

**FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH**  
**9244 Five Forks Road**  
**Waynesboro, PA 17268-9612**                      **Tel: (717) 762-2991**

---

*SCRIPTURE: Mark 9-16, Philippians 2, Acts 1-5*

*DATE: 2022-03-13*

*Series: Jesus' Perspective*

*SERMON: "Understanding Who We Are"*

---

## **Introduction**

**Yoseph Sahn** was the pastor of a large church in Romania at a time of some of the most brutal treatment of Christians and Yoseph spoke out against it. The government sent the police to his home to interrogate Yoseph, five days a week and sometimes up to seven hours a day. Sometimes they would interrogate him with a loaded pistol on the table in front of the interrogator. The intent was to mentally destroy him.

One day after a very grueling period of questioning, Yoseph went into his study, and fell to the floor sobbing. He said "God, I can't take anymore."

He then began to read from a devotional book by E Stanley Jones on "How to live above your circumstances." It was about Jesus facing the cross. Jones had said, "Jesus did not resist the cross. Instead, Jesus embraced the cross."

Yoseph prayed, "God, you surely don't mean I'm supposed to embrace my interrogators?"

"Yes," the Lord said, "That is exactly what I mean."

Yoseph replied, "Well, God, if you want me to do that, you must do something in my heart that you have never done before."

And that is exactly what the Lord did. Yoseph walked back into the interrogation room ready to embrace his trial. He said the change in the atmosphere was almost comical. Before that time, the pastor had been in trauma but now the chief interrogator was the one in trauma

because he had lost control of his subject. The chief interrogator was beside himself. He finally spun around in anger and said, “You are stupid. I guess we’ll just have to go ahead and kill you.”

Yoseph found himself saying, “I understand, sir. That’s your ultimate weapon. When everything else has failed, you can always kill. But you know, I have an ultimate weapon too. And when you use your ultimate weapon, I get to use mine.”

“What’s your ultimate weapon?” The interrogator angrily demanded.

“Your ultimate weapon is to kill.” Yoseph said. “Mine is to die. When I die, I will be much better off. But your troubles will be just beginning. You will have much more trouble with me dead than you have with me alive.”

Yoseph said later, **“When I was pulling every string to try to save my life, I was at my wits end. But when I turned the strings loose and let Christ have complete control, I was free.”**

That is thinking like God thinks – being willing to give up your life for others, rather than trying to save it.

Dennis Kinlaw wrote: **“God can enable people to think as He thinks.”**

We said last week this means acquiring **Jesus’ perspective** (series graphic) on life, the world, and others, and then learning to respond to life situations the way Jesus would.

We believe this is at the heart of what it means when we say we want to be Jesus followers. It is more than just what we know and believe about Jesus. It is even more than just obeying what Jesus says. We are talking about developing the very attitudes and emotions and priorities that Jesus has.

This quest **to acquire the mind of Christ begins with understanding who Christ is.**

We looked briefly at that fascinating story in Mark, where one moment, Peter is declaring to Jesus, “You are the Messiah.” And a few moments later, Jesus turns to Peter, and says, “Get behind me, Satan.” Peter knew Jesus was the Messiah but had not yet acquired Jesus’ perspective.

**Mark’s Gospel** is a fascinating study that seems to hinge on that story.

**Mark 1 – 8** seems to be focusing on the life of Jesus that points to the reality of **who Jesus is**. Jesus is the Messiah, no question about it. He is able to meet the needs of all people, whether Jew or Gentile.

He deals with the **intellectual** needs of people, their thinking.

He addressed the **spiritual** needs of people. He rebukes and casts out demons. Jesus even forgave people’s sins.

He dealt with the **physical** needs of people, healing the sick, and feeding the hungry.

Jesus embraced those who were left on the fringes of society – dealing with their **emotional and relational needs**. The outcasts, the marginalized, the despised, the broken and hurting.

Mark shows us, **Jesus is the Savior of the world**. He is completely adequate to meet every need. This is what Peter really declares when he says, “Jesus, you are the Messiah.”

So, the disciples have taken the first step we all must take as we strive to become disciples.

The **First Step** is: **Find out who Jesus is**. Often it is not what we thought at first.

The **Second Step** in becoming a disciple is: **Find out who You are**.

Very interestingly, the second half of Mark’s gospel, **Mark 9-16**, seems to show **Who the Disciples really Are**. The disciples had not yet begun to think like Jesus, although they knew

who he was.

In Mark 9 – 16 we find Jesus, time and again, explaining and showing the disciples that being the Messiah, the Savior, means, above all, self-sacrifice, and that he is going to his death on the cross.

This is his ultimate expression of being a self-sacrificing king, rather than a nation conquering king. It is also the ultimate expression of love.

Jesus said, **“Greater love has no man than this, than a man lay down his life for his friends.”** He also said **“If you want to be my disciple, denounce self and take up my cross and follow me.”**

The disciples didn’t get that part at first. In fact, there is not one story in the second half of Mark’s gospel, that portrays the disciples in a positive light. Mark shows how **Disciples of Jesus need to learn to know who they are and how they think.**

**We will consider this for a few minutes, and as Mark reveals who the disciples really were, I invite you to picture yourself as one of them. Perhaps you can see yourself in them and discover some about yourself.**

1<sup>st</sup>, the disciples tended to be **self-reliant.**

One story finds the disciples unable to cast out a demon. A desperate father brings his son to Jesus.

**9:17 “Teacher, I brought my son so you could heal him. He is possessed by an evil spirit that won’t let him talk. I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn’t do it.”**

**<sup>19</sup> Jesus said to them, “You faithless people! How long must I be with you? Bring the boy to me.”** And Jesus proceeds to cast the demon out of the boy.

**<sup>28</sup> Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, “Why couldn’t we cast out that evil spirit?”**

**29 Jesus replied, “This kind can be cast out only by prayer.”**

**Faith or ‘trust’ in someone else is an expression of our own inability.** When we say we are trusting Jesus to handle a situation, we are admitting that we cannot handle it on our own. So, when Jesus says to the crowd, including the disciples, by the way, “You, faithless people,” he is essentially pointing out that they were depending or **relying on themselves** to cast out the demon. And they could not. They apparently “lost faith” in the Lord.

The same thing happens to us. When we feel self-confident or self-adequate or self-reliant, we too lose faith, or “stop trusting,” or relying on, the Lord.

Then Jesus explained to the disciples that “this kind of demon can only be cast out by prayer.” Apparently, the disciples neglected to pray this time. **Prayer is an expression of dependance on God.** The disciples lost their ability to cast out demons when they lost their sense of dependence on God. The disciples were still self-reliant.

**Have you ever faced a situation and neglected to pray?** Of course, we all have – if we think we can handle it. But if it looks like a very difficult situation, we are more likely to remember to pray. However, we often act self-reliant, just like the disciples.

The disciples were also **status seekers.**

After the incident with the demonized boy, Jesus and the disciples were walking along and Jesus talks with his disciples about going to the cross. The disciples didn’t understand what he was talking about but were afraid to ask. Instead they proceeded to talk among themselves. Mark continues:

**9:33 After they arrived at Capernaum and settled in a house, Jesus asked his disciples, “What were you discussing out on the road?” 34 But they didn’t answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. 35 He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, and said, “Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else.”** Essentially – “Give up your status.”

Then Jesus uses the illustration of a child to make his point. A child, in that day, was a

person of no status. Jesus is saying, “If you want to be considered great in my kingdom, give up your status.” That sounds crazy, how can you be great if you have no status? But it only sounds crazy if you are **not** seeing things from Jesus’ perspective.

Shortly after this, the disciples would scold some parents for bothering Jesus by bringing their children to him. The disciples didn’t get it did they? This occurs just after Jesus used a child to illustrate what it means to be great in his kingdom. The disciples still thought status mattered in Jesus’ life. They did not have the mind of Christ.

By going to the cross, Jesus gave up all his status. Paul said Jesus, “**did not consider equality with God, (Status), something to be grasped.**”

Who were the disciples? The disciples were still those who were grasping for status, rather than embracing the life of humility.

If you are impressed with yourself when important people acknowledge you, and you feel the pride growing in your chest when that happens, and you tell as many people as possible about it, you are one who still seeks status.

Or if you are offended when you are **not** recognized publicly, for something that you did, or who you are, you are still a status seeker. If you are offended because someone else is promoted and you are not, you are a status seeker and don’t yet have the mind of Christ.

I am not saying we should not recognize people and their accomplishments. But it is when we are offended, that we don’t receive the recognition we think we deserve, then we are status seekers.

The disciples were also **clinging to power.**

The disciples came across a man casting out demons – something they have failed to do. And so they tell the man to stop, because he wasn’t, “one of them.”

**9:38 John said to Jesus, “Teacher, we saw someone using your name to cast out demons, but we told him to stop because he wasn’t in our group.”**

<sup>39</sup> “Don’t stop him!” Jesus said. “No one who performs a miracle, (a display of power) in my name will soon be able to speak evil of me. <sup>40</sup> Anyone who is not against us is for us.

The person was threatening the disciples’ power and influence, and they wanted him to stop that. Jesus freely gave up his power when he allowed himself to be crucified.

When we begin worrying that others will gain more power and influence than we have, it is a signal that we are clinging to power and don’t have the mind of Christ.

The disciples **sought after authority.** (Mark 10)

**10:35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came over and spoke to [Jesus]. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do us a favor.”**

<sup>36</sup> “What is your request?” he asked.

<sup>37</sup> They replied, “When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left.”

<sup>41</sup> When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. <sup>42</sup> So Jesus called them together (again) and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. <sup>43</sup> But among you it will be different.

When we claim authority, (implying, “you must listen to me,”) because of a position we hold, or because we think we have superior information than someone else, we are not thinking like Christ. This is the scourge of so many social media posts – people claiming to “be in the know.” Sadly, it is common among many who claim to follow Jesus. But I don’t think we really see things from Jesus’ perspective when we have that attitude.

The disciples were **unreliable companions who looked out for themselves first.**

After the last supper Jesus has this conversation with his disciples.

**14:27 He told them, “All of you will desert me.”**

**<sup>29</sup> Peter said to him, “Even if everyone else deserts you, I never will.”**

**<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you even know me.”**

**<sup>31</sup> “No!” Peter declared emphatically. “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!” And all the others vowed the same.**

A short time later we read.

**<sup>50</sup> Then all his disciples deserted him and ran away.**

And not long after that we read:

**<sup>71</sup> Peter swore, “A curse on me if I’m lying - I don’t know this man you’re talking about!”**

**<sup>72</sup> And immediately the rooster crowed the second time.**

**Suddenly, Jesus’ words flashed through Peter’s mind: “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you even know me.” And he broke down and wept.**

How different this is from Jesus, whom Matthew tells us said:

**Matthew 28 “Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** And Jesus warns of dire consequences for those who deny Him. Having the mind of Christ means standing firm even in the face of persecution and hardship. It does not mean destroying your enemies. That is God’s job, not ours.

As I said, the disciples are not portrayed in a very positive light after they declared that Jesus was the Messiah.

The disciples **did not yet recognize who they were**. They did not realize they were still selfish, self-seeking, self-centered, self-preserving. They still thought this way even though they had been in close relationship with Jesus for three years. And Jesus had modeled the selfless life for them.

**The disciples' problem is our problem.** Not ours only but the problem for many would-be followers of Jesus, in the early church and down through the ages of the church.

I believe many of us are aware that too often we are like the disciples in the second half of Mark,

Kinlaw comments:

**The body of Christ has never learned. We still squabble for position. We fight for power. We want what we want, when we want it.**

Thankfully, Paul helps us in his letter to the church at Philippi by pointing out **4 Ungodly Characteristics** that prevent us from acquiring the mind of Christ. Characteristics that I believe keep Holy Spirit from transforming us into people that think like Jesus.

**Philippians 2:3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others.**

**<sup>5</sup> You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.**

**<sup>13</sup> For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.**

**<sup>14</sup> Do everything without complaining and arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.**

**Verse 5** shows us that the expectation is for Jesus followers: to have the same attitude as Jesus – others-centered not self-centered. This is having the mind of Christ – Jesus'

perspective on things, thinking the way Jesus thinks.

**Verse 13** shows that it is God working in us who gives us the desire and the power to please God. What hinders this is 4 Ungodly Characteristics we must be aware of that all too often rear their ugly heads in our lives. We don't always recognize they are there. Part of finding out who we are is learning to recognize these characteristics in ourselves.

1<sup>st</sup> one:

### **Self Interest**

This is the supreme characteristic of a sinful person. It has been said, sinfulness is when we are "curved inward upon ourselves." "Life is mostly about me."

On the other hand, the purpose of the salvation offered by Christ, is to undo our distorted inward orientation. **Salvation is to turn us outward, so that we are no longer interested in ourselves but in the well-being of others.** That is a big change from "getting saved to avoid hell." Salvation is not mainly about "saving our own skin." It is more about becoming someone whom God will use to save others.

When we understand sin as "self-interest," we begin to see, the essence of Christian living is making oneself a servant to others as Christ is a servant.

Self-interest is demonstrated well by the question, "**What's in it for me?**" Jesus never strived to get anything for himself. The Gospels relate no instance in which Jesus' self-interest was his first consideration. He was always more concerned about others.

Can you imagine Jesus thinking, when Jairus asked him to heal his daughter, "But what's in it for me?" Even mentioning such an idea offends us because that attitude is utterly opposite to what Jesus represented. He came to lay down his life for his sheep (John 10:15). Jesus did not come to protect himself; rather, he came to spend himself.

Jesus expressed the New Testament lifestyle like this: "**Love one another as I have loved you.**" (John 15:12). Jesus changed the pattern of personal priorities when he became the shepherd who sacrificed himself for his sheep.

Another ungodly characteristic to get rid of.

**Conceit** - worrying about whether you look good, to other people.

A Christian should be unconcerned about elevating his own status or doing things for the sake of appearances.

How often we fall short of doing God's will because we are overly concerned about appearances. Jesus exemplified a life unconcerned with appearances. He talked with a Samaritan woman; he touched lepers; he cared nothing about how he looked before his disciples or the public.

It is so hard to not have, and even nurture an attitude that continually asks, "How does that make me look in the eyes of people watching?" We need to recognize such an attitude in ourselves and let go of it.

Another ungodly characteristic we struggle to let go of:

**Murmuring or Complaining**

This is the self-pitying attitude that says, "I deserve better than this." It is another mark that we are not thinking like Jesus.

When Helen Roseveare graduated from medical school in Cambridge, she went to an area of Zaire, Africa, where 200,000 people lived without a doctor. She made that her mission field. As her medical work progressed she decided to build a hospital. She wrote to her mother, asking for a book about how to build a hospital; her mother sent her a book about how to make bricks. So Helen found herself teaching the Africans how to make kiln-fired bricks.

As they were taking the first load from the kiln, and she began pulling the spines off the new bricks, she realized that her fingers were wet. They were dripping blood where she had broken her fingernails. She thought, "Lord, I didn't come to Africa to make bricks. I came here to be a surgeon. Surely there is someone else who can make bricks."

While she stood there feeling sorry for herself, a runner came from the hospital and

said, “We have an emergency. Come. You must perform surgery immediately.”

She went and began to prepare for surgery. She gritted her teeth as she scrubbed her hands with the brush; then she let her assistant pour alcohol over them, and her protest became a scream.

A few weeks later, one of the workers at the kiln said “Dr., when you are in the surgery you are like a god. You terrify us. But when you’re at the brick kiln and your fingers drip blood like ours, you are our sister. We love you.”

At that moment she realized God had not sent her to Africa to be a surgeon: he had sent her there to show the love of Christ. What did she deserve? Merely an opportunity to show the love of Christ. And she couldn’t do that if she got what she thought she deserved.

Do you find yourself complaining to God that you deserve better? Saying things like, “I shouldn’t have to pay so much for gas or groceries.” I think that is murmuring. There are people in our community who don’t have the luxury of a car to get to the grocery store, or the resources to buy groceries.

Or do you complain at work that you should not have to do certain unpleasant tasks? “Someone else should do those.” That is murmuring.

Paul also mentions:

### **Arguing**

This includes arguing with God, like complaining to God. But in this context, it focuses more on **ongoing disputes with other people** – particularly other people in the church fellowship. “Don’t argue,” Paul says, “So that no one can criticize you.” There is nothing like a good argument in the church to destroy its testimony, and ability to influence the community for Christ.

Why do we argue over things in the church? Isn’t it often because we want to have our own way? There it is again – that self-focus.

The perspective of Christ is to let go of self-preservation and instead spend yourself for others. It sounds so radical we want to reason our way out of it. But that is not the mind of Christ who prayed, “Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, **not my will but your will be done.**” That is the mind of Christ. Letting go of self.

Now, I don’t want us to think that the disciples were complete failures. Mark does not write his gospel to show that. Rather he is showing us how we need to come to know ourselves on our journey of becoming a disciple.

It is interesting, that in the book of Acts, the story of the birth of the church, every one of the negative things said about the disciples in the second half of Mark’s gospel are reversed in Acts. I wish we had more time to study the transformation that takes place:

**From Mark to Acts** – let me outline it for us.

1<sup>st</sup> Kinlaw observes that this reversal takes place in the context of **the fellowship of believers**. It is when the disciples gather as a community of believers. So, he concludes:

**A person does not realize this self-centered bent when he or she lives in isolation. One needs to live in community to realize the problems in his own soul.**

It is in the context of being together, working together, worshipping together as a congregation, that we really get to know ourselves and realize how self-centered we are.

In Acts 1 – 5, Jesus’ disciples, who had been unable to think the way Jesus thought, are transformed completely, even in their **thinking**. Peter begins his sermon on the day of Pentecost by telling the crowd, “Let this be known to you...” He is referring to their intellect.

The book of Acts records how the disciples regained their lost **spiritual power**.

At the end of Mark they are unable to heal a demon possessed boy; but in Acts, they can say to a cripple, “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.” They highlight their **dependance on God** and not on themselves.

In the book of Acts we see the disciples shaking off the **tyranny of self-interest**. They

are brought to trial before the Sanhedrin, which forbids them to preach about Jesus, and they reply, knowing the danger of angering the Sanhedrin, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” They no longer are concerned with their **status or even preserving their own lives.**

Every negative quality of the disciples reported in the latter half of Mark is reversed in the book of Acts.

What does it? **It is Holy Spirit living in and through them.** On the day of Pentecost, Holy Spirit came on the disciples in a mighty way. This same Holy Spirit comes to live in everyone who chooses to become a Jesus Follower.

This brings us to a very important observation we need to make. 1) The first step of becoming a disciple is finding out who Jesus is. 2) The second step of becoming a disciple is realize who you are.

3) The **third step is finding Holy Spirit’s power to displace your human weakness with the fullness of Christ.**

We are not describing a self-help program. We are describing something only God can do. But God will only do it if we: to quote Joseph Sahn:

**“If we turn the strings [of self-centeredness] loose and let Christ have complete control.”**

When we do this, we begin to think differently; we have different emotions. Our entire outlook changes. We begin to acquire the mind of Christ. Not by our own efforts but by the work of Holy Spirit in us.

**PRAY**