

Jesus asking a question: Who do people say that I am?

Why not ask: **-What do people think that I came to do?**

I think that the answer has to do with people associating identities with a particular job description (eg Prime Minister, King, Messiah???). It also defines what you cannot do. You cannot be a royal and forsake all royal duties. The disciples clearly thought that Jesus would fit into one identity or another. They try a few (remember this is a group of people who are deaf and blind):

“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” Mark 8:28

- ie John the preparer reincarnated
- Elijah who was to prepare for Yahweh (Malachi 4:5)
- A prophet – someone announcing God’s word

Peter goes for broke; “you are the Christ” (Mark 8:29). The Old Testament word was “Messiah”. This is an identity that Jews and the disciples would have perceived as having a specific job description. That job description would have varied but it involved delivering God’s people. It was applied to the Kings and Priests of Israel. It could also be used of the people of Israel as a whole and of the Gentile ruler Cyrus. (Isa 44:28)

Progress!

Peter hasn’t been wasting his time following Jesus for 3 years. He’s on the right bandwagon. He’s named his highest expectation and hope. For Peter, this expressed something better than just another king, prophet or warrior. So, he has got the right answer.

Jesus says don’t tell anyone. “And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.” (8:30)

This seems ridiculous. For a start, how do we get the army together if we can’t broadcast the fact that we have found the Christ.

No one has got it

If the general populace believed that Jesus was the Messiah they would have had an immediate idea of what he would do.

Jesus also needed to teach Peter and the others what sort of Messiah/deliverer he was. Peter had seen but only so that men looked like trees walking. (Mark 8:24) Jesus accepts the title but never uses it. Instead he uses his preferred title – Son of Man. It is a title with some content (Daniel 7:11-14) but not much. Jesus has already used it to speak of his authority on earth (Mark 2:10;28). Now he uses it to teach about the fact that he must suffer, “*He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.*” (Mark 8:31).

Peter knows that whatever a Messiah is, the job description does not include suffering and dying. “And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him” (Mark 8:32).

For Peter its like:-

- A doctor whose aim is to make people sick
- A teacher who wants to increase ignorance
- An engineer who builds bridges to break

Jesus can't let that Go

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

Surely the things of God are Power, Peace, Joy, Comfort

No, Jesus has frequently done the opposite of what was expected. He touched lepers. He ate with sinners, He worked on the Sabbath. He took the contagion of the world on himself. He didn't separate from it.

Applies to his followers too

This is not only true of Jesus. It is true of his followers.

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? (Mark 8:34)

But there is a third aspect Jesus wants his disciples to know about the “Son of Man”. He will come with the “glory of his Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:38).

The working out of the idea that Jesus must suffer.

The rest of the book is about

- Suffering
- Rejection
- Dying
- Rising

This is a totally unexpected and the ‘unnecessary’/‘unreasonable’ aspect of being God.

And it remains a surprise to Christians. If Jesus brought God's Kingdom and we have entered it. (Mark 10:15) ie we are on God's side and he is on ours, how come we look like losers? We accept suffering is an aspect of life and of being a Christian just because it is, but it challenges our faith in a sovereign and loving heavenly Father.

Peter had a lot to learn about power, justice and grace. So do we.

Our current situation provides a lot of opportunities to consider how our faith should show itself in our preparedness to serve one another. I am encouraged by the number of people talking to each other (by email or phone) and the number of people prepared to be a part of ministries being put into place to practice being the body of Christ at St Alban's.

In Jesus we see God standard grace and love. Can we see it? Will we believe it?