Lesson 4: Who Do You Say I Am?

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: That as the Messiah, Jesus came to offer the things of God (forgiveness and eternal life) rather than the things of men (power and earthly success).

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To understand the importance of confessing Jesus as the Messiah in their own lives.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Mark 8:27-33

KEY TAKEAWAY: As the Messiah, part of Jesus' ministry would include His death for our sins. This is an important part of understanding and confessing Him as our Savior.

OVERVIEW:

Very few Jews in the first century would have had any expectations of the Messiah coming to earth to die. They all, including the disciples, were expecting a military conqueror whose power and might would make things easier on them. Jesus emphasized that part of His mission as the Messiah involved suffering. This suffering was in accordance with God's will and His plan for the redemption of all of humanity, making it a crucial part of Jesus' ministry. As He teaches this to His disciples, it encourages all followers to answer the question: "Who Do You Say I Am?"

TEACHER PREP VIDEO:

Each *This Is Jesus* lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These short videos are designed to help you grasp the lesson's main point as you prepare to teach.



BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. *The Details* give you background info for each book. *The Setting* informs you of what's happening in and around the passage. *The Main Point* gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "CONTEXT"?** In every YM360 Bible Study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context," we mean, at the very least, helping students know *who* wrote the book, *when* it was written, and *why* it was written.
- **WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

THE DETAILS

Mark

- *Author*: The Gospel of Mark was written by its namesake. Mark, also known as John Mark, is believed to have received most of his information for his Gospel from Peter's firsthand accounts.
- *Time frame:* Mark is thought to have written his Gospel in the mid 50's A.D.
- *Purpose:* Mark was writing primarily for a non-Jewish audience. His Gospel explains Jewish customs to non-Jews in an effort to get them to see the big picture of Jesus' identity.

THE SETTING

Jesus asked His disciples who the crowds thought He was, and the disciples noted some thought He was John the Baptist, while others thought he was another prophet. Jesus then asked the disciples who they believed Him to be, and Peter acknowledged that Jesus is the Christ, or Messiah. However, Peter did not fully understand the mission of the Messiah. Jesus then began to speak of His impending suffering and death. Peter challenged His words, which earned him a strong rebuke from Jesus.

THE MAIN POINT

It may seem like a modern struggle to confess that Jesus is the Messiah. However, this lesson takes a closer look at a passage full of people who were daily witnesses to Jesus' ministry, message, and miracles, who still struggled to correctly identify Him. Peter even comes as close as using the terminology of "Christ," and yet He still rebukes Jesus when He reveals His true mission as the Messiah. Ultimately, this lesson encourages students to reflect on how they answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say I am?" Even with all the context of Scripture, are they still making Peter's mistake?

LESSON PLAN

The Lesson Plan contains three elements: an introductory activity called *The Lead In;* the Bible Study section called *The Main Event;* and an application-focused segment called *The Last Word.*

THE LEAD IN

- *Goal:* To introduce the idea of questioning someone's identity.
- *Set-Up:* None needed.

FIRST, welcome students and divide them into groups of three or more. **Say something like:**

- **We will be playing a game called "20 Questions." Each of the answers is a famous person. Each group gets three questions to try to figure out who they are. The first group to guess correctly wins. The tricky part is that you can only ask yes or no questions, and when your three questions are up, you must at least try to guess the person's identity. When all groups have asked their questions, we will start again with the first group. In the second round, each group gets only one question.**

Think of someone famous, and begin the round. Go until each group has asked all of their questions or has guessed the identity. Repeat this process for as long as time allows, coming up with a new identity each time.

THEN, lead the students in a discussion involving the following questions:

- **Which identity was the easiest to guess? Why?**
  - *Answers will vary.*

- **Which was the most difficult? Why?**
  - *Answers will vary.*

FINALLY, **say something like:**

- **Guessing someone's true identity can be difficult. It's fun to see how quickly you can guess the identity of a famous person based on a limited number of facts. But what if we were tasked with discovering the identity of the Messiah (Savior of the World)? Would we be able to guess who He was in just a few questions? Today, we will take a closer look at how the disciples faced their own version of "20 Questions." Was Jesus actually the Messiah? Were they wrong for asking? Did they believe in Jesus? Let's find out!**

Make sure there are no questions, and then transition to The Main Event.

THE MAIN EVENT

- *Goal:* To examine Jesus' revelation of who the Messiah is, and the condemnation of who others claimed the Messiah to be.
- *Set-Up:* Make sure students have a Bible or Bible App.

FIRST, say something like:

- **Jesus came to earth to show humanity what God is like and to provide humanity with a solution for its biggest problem: sin. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, He took care of the sin problem for all who would accept His work on their behalf. He made it possible for people to live in a right relationship with God. This right relationship includes abundant life on this earth and eternal life after leaving this earth.**

Explain that, before that, however, even Jesus' disciples were a little bit skeptical as to whether He was actually the Messiah- the Savior of the World. During His ministry, many people had different opinions about His identity and His purpose. One day, while asking the disciples about some of those opinions, Jesus also asked them *their* opinion. Peter, speaking on behalf of the other disciples, acknowledged Jesus as the Christ. In this account in Mark, Jesus seemed not to acknowledge Peter's confession but only told him and the other disciples to keep quiet about His identity.

THEN, read or have a student read Mark 8:27-30. **Ask:**

- **Before we dig into this passage, is anyone bothered by Jesus' response to Peter's confession? Why do you think Jesus told the disciples to tell no one about His identity as the Messiah?**
    - *Answers will vary.*

Explain to students that this response of 'tell no one' will make a little more sense when we understand what Peter understood the Christ (or Messiah) to be. While Peter's response is accurate, it most likely reflects an inadequate understanding of the title "Christ." The Jews expected the Messiah (Christ) to be a king sent by God to overthrow the oppressive Roman Empire and restore to Israel her glory, prominence, and dominion as in the days of King David and King Solomon. They waited for the Messiah King who would rule from David's throne forever. With his confession, Peter affirmed his belief that Jesus was the King who would reign forever on David's throne.

NEXT, explain to students that you are going to back up from that moment and start at the beginning of this passage. **Say something like:**

- **While Jesus and His disciples were in Caesarea Philippi, which is about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus asked who people were saying He was. Since Jesus had been ministering in Judea, Galilee, and the surrounding areas for a couple of years, people would have either heard Him or heard about Him and would have come to some conclusions. These opinions would have been spreading throughout the region, so it wouldn't be unusual for the disciples to know what people were saying.**

Ask students:

- **If one of your best friends asked you to honestly tell them what others thought of them, would you struggle to tell them? Why or why not?**
    - *Answers will vary.* Encourage students to think about how awkward this could be in their own context, and how much more awkward it could have been for the disciples who had likely heard all sorts of good and bad about Jesus!

THEN, explain that the disciples responded that there were a variety of opinions about Jesus. Some, like Herod, believed Jesus was John the Baptist returned from the dead (see Mark 6:16). Other people thought Jesus to be Elijah, perhaps because of the miracles He performed, similar to those God empowered the ancient prophet to do. Still others thought Jesus was another of the prophets. While people generally thought well of Jesus, their opinions were far from adequate. **Say something like:**

- **Jesus then did the unexpected, asking the disciples as a whole a similar question, "Who do you say that I am?" Just imagine the tension in the air in those moments before Peter spoke up. Each disciple was suddenly put on the spot. It didn't matter that they knew people who embraced Jesus or that they could name the people who didn't. The only thing that mattered in this moment was what they believed about Jesus. They had spent their days serving God right alongside Jesus, watching Him do incredible things throughout His ministry, but witnessing that did not mean anything if they didn't have faith in who He actually was.**

NEXT, encourage students to reflect for a moment on how they would answer this question. (This should be a quiet moment of reflection.) **Say something like:**

- **One of the most important questions a person will ever answer is this: "Who is Jesus to you?" Jesus performed many miracles throughout His time on Earth. He also preached the Word of God in a revolutionary way for the time. But He did these things so that we would know Him as Lord, not as a great magician or teacher. At this point in His ministry, He could likely tell that His disciples were not ready for His ultimate mission as Messiah. Like many others, they likely thought His mission as the Messiah would be to take the throne of David and defeat the Roman Empire, setting up a powerful political rule that would carry them into eternity. His death was not on their agenda. This is why Jesus instructed them not to carry their confession of who He was any further. To use an example from math class… they may have had the final answer right, but their formula was all wrong.**

Ask students:

- **Why do you think Peter's response to Jesus' "Who do you say I am?" question is problematic or incomplete?**
  - o *Answers will vary.* Help students understand that while Peter's response is accurate, it reflected a complete misunderstanding of Jesus' title of "Christ" or "Messiah" and what He had truly come to do.

Read or have a student read Mark 8:31-33. **Say something like:**

- **Jesus had made veiled references to His death earlier in His ministry. But on this occasion, "He spoke plainly" and openly about what would happen to Him. Because His words were clearly understood, they must have been quite a shock to the disciples. This was not what they expected of their Messiah. In fact, very few Jews in the first century would have had any expectations of the Messiah coming to earth to die. They all, including the disciples, were expecting a military conqueror whose power and might would make things easier on them. Though they believed Jesus to be the Messiah, they apparently heard only parts of what He said. But because Jesus was not the type of Messiah they expected, He "warned" the Twelve to keep quiet about His identity.**

Explain that pulling Jesus away from the other disciples, Peter "began to rebuke" Jesus with regard to what He was saying. Remarkably, Peter didn't want Jesus to say such things or to even think them. Encourage students to think back to Jesus' time in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11). As a quick reminder, Satan's temptations involved offering Him the kingdoms of the world *without* going to the Cross. Peter's argument was not only similar, but it was also nearly thought-for-thought. It is no surprise that Jesus strongly rebuked him as Satan.

- **In telling Peter to "get behind me," Jesus commanded him to stop such talk and to get away from Him with any temptation of disobedience to God's will. Then Jesus pointed to the contrast between "the things of God" and the "things of men." God's plan for the Messiah included suffering and death. This plan would bring about salvation throughout the world for those who accept by faith His sacrificial death on their behalf. On the other hand, the Jews' plan for the Messiah included power and authority to secure Israel's prestige and position throughout the world.**

Ask students:

- **Jesus understood that people in His own time had different ideas about who He was and what His mission was. We can safely assume that Jesus also recognizes the many opinions and misunderstandings that people in our world today (2,000 years later) have about His identity and mission. How can we be diligent in seeking the "things of God," versus the "things of men"?**
  - o *Answers will vary.*

FINALLY, explain to students that even the closest followers of Jesus struggled in their faith by letting the things of men alter their understanding of the things of God. Jesus pushed against this, exposing how if we aren't careful, we can present the same arguments as Satan did in the desert, using Scripture to justify our desire for things like power, influence, or control. **Say something like:**

- **This was a big moment in the ministry of Jesus. He essentially pointed out the crossroads they had come to. From then on, Jesus would be preparing for His mission as the Messiah, which was to die for our sins in a very brutal way. The earthly hopes and dreams that others had of the Messiah would be completely dashed in the face of the truth. We also face this crossroad when we determine who we believe Jesus is. Do we view Him as a good teacher? A great prophet? A magician? Do we expect Him to give us a bunch of earthly comforts as long as we do our daily Bible reading? Or do we see Him for who He is- the Messiah that came to offer the things of God rather than the things of men?**

Ask students:

- **How has your belief in and confession of who Jesus is provided a foundation for your life? How is your faith in Him evident to others?**
    - o *Answers will vary.*

Allow for questions, and then transition into The Last Word.

THE LAST WORD

- *Goal:* To help students take a closer look at Peter's false ideas about the Messiah versus the actual Messiah that Jesus came to be.
- *Set-Up:* Make sure you have plenty of blank sheets of paper for each student and some things to draw with.

FIRST, explain that the point of this exercise is to show that in terms of people's identities, we often do not know the complete story. **Say something like:**

- **Take the case of Clark Kent and Superman. If someone were to describe Clark Kent, they might say that he is a mild-mannered reporter for the *Daily Planet*. But that is only half the story. He is also able to leap tall buildings with a single bound and is more powerful than a locomotive. All of the things about Clark Kent were true, but there is a deeper level of truth about his identity.**

NEXT, group students up or allow them to complete this activity on their own. Pass out blank pieces of paper to the groups/students and something to write with. Challenge them to follow the directions and come up with their very own superhero. Once they have done this, allow them to share their Superheroes with the group. **Ask:**

- **If your superhero had a secret identity, why did you find that necessary? Or if they didn't, why did you determine they didn't need one?**
    - o *Answers will vary.* Allow students to discuss.

THEN, explain that unlike some of our superheroes, Jesus wasn't trying to have a 'secret identity.' He wanted to be known for exactly who He is. **Ask:**

- **What do you think Peter meant by his confession of Jesus? Did he fully understand what he was saying?**
    - o *Answer:* Peter's confession was true, but it didn't quite capture the truth of the Messiah.

Say something like:

- **Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, or Messiah, which means the Anointed One. Jewish people had been waiting for a Messiah to come. Their conception of this person was someone who would come and lead them back to their former glory. He would be a king who would reestablish Israel as the leading military power, as it was under King David. This is what Peter meant when He called Jesus the Messiah.**

NEXT, **say something like:**

- **However, Jesus was not there to give power to anyone, but rather to give them forgiveness and eternal life. To use our superhero example, Peter identified who Jesus was, but He missed out on the complexities of what that meant. Peter was waiting for Jesus' big reveal- the part when He put on His cape and became the "Super Messiah" that would bring political and economic stability to the world. He couldn't separate this idea of a superhero that was pretending to be a servant to the people for a little while from the actual Messiah standing in front of him, saying, "Peter, there is no cape. I'm going to do something completely awesome, but it's not at all like what you think."**

Ask students:

- **Why is it important for us to understand the difference between the Jesus who came to die for our sins and the "Super Messiah" that many expected?**
    - *Answers will vary.*

FINALLY, end by explaining that just like the superheroes students created, humans have always come up with some pretty fantastical stories and ideas about the type of people that could save them, along with what they need saving from. Heroes that are extra strong, or that can fly over walls, or that have pinpoint accuracy with a bow and arrow. But Jesus, the greatest hero of all (literally the Savior of the world), did not come with these theatrical powers that He used to slay the big bad Roman Empire. Instead, He came as a humble servant to His people, and offered them something greater than any superhero ever could!

Allow Time For Any Closing Thoughts Or Questions From Your Students. Before Leaving, Close With A Prayer.

- Don't forget to remind students about their devotions this week. If you're posting them on Social Media or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.