

Faith

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[0 : 0 0] I'd like us to turn back this morning and also on Friday morning when we meet together on New Year's Day to look at the subject of faith. It's always an important subject to look at faith and I think it's good at the end of a year to remind ourselves of the crucial elements of our faith and what it is to have faith for those who have arrived late and to missed a reading. We read first in Isaiah chapter 8-9 and then in Mark chapter 8 and we're going to be looking at Mark chapter 8 and from verse 27 to the end of the chapter and we're really going to be focusing our attention for a few moments on Jesus Christ. Many people have been in church over the last few days. Many people have been singing about the birth of Jesus and I want us to remember that focus today and broaden our outlook on Jesus to beyond his incarnation and look a little bit more about why he came and why he is the object of our faith and it's so important to refocus today and as I guess in many ways every day to focus our attention on

Jesus Christ and we do so by looking at Jesus on questions about faith and then the answers that he gives about faith in the passage that we read in Mark chapter 8 from verse 27 and questions are often a great way of channeling people's thoughts and channeling people's thoughts in the right way and here Jesus is kind of setting the scene with respect to his own teaching and what he wants to say by asking a couple of questions of his disciples and particularly I guess of Peter or at least Peter becomes the spokesperson for the disciples in his answers but even in his questions Jesus helps us to understand a little bit about the nature of faith and he asks a couple of questions and I'm going to look at them in reverse order who do people say that I am and what about you so he asks these two questions with regard to really what people thought about Jesus and that then in turn informs us about the nature of faith and so we have here Jesus asking that question secondly to Peter what about you or to the disciples what about you and it reminds us that the nature of faith is such that it is a personal reality faith is something that is individual and personal what about you you know people in general might have questions or answers or information about Jesus but Jesus focuses in and says what about you here we have Jesus going eyeball to eyeball with the individual and not just in the passage but also in our understanding of Christianity he goes eyeball to eyeball with us and he says what about you what about me what about us what about us individually what do we think about Jesus Christ there is here from Jesus an immediate personal challenge to trust in Jesus Christ to throw out our lives into his arms and to put our faith in him he wants us as we worship today he wants the disciples as they follow him he wants every believer to be clear about who he is what about you what do you think of Jesus Christ no what does a person beside you think no what does your mum and dad think but what do you think about me Jesus makes clear that there's this very personal interaction that must go on if we are to have faith in Jesus Christ it's not just kind of an ethereal vague hope it's not just a warm emotional feeling particularly at this time of year we are to have a sure and certain hope in the reality of the person of Jesus Christ and that is a reminder for us today that you have a personal responsibility as I have to know to relate to to have faith in and to trust Jesus Christ he's the only Savior he's the only redeemer he is the only hope we have Jesus Christ so faith in Jesus Christ has that personal

and individual reality but I think interestingly there's also a great focus there for us maybe inadvertently here in this passage but a great focus here for us in our evangelism when we as Christians go out with the gospel when we share the gospel when we tell other people about the gospel we need to focus on the focus we need to focus on Jesus Christ when we're sharing the gospel Christ is ego centric Christ draws the attention to himself Christ has no shame in that there is no false pride in that he says look the gospel is about me who do people say I am and I just thought what about you who do you say that I am so the gospel is really ego or Christ here is in an absolutely pure and humble and perfect way ego centric about the about himself and about the gospel we can spend a lot of time discussing around the edges of the gospel we can spend a lot of time on philosophical apologetics we can spend a lot of time talking about the church talking about creation talking about evolution we can do all of these things but it's tremendously important for us to move beyond these to move beyond ethics to move beyond morality to move beyond politics and recognize that the focus of evangelism and the focus of our faith and of the gospel is Jesus Christ himself so when you share the gospel the way you share the gospel will reflect the centrality or otherwise that Jesus has in your life if we only share our faith in kind of intellectual propositional terms it may be that that's the kind of faith that we emphasize an imp an intellectual propositional faith which it is but it's not only that it's relational and

Jesus is the core of evangelism who do people say that I am and as Jesus is the core of our lives he will also then be the core of our evangelism because he's changed our lives we'll be wanting to share him with other people so that their lives will be changed by Jesus Christ as well who do people say that I am we need to focus in our evangelism on the focus we need to pass on the good news about what Jesus has done for us as we share that with other people but also interestingly I think here is an aside as a really unintentional aspect to what Jesus is saying here it's not only important to focus on the focus I think also it's important for us to know what other people think it's no good just living in a Christian bubble with ourselves all the time it's important for us to know what other people think because Jesus clearly expected that of his disciples he presumed that they would know who do people say that I am it was almost implicit for them that they would have a knowledge and an understanding of what people generally around them were thinking about the coming of the

Christ Christ was interested in what other people thought of him and he presumed the disciples would also know about what other people thought of him anything that's good I think that's significant for us it's important for us to know where people are at it's important for us to know what they're thinking spiritually what they think about the gospel what they think about Christianity but most importantly what they think about Jesus Christ and it's not only important that we know what they know in other words we must be engaging with the world but it's also important for us to recognise that's a great way of introducing the gospel into conversation if we're you know wanting to speak about our faith and I don't mean in any way by ramming it down people's throats but if an opportunity arises that's a great question to channel people's thoughts and minds not you know what do you think of the church not even maybe at this early stage what do you think of the Bible but what do you think of Christ who do you think Christ is because you will find it will people will come up with different operative answers which will provide many opportunities to share the gospel so don't be afraid to ask people what they think about Jesus Christ because it might well be a tremendous opener into their hearts and also a great opener of conversation so Jesus asks these questions who do you say I am who do people say that I am these are questions about faith and they're questions that we must ask ourselves and it's good if we also know what other people are thinking but then we also see that Jesus gives answers about faith in this passage as well he speaks about the importance of or he gives answers to the questions in many ways that he asks and we're going to look at that for a moment or it not just the answers Jesus gives but even the answers that Peter gives here are significant in verse 29 an answer to Jesus question what about you who do you say that I am Peter gives a tremendously insightful answer he says you are the

[12 : 23] Christ you're the Christ Peter knew Jesus Christ he didn't only know about him he knew Christ now I know it's pre-cross I know it's in a sense well it is pre-pentecost it's also pre-New Testament as it were but nonetheless he had this relationship with Christ he knew that Christ was the Messiah and he knew as we understand from other scripture that he was his Messiah in the old Highland lingo we would say that Peter had the heart of the matter and that sometimes the way it would have been described when someone maybe didn't have a tremendously clear understanding but clearly had the heart of the matter in their understanding in seed form there's two very important things that

Jesus and that Peter understands about Jesus one that he is the Messiah that is that he's the Redeemer we read about the coming of the Christ in Isaiah chapter 9 and he is the anointed one he's the expected one he's the saviour of prophecy he didn't just stumble onto the world scene but he's the one who is the great hope for humanity the Redeemer now whoever else Jesus is for you he must be your Redeemer he must be you must embrace biblical language and embrace Old Testament prophetic understanding of the Messiah and acknowledge him not just as God not just as a religious figure but as the Redeemer in our understanding of faith we recognize we have faith in one that we need we need him he's our saviour he's a Redeemer he has provided for our salvation we are needy lost empty spiritually in darkness without him he has brought us back into fellowship and relationship with himself he's our Messiah now sometimes we're a bit uncomfortable with that language it's maybe a bit we feel it's a bit unknown in the kind of environment that we live in the kind of society the kind of thinking that we have but it is nonetheless a tremendously important concept for us to grasp you will never know Jesus Christ if you don't know need if you don't have a need for him he will never be your saviour if you are self-contained and content and happy with yourself as a person in relation to

God Jesus must be our Messiah he must be our saviour but within that understanding of Messiah or Christ is the whole idea of Lordship whole idea of kingship king of kings and we know already within the disciples kind of unclear understanding of Jesus at this point they knew enough to worship him he was their master and so Jesus Christ is not only a Redeemer but he must you know he's not oh that's great I've got a Redeemer oh well that's great I've enjoyed that I could put him away and I've covered now for another year he saved me and I can just live my life with him as Redeemer he's also our Lord he's also the one who has preeminence in our life the one who takes first place the one who we worship who we serve in whom we have faith genuine faith as we're looking at faith will always have this aspect of Lordship of primacy of importance of significance of glory of preeminence in our lives he can never be our second cousin once removed he's our elder brother he's our father he's our king he is close to us so in terms of answering the questions about faith not only is it has that personal aspect but it's a faith which involves knowing

Jesus Christ in these terms but also as we see getting to know him better Peter says you're the Christ and then Jesus goes on to teach them over a number of days many things primarily about his death he goes on in verse 31 say he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders chief priests and teachers the law they must be killed after three days rising in East spoke plainly about this so there was a need for the disciples as there is a need for us to learn more about Jesus and there's a double rebuke rebuke's maybe too strong a word certainly for the former situation but there are two times where Jesus kind of speaks to the disciples firstly in verse 30 where he warns them not to tell anyone about him so there's more a warning than a rebuke but then in verse 32 he rebukes Peter because Peter knew better than Jesus you're not going to go to the cross and die and so he rebuked Jesus Jesus rebuked Peter so as Jesus is teaching them about knowing him better part of that teaching is a rebuke from Jesus he called him to silence because they really didn't know enough about Jesus Christ to declare him the time wasn't ready for them to declare about Jesus Christ they had many important things to learn about Jesus before sharing Jesus and they were not to have not a lack of knowledge to match a clear zeal so he called them to silence but then there was Peter's cry of stupidity where he rebuked Jesus it was as proud in many ways as it was foolish why because it was an attack at the very heart of the gospel at the very heart of the very heart of faith of knowing this Jesus it was a temptation from the pit of hell to avoid the cross coming through his best friend and that is why Jesus spoke so strongly against what Peter was saying he knew the way of the cross was absolutely crucial and he wants us to know that as well with regard to our faith in him it's a solemn reminder to us that Jesus Christ and knowing Jesus Christ involves more than just emotion and involves more than just warm cuddly feelings but involves knowing him for who he was and who he is and that we need to keep on getting to know him and keep on learning about him and if we have a faith that fails to focus on the cross of Jesus Christ we will always be flirting with heresy we

will always be flirting with lies we will always be in danger of moving away from orthodoxy and moving away from life and from light and from hope because the cross is central to Jesus's Messiah and central to our understanding so the objective or sorry the subjective truth of knowing Jesus that we've spoken about is matched or is dovetailed with this objective truth of the cross of what Jesus came to do it's no good today saying I love Jesus but I hate theology because the two are absolutely dovetailed together the theology of the cross the radical teaching of a crucified Savior is utterly significant and important for us and we can't have one with you without the other John describes Jesus as the word and we recognize that Jesus hears teaching about himself because we need to understand about him you know famous people will reveal things about themselves in magazines so we can get to know them better occasionally they will tell us kind of more personal things about themselves so that we get to know them better they control that of course and it's usually just the things that they want us to know about themselves not so keen on the other stuff but always knowledge of a person involves understanding more facts about them and the cross is central and that was that's radical teaching it was radical for the disciples and it remains radical for us a suffering Messiah we just don't like the whole concept but it's very important it reminds us that salvation the nature of salvation itself is about a suffering sacrificial

[23 : 40] Savior big words like the atonement propitiation substitution wrath of God being appeased all of these things matter in our understanding of Jesus Christ we can never graduate from a crucified and risen Savior there's no sacrament to remember the birth of Jesus but there is for the death of Jesus because it's so significant and so important not only to the nature of salvation but to the nature of God himself because Colossians remind us that in Jesus in gentle Jesus making mild in the manger is the fullness of deity that the nature of the whole triune God is wrapped up in swaddling clothes as it were as the incarnation is at the very heart of who God is and what he has done for us this is very basic very important for us and we realign ourselves maybe at the end of the year towards these important aspects of faith it's always dangerous isn't it we kind of poo poo the idea of idolatry today and we think well that's what happens in pagan countries or in the past and we immediately think of wooden or golden or other kind of ugly idols that people foolishly worship but it's very easy to make Christ or to be idolatrous in our understanding of Jesus

Jesus that we have made up in our own image a Jesus that doesn't go the way of the cross a Jesus that doesn't demand our preeminent loyalty and love a Jesus who doesn't require us to fall on our knees at the cross and say I need you because I'm lost and I'm a sinner Christ that is not holy a Christ that is not pure a Christ that is not our judge a Christ that is not eternal all kinds of things that we can do to make Christ an idol of Jesus Christ so let's remember as we close our thoughts on this passage and think about faith and on Friday morning hopefully we'll look more at the fruit of faith and the fruit of having Christ in our lives and what that involves can we remind ourselves in our faith how central that relationship with Jesus is your prayer life you're talking to him we just don't have genuine relationships with people we don't know and don't speak to and if you're struggling in your faith and if you're drifting from your faith and Christ seems very far away from you and irrelevant to you can I ask are you speaking with him are you in relationship with him are you praying to him are you reading about him and reading him in his word are you taking that time what about you Jesus says what about your relationship with me the centrality of that relationship with Jesus Christ that moves beyond propositional truth and family culture and all that goes with it are you working that relationship out because it's required not working for our salvation but working out that relationship and within that relationship is the cross central is Christ crucified central in our lives in our testimonies in our understanding of faith let's throw out this crazy notion of cosmic child abuse and recognize that the universe revolves around a crucified risen Savior who is the only Savior and that he sits in glory with nail pierced hands for our sins you will see that and I will see that one day we are to have this daily dependence on this Christ and also to remind ourselves the supremacy of his word for us as the disciples were taught by Jesus and even reacted against his teaching so we must recognize that Jesus will go on teaching us and that sometimes our sinful hearts might react against that but he's good as I said in prayer at the beginning and he loves us remember that even the bad things that happen in our lives he's good he can never be anything other than perfectly good and that he loves us and in his word we are to submit to it we're to know it we're to love it we're to understand it we're to be taught through his spirit working in our conscience and in our minds were to be students of him students of the word who is Jesus Christ but to be serious about that just as I spoke about prayer in relationship so reading the word so significant not in a perfunctory way not just in a superstitious way but in a humble prayerful

living way looking for Christ to teach and to lead and to guide us let's not think too highly of ourselves but with sober reflection recognizing that we often just like Peter and the disciples will get it wrong we'll often be tempted to betray him we'll often be tempted to ignore him to run away from him to deny him just like the disciples were but let us by his Holy Spirit and by his grace depend on him be filled with his love know his power in our lives to purchase great that you're here today if you were here last year then it's great you're here this year God has kept you as a Christian over this last year you've persevered by his grace and we unless we are with him in glory we'll be here next year by his grace so let's rely on him let's depend on him let's look to him and let's power heads in prayer father we thank you for who you are and we thank you for speaking to us about the nature of the faith that we should have in you its character and its shape and we thank you that that faith is a gift that it's not something we can earn or not something we can simply manufacture by a head understanding of your truth but it is a gift that we're to humbly accept and to nurture in our hearts so bless us and help us we pray and guide us and deepen our faith give us more faith we pray Lord I believe help my unbelief may that be my and our prayer today a deal with the sin that separates us from you and that makes us cold-hearted and loveless and bless us as we think more about the fruit of faith on Friday morning on the first day of 2010 if by your grace you allow us to meet together we long and look forward to these privileges in Jesus name amen