, if they are not going to the Pastor's Sermon Study.

The gathering is called "Conversations with God." All we do is read a pre-selected passage from the New Testament a few times, and then wait silently for God to bring something to our minds. Telling you about it here makes it sound more mystical than it is, but we usually walk away sensing that God has somehow spoken to us through the pages of scripture.

Here's the catch. In the time of sharing, we abide by one simple rule. You can only share how you think God is speaking to you personally through the passage. In other words, you cannot interpret the passage for anyone else in the room.

At first, this was really difficult for some people. Most of us are accustomed to a teacher or leader giving us the meaning of a passage, or at least putting it in context for us. Even those of us who read the Bible quite often more comfortable theologizing in general terms about what God intends for other people than we are sharing how God is at work in our own lives right now.

This is true for our larger culture as well. People seem to prefer talking about “organized religion” than the details of their beliefs about God.

Jesus knows this about people. And so he asks a question to his disciples that gets right to the heart of the matter. On the road to Caesarea Philippi he turns and says to them, “Who do you say that I am?” The answer to this question is the most important one we will ever consider. Indeed, it will change the course of our lives forever.

#### SLIDE #1

##### II.

A stereopticon is a device that you put over your eyes so that you can see two different images at the same time. It focuses your right eye on one image and your left eye on another.

Psychologists have used this device to learn how people’s expectations affects what their brains actually register when they look at something. Participants in experiments using these devices describe seeing only the picture with which they are most familiar.

One of the most famous early experiments used a large sample of north Americans and a large sample of Latin Americans to look at two pictures. One picture was of a baseball player and the other was of a bullfighter. When they flashed the pictures simultaneously before their eyes, the North Americans reported seeing the baseball player and the Latin Americans reported seeing the bullfighter as you might have guessed.

The point is that we tend to see what we are trained to see and not what’s there.

#### SLIDE #2

##### III.

This is Peter’s problem when he answers the question that Jesus poses on the way to Caesarea Philippi. He has a popular notion stuck in his head of what the Messiah is suppose to be. Nowhere in his background is there a Messiah like the one Jesus describes on the pages of Scripture.

Last week, Pastor Jeff compared the disciples to the seven dwarfs. I almost fell off my chair laughing when he did his impersonation of those little guys. “Hey, Sleepy, did you remember bread?” “No, Dopey, did you?” “What about you, Bashful?” But to be fair to them, we should not judge them too harshly, because their expectations didn’t prepare them for a Messiah like Jesus.

Israel had been an occupied territory for hundreds of years, and during all that time its foreign oppressors influenced how they would worship, where they could live, and what laws they would obey.

The Hebrew people were waiting for a messiah like Joshua who would drive out their enemies or a king like David who would reign on the throne with righteousness. To anoint someone with oil in the Hebrew language was to “messiah” them, in the same way that the Hebrew people would messiah priests, prophets, and kings. By the time of the first century, the expectation for a Messiah was overtaken by political and nationalistic hopes. The Messiah they were expecting would be a military and political leader who would retake the promise land so that they could live in freedom and prosperity. Nowhere in their expectations was their a place for a Messiah who would suffer and die for the sake of the whole world.

That’s why Peter objected at first to Jesus’ teaching. The Messiah that Jesus describes is foreign to him. He says, “the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

### SLIDE #3

#### IV.

This whole scene gets very interesting to me here. We don’t like to be rebuked in our society. In fact, we think it is kind of rude. There are some rare exceptions these days, but for the most part, we live by standards of tolerance that say, “I’m okay, you’re okay.” We all tiptoe around telling people when they are doing something wrong.

That wasn’t so in ancient times. The practice of rebuke was much more prominent in the role in teaching and instruction. It was the way that you could tell that you were part of the community, when someone cared enough about

you to rebuke you. I suppose the same thing is true today about our children. You know when you've become "part of the family" when your friend's parents correct your behavior. Rebuke is correction that is given so forthrightly that it's easy to remember. You don't want to experience it again, so it motivates you to change your behavior.

A current example of the use of rebuke today is Simon on "American Idol." He's the only judge who tells the contestants straight up how they performed and how they can improve. He does it with a mean spirit at times, but he gets his point across. And guess what? The contestants respect his opinion more than they do any of the other judges. At its best, rebuke helps you to know what you need to change in order to become the person you want to be.

In Mark 8, we become witnesses to a double rebuke. Peter rebukes Jesus for describing the Messiah in a way that is beyond anything Peter would have expected. And then Jesus comes right back and rebukes Peter for standing so completely and diabolically against the will of God. He says, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind *not* on divine things but on human things."

I don't think you can get any stronger language than calling someone "Satan," but that's what Jesus calls his most vocal disciple. Jesus remembers the temptations by Satan in the wilderness and recognizes Peter's challenge to him as the same type. Peter is lined up right behind Satan, so Jesus calls him by that name.

#### V.

Like Ryan in the video we saw earlier, we have a tendency to imagine a Jesus of our own making, a "plastic Jesus," rather than the one revealed on the pages of scripture. We want a Jesus that comes in power and glory, not one that will suffer, be rejected, and die. The secret that Jesus has been trying to keep all this time in is not that he is the Messiah, but what type of Messiah he will be. God's Messiah will be revealed in weakness and through giving himself as a ransom for many.

Jesus does not offer his disciples a variety of ways to be personally fulfilled. He does not offer intoxicating or entertaining spiritual experiences. He does not sell his followers on intellectual stimulation. He presents them with a cross. And he bids them to follow him.

A lot of us want to be a disciple the way many people watch television—sitting on a lounge chair with a remote control in one’s hand and a drink in the other, ready to switch channels whenever anything unpleasant, tedious, or demanding appears on the screen. But Jesus says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”<sup>35</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”

Jesus offers paradoxical advice on how to save one’s life. One has to lose one’s life to save it.

#### VI.

Mark tells us that Jesus spoke “openly about this” to his disciples. He’s not talking in parables anymore. The cross is the heart of the gospel and carrying one’s cross is central to discipleship. This particular demand separates the disciples from the admirers. Disciples must do more than survey the wondrous cross, glory in the cross of Christ, and love the old rugged cross, as beloved hymns have sung. They must become like Jesus and *live* the cross.

To take up the cross means that you have to graduate from the school of suffering, not because of the dumb things you do or the mistakes you make, but suffering for the sake of loving others and the gospel. Disciples stake their lives on their confession that Jesus is the Messiah *and* follow him on the way to suffering. Admirers may acknowledge him as the Messiah, but they dig in their heels when he calls them to follow him down the particular path that may lead to sacrifice. Following Jesus to the cross is not some tedious detour of faith; it is the main road.

#### SLIDE #4

The way you answer the question, “Who do you say that I am?” will affect everything about you. It will affect how you love your wife or husband. It will affect how you do your business. It will affect how you discipline your children. It will affect how you spend your money. There is not an area of your life that this question will not affect.

Two Sundays ago an elder from this church picked me up behind my office to take me car shopping. Our 14 year old minivan had died, so it was time to get a

new car. I had my sights on a Honda with leather seats, a moon roof, and all the bells and whistles you could ask for. But by the time we got to the dealerships in San Juan Capistrano, he had convinced me to drive by the Honda store and buy a Kia for \$10,000 less. It had basically the same stuff on it but it came with a 100,000 warranty and \$700 less in interest payments per year. He said having \$10,000 less in debt would lower my anxiety about money and that I would have \$700 more a year in saved interest payments to spend on other things. This elder is a big giver, so I knew how he would advise me to use with the extra \$700. He'd tell me to give it to the church!

Incidentally, when I went to get in the car this morning to come here, there was a wide swath of white paint stretched across the front bumper. I don't know who crashed it, but guess what? It doesn't really matter because it cost me \$10,000 less than the car I originally wanted. I'm still way ahead of the game!

The point is that self-denial takes many shapes. Sometimes I wish that the disciples didn't leave job and family to follow Christ, because they make the bar seem so high, but for some, it may mean that. For the proud, it may mean renouncing the desire for status and power. For the greedy, it will mean renouncing an appetite for ever-greater wealth. The complacent will have to renounce the love of comfort. The cowardly will have to abandon the craving for security. The violent will have to repudiate the desire for revenge. On it goes. Individuals know best what hinders them from giving their lives to God.

## VII.

This isn't the last time that Jesus will need to explain his way of redemption to his disciples. He needs to do so two more times in this section of Mark alone. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, we can't begin to understand the implications the cross has for our lives. The affirmation, "You are the Messiah" is always an act of faith whenever it is made.

Mark gives us the *Cliff Notes* of what went on that day when the disciples were on the way to Caesarea Philippi. He writes the abridged version of the gospels. In Matthew's gospel, after Peter blurts out his confession, Jesus says to Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon (Peter) son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven."

Even at the moment of Peter's confession, God was at work. This gives me great hope. God is at work revealing himself to us at every step on our journey. Jesus calls us to the cross, but he doesn't send us there ahead of him. He goes there first, and shows us the way of love. It has been said that "Jesus isn't looking for drum majors; he's looking for followers," so whatever he calls us to do is something that he has done first.

#### VIII.

It isn't a surprise that the way of the cross is passed over by so many. Love that serves others no matter how much it costs, clashes head-to-head with worldly wisdom that asks at every turn, "What's in it for me?" Worldly wisdom will always dismiss Jesus' description of the Messiah.

There are many opinions today of who Jesus is. Many people respect him as an ethical teacher whose memorable sayings about loving your neighbor, turning the other cheek, and not casting the first stone *make* for great sayings. The Jesus that the gospels present, however, is that he is none other than the Son of God, placing him in a category all his own. He is the Messiah, the lover of our souls.

#### SLIDE #5

#### IX.

Friends, "Who do you say that I am?" is the most important question you will ever answer. The future has broken in on us with a new King, one that is anointed to save the world.

Speaking of his kingdom at the end of this part of Mark's gospel, we get a better picture of how the story will end for us. Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news,<sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age— (we're going to get a HUNDREDFOLD!) of houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields (unfortunately he has to add the next phrase!) with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life." (Mark 10:20-30). We get a foretaste of the best life ever in this age because "the age to come" has broken in on us with his arrival.

When you're a citizen of the kingdom, you become part of a great big family that has houses, fields, and relatives in every corner of the globe. When your children are young and they want to go swimming in someone's pool, you know

who to call. When you move across the country, you already have brothers and sisters there. And if you want to learn how to sail, you know that Pastor Jeff will take you sailing on his new boat! That's why Jesus can make such a lofty claim. It's true!

And then he says this, as if to turn conventional wisdom completely on its head. <sup>31</sup>"But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first." (Mk 10:31).

Earthly authorities who employ the power tactics of the beast will one day ultimately be conquered by a lamb who renounces all show of power.

That's the Jesus I want to follow. How about you?