

February 5, 2012

Jesus: Getting It Right ... and Wrong

Mark 8:27-9:1

We're a world looking for heroes ...

Wouldn't it be great if someone could solve the global economic problems? Wouldn't it be great if someone could "fix" problems with pollution and climate change? Wouldn't it be great if someone could fix the problems in Syria ... Egypt ... Libya ... Greece ... Nigeria ... Sudan ... Mexico ... the United States ... first nations reserves in Canada ... Lethbridge ... my own neighbourhood ... my own life ...?

Remember when Barack Obama was elected President? There was so much hope and so much hype that he would be that hero ...

But President Obama is human. And he cannot change the world.

So we continue looking for a hero ...

And we make movies like *Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, Spiderman, Batman, Superman, The Green Lantern* in an elusive search for a genuine hero for our time ...

They were looking for a hero, too ...

In the first century the Jewish people were expecting the appearance of Messiah, the anointed deliverer God had promised. Many passages in the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament, foretell the coming of a king, a descendant of David, who would reign in righteousness, save his people, and introduce true peace, harmony, and the Kingdom of God on earth (what the Jewish people called "*shalom*," e.g. Isaiah 9:6,7; 11:1-10; Jeremiah 23:5,6). This was the promised Messiah (literally in English, "*Anointed One*"; the Greek equivalent is the word "*Christ*")

In the period between when the Old testament books were completed and the birth of Jesus, there were lots of conversations about the Messiah:

- there were hopes of a political deliverer, the 'Anointed of the Lord' who would drive out the Romans and re-establish the physical Kingdom of Israel.
- Others dreamed of an eschatological deliverer who would bring history to an end; when the Messiah came, the earth would be purged or destroyed and only faithful Jews would survive.
- Some expected two messiahs, one from the house of David and one from the house of Aaron (Zechariah 4:14).

Mark begins his gospel: "*Jesus came proclaiming the good news of God: 'The time has come,' Jesus said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'*" (Mark 1:14-15). He is claiming to be the King, the Messiah!

When Jesus comes back to his hometown of Nazareth to read Scripture in the Synagogue, He reads from Isaiah words about the promised Messiah: "*The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,*" Jesus read, "*for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come.*" Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. As everyone watched and listened, Jesus said: "*The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!*" (Luke 4:18-23). "*I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God ... because that is why I was sent*" (Luke 4:43). Jesus know who He is.

Does anyone else?

In Mark 8, Jesus miraculously fed 4000 people with seven loaves and a few fish (8:1-10). He goes on to heal a blind man in the town of Bethsaida (8:21-26). That's incredible. These are signs of the Kingdom of God - the hungry are fed, the suffering are healed ... But notice the response:

- The Pharisees, religious leaders, "*demanded that he show them a miraculous sign from heaven to prove his authority*"(8:11). What part of miracles were they not getting???
- The crowds enjoyed the food and the show, but didn't see Him as the Messiah ...
- Jesus' own disciples struggled to get it. They forgot to take supper with them when they got on a boat: they began to argue about whose fault it was. Jesus said, '*Why are you arguing about having no bread? Don't you know or understand even yet? Are your hearts too hard to take it in? You have eyes - can't you see? You have ears - can't you hear? Don't you remember anything at all? When I fed the 5,000 with five loaves of bread, how many baskets of leftovers did you pick up afterward?*' '*Twelve,*' they said.¹ '*And when I fed the 4,000 with seven loaves, how many large baskets of leftovers did you pick up?*' '*Seven,*' they said. '*Don't you understand yet?*' he asked them."(8:16-21)

To push the issue, Jesus asks His disciples directly, "*Who do people say I am?*" The disciples stuttered back, "*Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.*" Jesus persisted: "*But what about you? Who do you say I am?*" Peter burst forth with, "*You are the 'Messiah'*"(Mark 8:27-29).

Good for Peter, he gets it! Or does he?

¹ See Mark 6:30-44

Jesus began to tell them that He would suffer terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He went on to say He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead. This was not anyone's expectation of the Messiah (even though it is a clear theme in the Old Testament, e.g. Isaiah 53). It was much more attractive to think in terms of the military hero than the suffering servant.

So Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. After all, no advisor to any potential political candidate would ever emphasize their own suffering, assassination, and apparent "failure."

But Jesus reprimanded Peter: *"Get away from me, Satan!"* he said. *"You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."* (8:33).

In an instant, Peter goes from being the star pupil to class goat! Jesus' point is that His death is not an end or even an interruption of His mission, but its climax. Though His death Jesus would take upon Himself the sin of the world; He would pay the price for all sin everywhere and every time; He would die in our place, taking upon Himself the punishment we deserve; He would satisfy all the Old Testament laws; and He would restore our relationship with God. The relationship that was shattered when Adam and Eve first rebelled against God (Genesis 3) was restored.

As Peter retreats to lick his wounds, Jesus goes on to explain that the way to life leads through the way of death: *"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."* (8:34-38).

So what does this mean for us?

Stan Grenz, late professor of theology at Carey Theological College, comments on Peter's affirmation of faith: *"Peter's Spirit-inspired confession lies at the heart of our faith as well. With believers of all ages, we acknowledge that God has acted in this specific human life. Echoing Matthew, who saw in the birth of our Lord the fulfillment of ancient prophecy, we declare that Jesus of Nazareth is 'Immanuel' - 'God with us.' This lofty declaration, 'Jesus is the Messiah,' (or 'Christ') is a central element in every Christian's religious vocabulary. We readily let the statement roll from our tongues.*

- *But what do we mean when we confess that God was in Jesus?*
- *Does our confession remain intelligible two millennia after Jesus' death?*
- *And if so, how are we to understand Jesus' identity in our context?*
- *How should we answer the question 'Who is Jesus?' in the contemporary world in*

which we live?

Those are profound questions to reflect upon ...

Who do you say that Jesus is? Why? If someone, without any Christian background, were to ask you, "*Who is Jesus?*" How would you respond? (We'll read the Nicene Creed together) We believe Jesus is fully God and fully human. His death and resurrection destroy the power of sin and death - we have new life - now and forever - through Him.

"Jesus came proclaiming the good news of God: 'The time has come,' Jesus said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" What good news is this? What good news do we have for our world? Our community? Our family? Ourselves? Because of who Jesus is and what He has done our good news is ... (I'll ask for responses)

If we want a hero who can deal with our issues, we can do not better than to look to Jesus - God with us and within us.

Grenz adds one more question to think about as we reflect on Jesus:

- *And what difference does it make in how we live?"*²

What difference does Jesus make in how you live?

In the New Testament the word 'saint' is applied to Christians generally. Being a Christian at all was extraordinary. Christians stood out sharply from their environment, regarded as something strange if not hostile. To the early Christians, Jesus was a revelation; something unlooked for, something previously unknown ... and it changed how they lived.

"Remember that there's an opportunity cost to pursuing the things of this world. God has a different economy. Hear it in the Sermon on the Mount. Read it in Paul's letters. See it in Christ's life. And experience it in your own." (Randy Raggio). The Good News: *"Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested"* (Hebrews 2:18).

G.K. Chesterton wrote, *"The Christian ideal has not been found tried and found wanting, it has been found difficult and left untried."*

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² Stan Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*.