

DEVOTIONAL READING

Philip Yancey Devotional

Turning Point

Mark 8

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” (Mark 8:29)

As this chapter opens, Jesus is exasperated with his disciples. They had seen him feed 5000 people, and then 4000, and yet still they worried about their next meal. “Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?” he asked reproachfully. Still, for all their denseness, the disciples had grasped something about Jesus that eluded most others. The crowds saw him as a reincarnation of a prophet: Elijah, maybe, or John the Baptist. But in this scene, Peter boldly pronounces Jesus the “Christ,” the very Messiah long predicted by the prophets.

It is difficult for us to comprehend the importance of that single word to first-century Jews. Ground down by centuries of foreign domination, they staked all their hopes in a Messiah who would lead their nation back to glory. Matthew records that Jesus, pleased by Peter’s impulsive declaration, lavished praise on him (16:17-19). But, Peter’s brightest moment was immediately followed by one of his dimmest—a few paragraphs later Jesus identifies Peter with Satan. What transpired between those two scenes marks an important turning point in the story of Jesus’ life.

To Peter and the other disciples, “Messiah” stood for wealth and fame and political power. Jesus knew, though, that the true Messiah would first have to endure scorn, humiliation, suffering, and even death. He was the Suffering Servant prophesied by Isaiah. He would take up an executioner’s cross, not a worldly position of honor.

Jesus accepted Peter’s designation; he was indeed the true Messiah. But from that moment on, Jesus made a strategic shift. He left Galilee and headed toward the capital of Jerusalem. Instead of addressing the crowds, he narrowed his scope to the twelve disciples and worked to prepare them for the suffering and death to come. Peter may have grasped Jesus’ identity, but he had much to learn about his mission. He wanted Jesus to avoid pain, not understanding that the pain of the cross would bring salvation to the whole world.

Life Question: If someone asked you who Jesus is, what would you say?