

In our Gospel reading Peter confessed Jesus to be the Christ. This is important and life changing because it is by our confession of Jesus as the Christ that we are saved. However, as we also heard, Peter ran into some difficulty when Jesus spoke about the cross. Today we will talk about what happened with Peter and how this also applies to us as Jesus's followers today.

We'll begin with the story. Jesus was going to the villages of Caesaria Philippi with his disciples. Jesus asked them, "**Who do people say that I am?**" The disciples told Jesus what they had heard. Some people said that he was John the Baptist; others, Elijah; others, one of the prophets. Jesus then asked them, "**What about you? Who do you say that I am?**" Peter responded for all of them and said, "**You are the Christ.**"

This is a very special answer. The word, "Christ," means "anointed one." The way that people were made into kings in the Old Testament was by being anointed with oil. Peter is saying that Jesus is king—but not just any king. God made promises in the Old Testament about a great king who would arise. He would be a descendant of Abraham and of David. He would put an end to injustice and wickedness. He would bring about righteousness and peace.

Peter's answer, therefore, "**You are the Christ,**" is of enormous significance. He is saying that Jesus is this great king. Peter does well with his confession of who Jesus is.

What happens next, though, throws a wrench into Peter's thoughts about Jesus being the Christ. Jesus began to tell them what was going to happen to him. He was going to suffer many things. He would be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and experts in the Law. He would be killed. After three days he would rise again.

This was not what Peter had in mind for his beloved king. Stuff like that didn't happen to kings. What good could this suffering and dying possibly serve? Peter rebuked Jesus. Jesus rebuked Peter right back. He used very harsh language. He said, "**Get behind me Satan!**" I'm not aware of Jesus ever calling anyone else that terrible name. He explained why he called him that: "**For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.**"

These words are key. They identify a great divide. A person can set his or her mind on the things of God or on the things of man. What does it mean to set your mind on the things of God or the things of man? Let's begin with the things of God.

The things of God are bound up in Jesus the Christ. He is loved by God the Father. What does this king do? You already heard very important things this king did. He suffered many things, was mistreated, killed, and rose again.

You are aware of the goodness that the king accomplished by doing that because we talk about that a lot. Jesus's suffering, death, and resurrection brought about the verdict of forgiveness for sinners. Sinners, who otherwise should die and go to hell for their sins, instead are received as beloved children of God for Jesus's sake.

Jesus's work as king, however, did not end with his death and resurrection. Forty days after he rose from the dead he ascended to the right hand of God the Father. That is where he reigns and rules as king now. The way that he reigns and rules his spiritual kingdom is through the testimony of God's Word by Christians like you and me. These Christians are scattered far and wide all over the earth. These Christians have been given the Holy Spirit. They believe the Gospel. They urge others to believe in the good news of this king and to follow him. When the last person whom God has chosen is brought to faith, then Jesus will come again.

When Jesus comes again he will judge so that goodness and evil will be identified and separated. Evil will be confined in hell. Those who believed in Jesus will receive their inheritance as co-heirs with Christ. All things will be placed under Jesus's feet. Then Jesus will hand over the kingdom to God the Father so that God will be all in all. These are the main points of the things of God, upon which we should set our minds.

What are the things of man? What Jesus means by the "things of man" is the way that man operates after the fall into sin. Already in Genesis you can see the things of man by the way that Adam and Eve lived after they disobeyed God. I don't think they were exactly happy, but they tried to make the best of the situation. They solved problems. They were ashamed of their nakedness, so they sewed together some fig leaves. Life went on.

So it was also for Cain, their son, and his descendants after they were rejected by God. They tried to make the best of things. They discovered new things. They made instruments to improve their quality of life.

Peter, when he was setting his mind on the things of man, perhaps thought that Jesus as an earthly king would be good for life in this world. Instead of him suffering and dying—seemingly accomplishing nothing—he should get busy. He could raise an army, create a following, and if luck was on their side they might manage to bring Israel back to its former glory.

So it is also today. We try to make the best of things. We've discovered lots of useful things. Like the men before us we try to push the ball forward. We try to make progress.

Jesus rebuked Peter by saying that he was setting his mind on the things of man instead of the things of God. Perhaps when Jesus told his disciples that he was going to suffer and be killed and rise again, it sounded to Peter as though Jesus was going backwards. That's how suffering generally sounds to us. We try to get rid of suffering. We try to fix problems. It sounded wrong that suffering should remain—especially under the rule of this very special, long-promised king!

Jesus, however, knew things that we don't know. He knew that our fundamental problems could not be fixed by any amount of reforms or the wisest of leaders. Our problems are too deep for that. We needed to be redeemed. That was why Jesus suffered, died, and rose again. This was good, not bad! It was how sinners were set free.

But Jesus's teaching on the cross was not just for him. He goes on to teach the disciples about the life that they were to live. Suffering would remain for them too. He said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

We can understand these words according to what Jesus told Peter. We are to set our minds on the things of God instead of on the things of man. To set our minds on the things of God is to recognize that he is king—he is in control, not us. God's understanding of goodness is better than our understanding of goodness. We might identify something as good that is not good, and, vice versa, we might identify something as being evil which is in fact very good.

Take, for example, the problem of being a disciple of Jesus. Being a disciple of Jesus is a problem, because that means we won't always fit in. Jesus didn't always fit in and look what they did to him. Jesus's apostles didn't always fit in. They were severely mistreated. Disciples of Jesus will never fit in because we believe in and testify to the Gospel. We believe that Jesus is the king who will set all things right.

The reason why this means we will never fit in is because we will always be seen as raining on the parade of earthly dreams. Man always dreams of making a paradise on this earth. By testifying that Jesus is the Christ we are also saying that all other reforms are at best half-measures, and can never really succeed. The Gospel is always an indictment against setting your mind on the things of man.

Although Jesus's message was not always welcome to everyone, Jesus did not change it. People went away from him. People got angry at him. He's going to remain the king that he is.

Jesus is open about the suffering that we will undergo as Christians. Suffering will remain. And if you won't deny yourself, if you won't take up your cross and follow him, then you won't be his disciple. It's as simple as that. When the prospect of suffering rears its ugly head, you will betray him to save your own skin.

Be prepared, therefore. Jesus says several times, "Be sober and watchful." That means, "Be sensible. Have unrealistic expectations. Don't be surprised when suffering comes upon you." You might be tempted to think that there is some way that you could "fix" Christianity so that you don't have to suffer. Maybe you can make it so that it never offends anyone, so that nobody ever feels bad from anything you might say. A lot of Christians set this as a high priority for their life of faith.

I submit to you that they are probably doing something similar to what Peter was thinking of doing in our reading today. Peter was trying to fit Jesus into a mold of his own making. This king would then work well for him, solve his problems, and go a long way in creating a paradise on this earth. So also today Christianity can be edited so as to curry favor with a certain segment of the population, or to avoid persecution from another segment of the population. This song and dance, however, is a far cry from the bold and simple confession of Peter: "You are the Christ."

We do not need to play tricks with what we say. We do not need to figure out how to be clever like we so often do with our worldly pursuits. We need the truth. The plainer and simpler the truth, the better. Then let the Holy Spirit go to work.

And if it should so happen that we then receive a cross, so be it. God will work good through that cross, even if we don't see it. God willing, and by God's grace, we'll keep on believing in the king, despite the cross. We'll keep confessing that Jesus is the Christ. By that confession we will be saved.