

FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: Mark 8:27-33

DATE: 2022-03-06

Series: Jesus' Perspective: Acquiring the Mind of Christ

SERMON: "Understanding Who Christ Is."

(Credit Dennis Kinlaw – The Mind of Christ)

Introduction

Have you ever worked so closely or played a sport with someone for so long that you begin to know your teammate's next move before they even make it?

Early in my career as a pastor, I worked with pastor Buck on the woodcutting ministry. Back then, most of the trees we cut up were apple trees. Orchard owners would push the trees out and we would go in and trim the small branches off, leaving just the large limbs and the trunk.

So that when the whole work crew would come in on a Saturday, they could easily and efficiently cut up the wood, split it and haul it away to people in need.

In the trimming process, Buck and I discovered that it was quicker for one man to cut the small branches, and the other man to pull them out of the way. When we started, I would cut a branch and Buck would pull it away. **At first**, it was always a guess as to which branch we should cut off next. But after a while of working together - and we trimmed literally thousands of apple trees like that - after a while, Buck knew which branch I was going to cut next and I knew which branch he would reach for next. Very few wasted movements.

When it came to trimming apple trees for firewood – we just started thinking alike. It seemed like we made the same decision at the same time. We were pretty impressive, we thought, and we were getting a little bit big headed about how good we were at it.

Then one day, we worked with the brothers from Mohn's Lumber. I remember Buck's

comment afterwards. “Ray, we’re still amateurs comes to cutting up a tree.” But I digress.

The point I intended to make was, we worked so closely together on that project we began to think like - to have the same mind about trimming trees if you will. We just knew each other’s next move. That same mind caused us to behave alike on that job.

Now **switch gears** with me for a moment.

I want to turn our attention to a passage of Scripture: Mark 8, where we encounter the subject of “thinking like someone else,” or “having the same mind as someone else.”

Mark’s gospel, chapter 8, appears to be a turning point in the whole book as Mark shares his version of the life of Jesus. Halfway through his book, Mark relates this story of Jesus and his disciples.

Mark 8:27-33 Jesus and his disciples left Galilee and went up to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. As they were walking along, he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

²⁸ “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets.”

²⁹ Then Jesus asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

Peter replied, “You are the Messiah.”

Peter got it right. He appears to really know who Jesus is. He had ‘arrived’ as a disciple we might say. But let’s go on.

³¹ Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead.

³² As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and

began to reprimand him for saying such things. ³³ Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. “Get away from me, Satan!” he said. “You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.”

Note the last phrase. Jesus says to Peter: “**you are looking at this from a human point of view and not from God’s point of view.**” Essentially, “Peter, you don’t have God’s perspective on this.”

This is a key phrase for us in this sermon series that I have called “**Jesus’ Perspective**” (graphic) I have subtitled it: “**How we can acquire the mind of Christ.**”

1st I want us to see how **biblical writers expect us to have the mind of Christ** and what they mean when they write that.

2nd I hope to show us how we, just like Peter, may be **Missing the Messiah King, because we don’t really understand who Jesus is.** We are often looking for the wrong things, and sometimes we don’t like the real Jesus when we understand who he really is. I believe God can change our minds and hearts about that.

So, let me ask you:

Would you like to learn to think like Jesus? So that if he was in your situation, his next move, his attitude about the situation and towards the people involved, his priorities, would be the same as the move or decision you are choosing to make. Where you would feel what Jesus was feeling? You would prioritize like Jesus?

Perhaps that seems a little far-fetched – maybe even impossible. But is it?

Dennis Kinlaw, in his book, “How every Christian can have the mind of Christ” makes this bold statement:

“God can enable people to think as he thinks.”

The mind of Christ, the way Jesus thinks, is on open display throughout the bible. And many biblical writers seem to indicate that this mind is available to people. Though more than a

few seem to miss it.

Now, when we say acquiring the mind of Christ we are talking about more than just obeying Jesus – or **outward** behavior – where we would do what we know Jesus expects us to do.

When we say, “We want to have the mind of Christ,” we are talking about having his **perspective** on things. And having his **attitude**. How he feels about stuff. We are talking about making Jesus’ **priorities** our priorities – not just because we know we should, but because that is who we really are in our hearts. That is a good bit more difficult than just obeying Jesus.

We want our hearts to become like his **heart**.

While that may seem, at first, like an impossibility for humans, various passages in both the Old and New Testaments indicate, God does enable people to think like he thinks.

I pray we have a hunger to see the world and other humans from God’s perspective. And then act and react in the way God does. This is having the mind of Christ. I believe we should:

Expect to Acquire the Mind of Christ

In the New Testament the word used to refer to the “Mind of Christ,” is the Greek word **“phroneo,”** or some form of it. It is used over 29 times. For example:

In Mark 8 Jesus says to Peter:

Mark 8:33 “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

He’s saying, “Peter, you do not have God’s perspective on this. You are not thinking like God, even though you just acknowledged that I am the Messiah. Peter, you don’t yet understand what it means to be the Messiah. It’s not what you think. In fact, your mind is like

Satan's. Get away from me." What a stinging rebuke.

In [Philippians 2:5](#) Paul writes, **In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:**

Some translations use the word "**attitude**" here. "Have the same **attitude** Jesus has towards others." Or **be towards each other the way Jesus is towards you.**

In [Romans 8:5](#) we read, **Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think (or set their minds) about things that please the Spirit.**

The sense of the word here includes the **desires of our hearts** – what we long for, what we want. This same idea is found in:

Colossians 3:2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

I want us to notice that "having the mind of Christ" is not pointing us to a set of beliefs or just a way of thinking. We are not even challenged to live by a set of rules. To "have the mind of Christ" is to have his **perspective**, his **attitude**, his **affections** and his **priorities**. And we are challenged to let his perspective guide our lives.

The Gospels challenge us to think the way Jesus thinks. The letters of Paul and others emphasize that we should expect the mind of Christ to be given to us by God.

But even in the Old Testament we find something similar although the phrase, "Mind of Christ" is not mentioned in the OT. The phrase we find in the OT is a Hebrew idiom, where we read, "**So and So walked with God.**"

Enoch walked with God; then he was no more.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God.

Elijah the prophet, went walking with God one day and ended up in heaven.

King **Hezekiah** was able to say to the Lord:

“I have walked before you in faithfulness, with a whole heart...”

These servants of God apparently shared God’s thoughts, his affections, and goals, and were in intimate relationship with him.

God declared through the prophet Ezekiel;

Ezekiel 36:26-27 “I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.”

This is the OT way of expressing God’s desire, and plan, of giving people the “Mind of Christ.”

So, throughout the bible, a major theme is that **God can and will enable people to think as God thinks.**

Certainly, there are times that our thoughts are not God’s thoughts, that our perspective is not the same as God’s perspective, but Paul and others write as if we should expect to have the mind of Christ and live that way. So:

How can we begin to acquire the mind of Christ?

Acquiring the Mind of Christ begins, I believe, with Understanding Who Jesus Is.

Too often we do not know Jesus well. This is not peculiar to us. The Jews of Jesus’ day, even his own disciples struggled in the same way. They did not **understand** who he was. Peter got the correct answer, that Jesus was the Messiah. But he didn’t understand what it meant to be God’s Messiah.

I think our minds can be just as far off. Our perspective of who Jesus is, and what it means to be a Jesus follower can be just as distorted. And it keeps **us** from acquiring the mind of Christ. So, let’s consider how the Jews missed the Messiah King.

And as we go through these points, I challenge each of us to do some self-evaluating. Are we missing Jesus because we don't see him for who he really is? Are we:

Missing the Messiah King

The Jews knew that the Christ would come as a king. A king usually enters his kingdom with a throne, a crown, a scepter and a group of servants ready to do his bidding. These are the symbols of his power.

Yet when Jesus, the King of Kings, entered his kingdom, that is not the way he came. John's Gospel depicts the kingly power of Jesus using **Four symbols of Jesus the King**. But those symbols contradict the world's understanding of a king. Let's consider them briefly and notice how often we think like the Jews and the disciples.

1st symbol.

The Rejectable King

In John's Gospel we are told that Jesus **"came to his own home, and his own people did not receive him."** John expands on this image in the book of Revelation where Jesus says, **"Listen, I'm standing at the door knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you and you with me."**

There is a painting by Holman Hunt, titled **"The light of the world."** (pic) It depicts Jesus standing at a door and knocking. He wears a crown on his head and carries a lantern in his hand – hence the title "The light of the world." But Jesus knocks at a door that has no handle. There is no way of opening the door from his side.

Think about it. No head of state has to knock at anyone's door. The President of the United States does not knock at doors. The president's aides go ahead of the president to open the doors. They make sure that the president never gets in a situation where he can be rejected. Because that would be a snub, an embarrassment.

Yet the King of Kings came into the world as one who knocks – one who is vulnerable and rejectable. The Jews did not expect that. They wanted a king who would come in power

and pomp to expel the Romans from the land. Yet Jesus came, not to deal with the Roman menace, but to see whether his people would accept him. So he knocked, and he is still knocking.

Jesus knocks daily on each of our lives and waits for us to invite him in to each situation. He does not force his way in or even impose himself on us. **How often are you inviting Jesus into what you are doing?** Or do you ignore his knock? Particularly if you know he would not be happy with the decision you are about to make or the attitude you have. (Pause)

Another symbol from John:

The Humble King

The second image of the Messiah appears 3 ½ years later in John's narrative, as Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. People of the city had heard about his miracles. They know about his power. Just a few days before, not far from the city, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. By Palm Sunday everyone in Jerusalem has talked about Lazarus.

So the whole city turns out to greet Jesus. They hail him as their Messiah King. **“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel.”** They are ready to crown him as their king.

At that moment, Jesus mounts a donkey to ride into the city. No Roman general ever entered Jerusalem on a donkey. No Egyptian Pharaoh used a donkey to pull his chariot.

In the ancient world, a horse symbolized power. The donkey on the other hand, was a humble beast of burden. But without question, Jesus on a donkey is a sign of the Messiah. Zechariah, the prophet, said “the one riding on a donkey is an intentional act of The Messiah.”

It is as if Jesus were telling the exultant crowd, “I am your king. But I am not the kind of king you expect. I am not coming in physical power or military might to destroy your enemies. In fact, I say, ‘Love your enemies.’ I come, not to impose something on you, but to offer you redemption. So, I come meekly, humbly.”

Most of us like the horse style of dealing with other people, rather than the donkey style. The horse is a symbol of worldly glory – power and might to destroy. We like to have the admiration that horse riders can command. But Jesus does not come to seek glory; he comes to serve not to be served. So, he rides on a donkey. The Jews, who had great ambitions for their Messiah, could not understand why he did this.

Sometimes we have great ambitions for how God ought to act on our behalf as Christians – or for the church – defeating those who oppose us. And we may even try to impose those ambitions on God by declaring that God will overpower our enemies, and give us what we are sure He wants. But such thinking is backwards compared to the mind of Christ. And at those times we are seeing things from man’s perspective, not from Jesus’ perspective.

Is your first inclination of how to deal with those who oppose you, a humble approach? Or is some other aggressive, defiant approach foremost in your mind? (Pause)

A third symbol.

The servant King

The 3rd kingly symbol is seen on the following Thursday night as Jesus takes his disciples to an upper room to observe the Passover meal. There, he takes a basin and towel, kneels on the floor and begins washing their feet. Peter looks incredulously at him and says, “Lord, you are never going to wash my feet.”

Imagine the trauma in Peter’s heart that night. Jesus was kneeling in front of him. That can’t be right. He’s the King of Kings. But Jesus simply wants Peter and all of his disciples to know that he is their servant. If you are offended by the idea of Jesus being your servant, you have the same problem Peter had.

And when we think that way, we still think as the world thinks not as God thinks. And when we think that we should not have to serve others, we are thinking as the world thinks and not as God thinks.

So, by way of self-evaluation, **“Are you regularly looking for opportunities to serve others?”** (Pause)

The 4th symbol:

The self-sacrificing King

The 4th unexpected symbol of the Messiah is found in John's story of Good Friday - the next day. Author Dorothy Sayers said that:

“Human history is filled with examples of men and women dying for their gods, but who would've imagined a God who would die for his people?”

But that's how it was on Good Friday. Jesus died on a cross, without putting up a fight. As the people of Jerusalem viewed the cross, they must've thought, “There's the conclusive proof that this fellow is not the Christ: he dies like any other man. He is an imposter.”

But they were rejecting him for exactly the reason that they should have fallen at his feet and adored him. They should have adored him because their own salvation came through Jesus sacrificing himself.

See, Jesus knew the only way for him to accomplish his mission was to go to the cross. He had said, **“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just as a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit.”**

Do you notice what the Son of God is saying? **God himself does not act to redeem us without going the way of self-sacrifice.**

And so it is. If we wish to bear fruit for God we must be willing to do the same – die to self. If we want to think like God thinks. If we want the mind of Christ, we must come to the end of ourselves.

When we understand who Jesus is, the self-sacrificing Messiah and King, and when we embrace a life of self-sacrifice for others, rather than trying to embrace a life of preserving ourselves, we have begun to acquire the mind of Christ.

A young man, Joe, was working for Ford Motor Company. He was moving rapidly up the corporate ladder and felt that God was blessing him.

But one day he felt God saying to him “you’re working in the wrong place.”

“Lord, what do you mean, I’m working in the wrong place?”

“I don’t want you working for Ford Motor Company anymore I want you to work for hospice, helping people die.” Joe chose to follow that leading.

Working for hospice, Joe was given the task of caring for a client who was very infectious. He was told to wear special clothes and rubber gloves, whenever he was with the man.

But Joe said, as he got ready to go into take care of the man he thought, “Wait a minute. This man is a fellow human being for whom Christ died. He has not felt the touch of another human for a long time. I am not going to wear all of that special uniform and rubber gloves.”

Joe walked into the room went over to the bed, leaned down put his arms around the pitiful man and hugged him to himself. Joe said to the man, “I’m here because I love you. One day Jesus Christ came into my heart and put his love inside me. So I love you.”

This began a conversation about Jesus and Joe was privileged to lead the man to Christ before the man passed away.

The key to the story is this. Joe came to the place, through the grace of God, where he cared more about the patient with an infectious disease than he cared about himself. That’s not our normal way of thinking about things, but it’s the way Christ thinks. Christ came to deliver us from the destructive tyranny of self-interest and self-preservation.

Jesus demonstrated that to us by living a life that was totally “other-focused” and not self-focused. When we get this understanding of who Jesus is, we are beginning to acquire the Mind of Christ.

Do you find yourself focusing first on self-preservation, rather than self-sacrifice?

Jesus came to show us the Father's heart. He came to demonstrate that **"God so loved the world that he gave us his son to die for us."** Because the first century Jews did not understand that, they did not recognize Christ for who he was. The Gospel of John shows that Israel did not think the way God thought.

The typical religious person of Jesus day supposed that salvation was a means of 'taking care of oneself.' We often think the same way. We often think of salvation "as how can I take care of myself." The Jews did not understand how much God cared for the entire world. And so they could not believe how far God was willing to go to save the world.

We wonder how the Jews and the religious leaders missed Jesus. They missed him because of their **sinful self-centeredness**. They saw things backwards. They did not understand who he was.

We often miss Jesus for the same reason – sinful self-centeredness and thinking that Jesus cares more about us than he cares for everyone else – at least we act that way.

Kinlaw writes:

How far was God was willing to go in order to reach you and me? We don't expect to find God among the oxen, but that's where Jesus was. We don't expect the sovereign God to enter this world in the form of a baby, but that's how he came. And we don't expect the one on whom our existence depends to be dependent on one of us, but he was. God loved us so much that he was willing to reverse our roles. He became one of us so that we might have his nature and have fellowship with him. What an awesome truth. Because it is so awesome, the Jews missed him – and so do many of us. (Kinlaw)

In Revelation, that great book that depicts the final triumph of God, in Revelation 4 and 5, if you remember, the door of heaven has opened and John has looked in to see the throne of God. The 24 elders are casting their crowns before him and the living creatures are there crying out, **"you are worthy, our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power. Behold the Lion of the Tribe of Judah."**

The lion of the tribe of Judah was the symbol of David's dynasty.

It was an upright, regal lion, standing on his hind legs with his forelegs extended his claws out. So when John turns to see the lion of the tribe of Judah, he sees: I'll let John tell it.

One of the Elders said, "Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David's throne, has won the victory. He is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals."

⁶ I saw a Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered, but it was now standing between the throne and the four living beings and among the twenty-four elders.

The King of Kings is a slaughtered lamb, not a roaring lion.

I think it is significant that in the book of Revelation, the figure of the lion is mentioned only one time; the symbol of the lamb appears 27 times. The book of Revelation repeatedly emphasizes that the lamb will reign in the new creation God establishes.

He is the Lamb who has been slain from the foundation of the world.

Now, Do you understand who Jesus really is?

Pray