

## The Christ

Mark 8:27-30; 2 Timothy 1:10

Sunday, September 12, 2021 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction: your goal in life is a person, not an accomplishment

In ancient times the empire of Rome considered Christianity an illegal religion, so it was dangerous to be public about your faith. From what we understand of those times, if you were in a public place and you suspected that the person next to you was a Christian, you could use your big toe to carve an arc in the dust, and if the other person made a second arc that formed the image of a fish in the dust, you knew that you were in the presence of a sibling in Christ. You may not have anything in common. You may not even speak that same language, nor have much common ground politically, but you are united by a common confession to one person, and you hold that confession no matter what.

- Set the Stage

To set the stage, the Lord Jesus has endured a frustrating time. He has multiplied food in miraculous fashion twice and not even His 12 closest disciples understand the significance. He heals a man of blindness but asks him to tell no one because Jesus has become controversial. Finally, when they reach Caesarea Philippi, one of the most pagan locations in Israel, Jesus asks the disciples what people say about Him. The disciples say that some believe He is John the Baptist, risen from the dead, others that He is Elijah or one of the other prophets. Jesus asks them what they think. Peter responds: "You are the Christ."

- Main point

The main point, at least for our consideration of the passage today, is that the disciples had already confessed that Jesus was the Christ. It was not a new decision, but rather affirming what had already been decided. This is significant because there is a whole theological argument about Peter in this passage. Jesus, in other Gospels, replied to this assertion that Peter knew this by revelation of the Father and that on this rock (Peter means "rock") Christ would build His church. The argument maintains that Peter is the rock and that the church is built upon the apostles, primarily upon Peter. Some in certain churches maintain that they are the true successors of Peter, whom they claim to be the rock. Thus, they are the true church. That would mean that the church is an organization, whichever one can prove that they truly are the successor of Peter, who was the rock.

I think the whole argument, and its implications, are off base. First of all, when Jesus said, "you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" in Matthew's Gospel, He

used different words for "rock". The name, Peter, meant "rock" but was used to describe a small rock or a stone. The other word for "rock" referred to something much larger. Jesus wasn't calling Peter the person on whom He would build His church, He was pointing out a play on words. Jesus, or the confession that "Jesus is the Christ" is the rock.

Also, as mentioned before, if you look a couple of chapters earlier, you find the disciples fighting the waves of the Sea of Galilee, having left Jesus on the shore so that He could pray. When they see Jesus walking upon the water, Peter asks for an invitation to join Him. Jesus obliges and Peter walks on water, until he starts paying attention to the waves and begins to sink. Jesus rescues him and returns him to the boat. At that time all the disciples worshipped Jesus and confessed that He was the Christ (Matthew 14:33). When Peter spoke those words in today's text, he was speaking something all the disciples had declared and, as their spokesman, reiterated it even though many were leaving the ministry of Jesus. The rock is not Peter, it is the person of Jesus, affirmed by the confession "Jesus is the Christ" or "Jesus is Lord".

- Application:

The application is that all denominations, even the major ones like the Roman Catholic Church or the Orthodox churches, as all as the many Protestant denominations, are earthly creations. They have their purpose because they help churches get organized and act as part of a network that reaches beyond their immediate circumstances, but they will not be represented in heaven. There is no church organization that can claim that Peter is the rock and that Peter is theirs, thus they are the true church. The rock is Jesus, and what draws us all together is the confession of Jesus as the Christ. That's why church is gathered wherever two or three are gathered in His Name, because that is all that is needed. It is not the building. Some churches are in apartments, or in forest clearings, people with people so diverse that, compared to us, they have nothing in common with us other than Christ. We use organizations and we use the building, they are important. The church is people united under Christ.

- Conclusion

Jesus, at one of the most pagan locations in Israel, surrounded by shrines and altars to false gods, asked the disciples who they say that He was. Peter spoke that He was the Christ. In spite of the many turning away, they stayed true to their belief. Their rock was Jesus, and they were united by the confession that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. We are united to them, and to people all over the world, by the same confession. He is our rock, and He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.