

"Who Do You Say He Is"

Text: Mark 8:31-38

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

I heard this once. Tell me what you think. A man who had just received the news that he had a terminal illness responded to the news with this comment: *"I don't have time to die."*

My first reaction? *"Oh, I'm pretty sure you do."* My second reaction was that this was really not a good attitude or sentiment, especially coming from a man whose time of grace would soon end and who was therefore about to enter eternity and stand in judgment before his Lord. It was a statement that indicated a preoccupation with the things of earth and a failure to contemplate the reality of eternity and of man's accountability to his Creator.

We're all at risk. Satan has to be very pleased with how distracted we've grown. His cause is greatly aided by wealth, prosperity, and commotion. On the other hand, I'm not sure he is very happy with hard times on earth. He would much rather see everyone preoccupied with a wealth of discretionary funds, good health, lots of free time, and no restraints. That's where and how he wants us to waste our time and energy. The devil wants us so busy chasing dollars and dreams that we find no time for that which God himself labeled as truly important. Christians and non-Christians alike need to be rescued. Not even the strongest fire of faith can long burn under such a flood of materialism, temptation, and preoccupation.

While our God *might* well be working to free us from Satan's carefully laid traps when he allows hardships into our lives, he most *certainly* strives to do so in our text. There our God seeks to draw us from earth to heaven – safe above the sea of "things" that threatens to engulf us and to extinguish saving faith. These words seek to snatch us from the frantic chaos of worldliness to the quiet comfort of the Savior's side. Our text reminds all of us that someday it *will* be time to die, and on that day it will have profited us nothing if we have gained the whole world and in the process lost our own soul. Our text also poses a question, which serves as the basis for our study this morning and which we will want to ask of ourselves: *"Who do you say that Jesus is?"* Simple question, maybe not so simple answer.

The text that will guide and instruct us is found recorded in the Gospel of Mark, the Eighth Chapter:

^{ESV} **Mark 8:27-38** *And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." ³⁰ And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. ³¹ ¶ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." ³⁴ ¶ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*

So far the very words of God. In a world filled with so much talk that is worthless and annoying – so many things that are vain and pointless – I pray that these words might command your full attention, for they are the words of God Himself. That our God would bless each of us through the study of these sacred words this morning, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Ever been so preoccupied with something that you find yourself noticing nothing else? For most men the answer is probably: *"Every time I turn on the television."* But we're talking here about *really* focused – totally absorbed to the point where the Rose Bowl parade could march past and you probably wouldn't notice.

If you find yourself trying to remember a situation in your life were that was the case, you needn't work too hard. That's pretty much exactly

what Satan is succeeding in doing to each one of us in our day to day lives here on Planet Preoccupy. The individual distractions may be different, but the resulting fixation is the same.

Your first task then this morning is to ask yourself, honestly: *"Where exactly is my day-to-day, moment-by-moment focus? What are the things in my life that keep me running so frantically from this place to that that I don't have time or energy to notice anything else? More to the point, am I allowing all these distractions to keep me from the one thing needful and a closer walk with my Savior?"*

It is self-evident that there are some necessary and unavoidable things in life that absorb much of our time and attention – things that aren't optional. The Bible reminds us, for example, that **"if any would not work, neither should he eat."** But how many of the distractions in your life are really necessary? A better question yet, if you stand back and take a look at your typical day, during how much of that day do you find yourself in a "worldly" state of mind rather than **"setting your mind on the things of God"** (the phrase our text uses)?

With all of the nonsense and nattering that assaults our eyes and ears on a daily basis, it's disturbingly easy to block out the stern and damning law contained in our text: **"For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."**³⁶ **For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?**³⁷ **For what can a man give in return for his soul?**³⁸ **For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."**

These words are like a hand grenade from our Savior. Your job this morning is to set them under your old Adam and pull the pin. Not easy to do. When we examine ourselves and our thoughts and actions day-by-day, moment-by-moment, does it seem reasonable that at pretty much any point during our average day Jesus could speak to you those same awful words that he first spoke to Peter: **"Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man"**? In fact if the Apostle Peter himself, who walked daily at the Savior's side, fell into this trap, you and I can know beyond a shadow of any reasonable doubt that the danger here is imminent and unavoidable.

"Setting your mind on the things of man" is a symptom of what Jesus in our text referred to as **"saving (your) life."** To **"save your life"** is a tough phrase to wrap our

minds around, but we need to work at it until we do. Normally we would regard *"saving a life"* as a good thing. Jesus obviously isn't using the term in that way. He's talking here about standing at a fork in the road and choosing the same path that the world *always* picks. He's talking about clawing and grasping for every last thing this world has to offer, even when those choices harm the eternal soul and damage or even destroy saving faith. In the worst case it means refusing what Jesus described in our text as **"denying self and taking up our cross and following Jesus."** To **"deny self"** is a very broad and inclusive term. It certainly means denying any hope of a salvation that we could earn with our own works, but it is more than that. **"Self"** really refers to any part in us that is worldly-minded, any part of our former, un-Christian thoughts, desires, and aspirations. *That* is what our God wants us to abandon. How are we doing?

This is an extremely sobering section of Holy Scripture. Which of us truly **"denies himself"**? Which of us has **"taken up a cross"** in following Jesus? During how much of our day are we **"mindful of the things of God"**? You and I don't even have time to get sick. We certainly don't have time to die. But we all *will* one day die (if our Lord doesn't return first). Our text reminds us to live with that day in mind.

Again, this is the harsh reality of the law that our sinful flesh needs to hear, but what exactly does this have to do with the question asked by our sermon theme: *Who do you say he is?*

Take a look through this morning's text again and you will notice what at first seems like two unrelated events. In the first part, Jesus asks his disciples **"Who do people say that I am?"** The disciples report what they have been hearing, after which Jesus gets to the point of his questions: **"But who do you say that I am?"** Peter answered with his marvelous, inspired: **"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."** The full quote is recorded in Matthew 16:16, and in that account Jesus went on to tell his disciples that he would found his Church on the simple truth expressed by Peter.

That's the first part of our text. In the second part, Jesus had harsh words for the very same man he had just praised for his confession. What then do the two parts have to do with each other, or are they just unconnected events told one after the other?

They are in fact connected. Here's how. The answer to *"Who do you say he is?"* is more than just a one-time confession or the answer to a question. In fact the full answer we give is comprised of everything we

do and say during our time of grace. It goes back to what Paul said to the Corinthians: **"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved."** (1 Corinthians 10:31-33) Again in Matthew 5:16, **"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."**

The fact is what you and I do with our time of grace is our loudest, clearest confession of just exactly who and what Jesus is to us.

What then is the confession you *want* to make? What do you want your words and actions to say about your Savior? Our text provides the answer, for not only is there strongest law in our text for this morning, there is also sweetest gospel. Here there is solace and comfort for wretches like you and me. Jesus knew that even his closest men were worldly-minded, as we also are worldly-minded. Yet he willingly gave his life for sinners like us. All of the Apostles abandoned Jesus in his final hours, thus proving that they were, at some level, **"ashamed of him."** And yet our Lord came to save these very men and, more than even that, he used these very men and their confession to establish his Church. Here is undeniable evidence that he came not for the "holy" and self-righteous, but for sinners like you and me. So also he assured us that not only would the one who **"desires to save his life lose it,"** but also that **"whoever loses his life for Jesus' sake and the gospel's will save it."**

To **"lose one's life"** means not only that we will despair of earning our own way to heaven; it also means that we are led to trust Jesus without question or reservation as the one who must supply every single thing that is good and positive for our salvation. It means that we have no life at all apart from Jesus. You and I **"are not our own, for we were bought at a price."** Those who sinfully love this world consistently rebel at such thoughts. Not so with the Children of God. Not so with us.

This, therefore, is the prayer that each of us ought to have this and every day - for ourselves and for each other. May God the Holy Spirit clear away from our lives all "self" and all preoccupation with that which tears down our faith and blinds us to the critical spiritual needs of ourselves and others. God grant us instead to be forever **"mindful of the things of God"** and devoted to the same. In this there is no shame, nor is there loss, for only the Child of God can have the peace and comfort of knowing that he not only has the time to die, he also knows there is no better time

than at this very moment if our Savior so wills it. God grant us all such hearts, such attitudes, such dedication, trust, and confidence. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16** When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." ³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴ "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ¹⁵ ¶ And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

^{ESV} **Romans 5:1-11** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. ⁶ ¶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

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The Second Sunday in Lent – March 1, 2015

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 721 (Brown Hymnal)

"Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Genesis 17:1-7,15-16) This is the account of one of the covenants that God made with Abraham. This was, in fact, a conditional covenant in that something was required of both parties. God's part was to bless Abraham's descendants and Abraham's part was circumcision. The New Covenant – the gospel – is one-sided. God did all by sending his Son to pay our sin-debt. The two covenants are related only in that the Promised Messiah was one of Abraham's descendants.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 118 (Supplement page 29)

The New Testament Lesson: (Romans 5:1-11) A powerful section of Holy Scripture that really needs no introduction. Thanks and praise to our merciful God for calling unworthy sinners like us to faith. Surely one of his greatest miracles is to have loved the unlovable. One note on this reading, when we read that God saved us when we were "**weak**," that word would be better translated "powerless" or "without strength." We were not just weak when our God brought us to faith. We were helpless.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 748 (Verses 1-3) (Brown Hymnal)

"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

The Sermon – Text: Mark 8:27-38 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Who Do You Say He Is?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 748 (Verses 4-5) (Brown Hymnal)

"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

The Offering – Hymn 788 (Verses 1 & 3)

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 49 (Red Hymnal)

"Almighty God Thy Word is Cast"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Sunday (50) Average (50) Wednesday (26)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
Tuesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
Wednesday	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service with Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council meeting

CLC News – Pastor Mark Tiefel is considering the call to Redemption of Lynnwood, WA. Pastor Andrew Schaller is considering the call to Calvary of Marquette, MI. Pastor Michael Roehl has returned the call to Resurrection of Corpus Christi, TX.

Easter Flowers – Today is the last day to sign up for Easter flowers. Please see Sandy if you have questions. Sign-up sheet is on the mailbox table.

Confirmation Class – Confirmation Class parents please note the 6pm Tuesday start time for this week. If anyone has a scheduling problem with a Tuesday class, please let the Pastor know this morning.

Mid-week Lenten Service – Don't forget the mid-week Lenten services – Wednesday at 7 pm.

Time Change – Unfortunately next Saturday night/Sunday morning we have to give back the extra hour of sleep we got last fall. Don't forget to turn your clocks ahead as DST begins March 8th.

Church Council Meeting – Council members please note the change in our meeting date. The meeting is now scheduled for next Sunday, March 8th, following the fellowship time.