

# Sermon Transcript

## Who Is Your Messiah?

**James 3:1-5 and Mark 8:27-38 | Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost | September 15, 2024 | John Klawiter, preaching**

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

I was recently on a phone call with a mentor. We were talking about upcoming events and planning when I started to get frustrated.

He could tell, so he asked what was bothering me.

I hesitated. I didn't know if I was overreacting and didn't want to start complaining about someone else, so I said I'd wait to tell him until this week when we got together for breakfast.

But then, as our conversation picked up again, I realized I needed to share what was on my mind and lay out my grievances.

I was frustrated about being voluntold to do something—something I didn't think was worthwhile and my presence would be redundant. Plus, it was an event that took me away from family time, so I was even less motivated to attend. I let it all out in my phone call.

It felt really good. I was gonna confront the person who I felt did me wrong.

Even Taryn could tell something was up because after I hung up, she was like “what was THAT all about?!”

My mentor acknowledged my feelings and affirmed that it was ok to feel this way.

I think I felt a bit like Peter. My understanding of a situation became my truth, but like Peter, I was missing information behind the scenes.

Peter is taking it all in and making his observations about Jesus.

When Jesus wants to know what people are saying about him, it's Peter who has been processing what the crowds have to say.

The disciples tell Jesus the crowds say he's John the Baptist, Elijah, or a prophet.

But Peter, when asked who do YOU say that I am, responds with “Jesus, you are the Messiah.” Jesus affirms his response by saying not to tell others this news.

Peter has it all figured out. Finally, someone asks him what he thinks and he lets it out. It's gotta feel good, right?

Which is why, just a few verses later, the scene is so confusing to me.

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How could Peter be so right in one verse and then be so wrong that Jesus says to “get behind me, Satan” in the next?

It’s because even though Peter was right—Jesus is the Messiah—he’s wrong in understanding what that means.

And I can’t say that I blame him for feeling the way he does.

Jesus tells his disciples what will happen—a prediction of his own rejection, death, and resurrection. None of this makes sense.

Peter and the disciples are more inclined to take up their swords and follow him. If Jesus is the Messiah, shouldn’t the elders, chief priests, and scribes be the ones who need to know this is true? According to their beliefs, Jesus came to be THEIR Messiah, after all?!

So, the confident Peter corrects his friend. Jesus, remember when I said “you’re the Messiah?” I think you’re missing the point of what that entails. You can’t go strolling into Jerusalem to be slaughtered. We’ll fight with you. We’ll fight FOR you. We’ll tell everyone about who you really are and build armies of believers.

That’s what Peter’s Messiah would do. **(SLIDE)** In fact, that’s what Peter WILL do in the garden—as he’ll draw his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus. Jesus, again, will correct his response.

Peter has an expectation of Jesus the Messiah that is in his image. This is the sin that often corrupts us, it takes hold of us, and it’s so dangerous.

We believe that Jesus is here to fulfill our expectations—not that we’re here to live into Jesus’s expectations that we’re partners in the suffering of God’s kingdom here on earth.

Princeton Theology Professor C Clifton Black offers us a glimpse into what this all means.

He says, “the language grates, not just because the stakes are life and death, but because Jesus upends everything we expect a messiah to be and to do for us. First-century Jewish messianic hopes varied, but none of them expected a messiah crucified by elders.

Instead, earlier writers dreamt of idealized rulers who would judge the wicked and restore Israel’s righteous. None of these messiahs handed their followers a cross to be shouldered en route to their own Golgotha’s.

**In no Gospel does Jesus say, “It is my responsibility to die for you, while you applaud my heroism.” Instead: “The Son of Man is ordained by God to suffer, die, and be raised. And so are his followers. Are you coming?”**

Does that make you pause? It should.

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Who is your Messiah?

Does Jesus do what we want... or do we pack Jesus into the package to fit what WE want????

Who and what we are willing to follow matters.

Taking up our cross isn't about accepting abusive situations; it isn't about avoiding healing or solutions to our pain. Too often, the church has laid guilt and shame upon the followers of Christ by misinterpreting the intent of Jesus' words.

There's enough suffering in the world that, just wait long enough, the suffering will find you. Instead of denying our reality, Jesus puts out his hand and says, "this is where we're going... are you coming with?"

Jesus' invitation is to embrace the pain. Embrace when life isn't easy. Embrace when someone we love is in need. Embrace when a stranger is stuck and we're present to help.

I met a fascinating young man recently named Wiel.

His parents were refugees from South Sudan and he was born in Minnesota soon after they arrived. My first impression of Wiel is that he's brilliant—he's very smart, but also humble and gracious. I had lunch with him a few weeks ago to hear his story.

When Wiel was 8, his father returned to South Sudan, even though it wasn't safe to be there. He was still seen as an opposing the government. But he returned to help his people.

Sure enough, when he arrived, his dad was killed (**SLIDE of South Sudan civil war**). A political victim. He died bearing the cross for others.

The events of Wiel's childhood had an impact on him. He told me about his job.

He works for a company that's purpose is to help people to create and maintain positive habits (**SLIDE of Healthy Habits**)—to help people become the person that they want to be.

I asked him how this company came to be.

He said that the owner had been very successful in the past—he'd made a lot of money and sold his company for a profit—but that company's main goal was to make money.

The owner now had a different goal in mind. Helping others.

After college, Wiel could have worked for any big, successful company that he wanted. Yet he chose to take a risk and work for this small company that was devoted to helping others.

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Despite being 24 years old, Wiel had the wisdom of someone who'd experienced suffering and pain. He knew what really mattered.

Who and what he was willing to follow mattered.

In October, I'm having him talk with our confirmation students on a Wednesday night about how the habits and goals that they set now will make an impact on who they grow up to become. Isn't that the message we want our youth to hear?

Which brings me back to the story with my mentor.

Despite my whining and complaining, I did the thing I was voluntold to do.

And I learned something. I didn't have the whole picture. I was helping someone who ALSO was told to do the event by someone else. We were in this together. My presence actually allowed important conversations and ministry to happen to walk alongside people who were struggling and suffering.

It was worthwhile and I'm grateful I was there.

I realized that I needed to own that—I told my mentor that I made a mistake. I sheepishly admitted that I was glad that I didn't extend my complaints further than I did. I wanted my mentor to understand that I knew I was wrong.

He sat there and smiled. He knew that learning was an ongoing thing. He didn't criticize me for misinterpreting the situation, he knew this self-awareness would help me grow.

Which is what Jesus expects from us.

We won't always get it right. We'll put more faith in our own ambitions and beliefs instead of turning to Christ in challenging situations. The healthy habit, however, is to step back and see where Christ is present in the bigger picture.

Jesus is patient—but as Peter found out—he can also be direct. With all the temptation, greed, and self-centered opportunities in front of us, following Jesus isn't easy. I was leading the way I wanted things to go. If I barreled forward that way, I would've missed what God was up to by leading me to a place I needed to be.

Jesus, you are the Messiah. You've saved the world as an act of love, with God's grace. We forget this and slip into creating you in our image. Help us respond with love and grace to keep you first. Amen.