

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not review by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 8: 27-29

Peace be with you, brothers and sisters, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is the time to read the Bible again. We'll continue to read Mark chapter 8, verses 27-29.

Jesus, accompanied by His disciples, embarked on His third missionary journey, traveling northward, until He reached the base of Mount Hermon, in the region of Caesarea Philippi, where He revealed to His disciples that He is the Messiah, the Christ. This profound revelation was directly given by the Father to Peter; Jesus even praised Peter in front of all the disciples. Perhaps this was the most glorious moment in Peter's life, yet the Gospel of Mark only dedicates a simple 4 verses to this event, set against the background of Jesus wanting the disciples to understand the true spiritual meanings behind the 12 baskets of leftovers and the 7 large baskets of fragments. We know that gospel of Mark is largely based on Peter's accounts and recorded by Mark. Through today's passage, we will try to understand why Mark arranged it this way and what he intended to convey.

Peter's life experiences can be divided into three stages, in complete accordance with the revelations in the Bible: Peter in the Gospels, Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, and Peter in the Epistles. The Bible's depiction of Peter is rich; we see in the Gospels, a Peter who is outspoken, impulsive, brave, yet often prone to mistakes. By the time we reach the Acts of the Apostles, he has matured into the leader among the apostle. During Pentecost, thru Peter's one sermon, 3000 Jewish men were saved, and the church in Jerusalem was established. Later, at the house of Cornelius, he opened the door to the Gentile gospel. Initially strong-willed in Acts, Peter later struggled to keep up with the leading of the Holy Spirit, losing some of his earlier boldness. After leaving Jerusalem in Acts, he seemingly disappears, as God leads Peter through deeper lessons in life. In his later years, Peter wrote the Epistles of Peter, becoming a mature and richly experienced elder apostle. It's likely during this time that he worked with Mark to complete the Gospel of Mark. By then, Peter's understanding of Christ was not only profound but also highly

practical, fitting well with his personality. His burden was for serving the church, and thus he portrayed Jesus from the perspective of a servant.

Therefore, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is portrayed as God's servant, the best example for every saint willing to serve God and the church. In his old age, Peter understood Christ as the bread of life, already broken and distributed to everyone, with these fragments collected, seven baskets full, to meet the needs of the Gentiles. Additionally, there were twelve baskets full, enough to supply the needs of all God's chosen people. Hence, in Mark 8:21, Jesus asks the disciples if they still don't understand, but by Peter's old age, he fully grasps it. Therefore, in recounting the most important moments of his life, he speaks little about himself but emphasizes the importance of the fragments, and the need for two touches to heal, to remove our spiritual blindness so we can truly see.

It's for this reason he first recounts the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida. This incident is only recorded in the Gospel of Mark, and immediately following this incident, he records the great revelation at Caesarea Philippi. Because to heal spiritual blindness requires Jesus' touch twice. In the great revelation at Caesarea Philippi, he also records two segments. The first segment is the recognition of Jesus as the Christ, which he records succinctly. The second segment is the revelation of Jesus Christ, that He must go to the cross, and His body will be broken. In this segment, Peter spends more effort in recounting it. When reading the Gospel of Mark, we must recognize Peter's intention behind the words.

Verse 27: "Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, 'Who do men say that I am?'"

Jesus led the disciples out, leaving behind Bethsaida, Galilee, and their familiar living environment. They were heading to the village of Caesarea Philippi. It's noteworthy for believers that Jesus didn't lead the disciples south to Jerusalem; Jerusalem had always been the religious center for the Israelites, where the Second

Temple, built during the return of Zerubbabel, and the expansion work in the city of Jerusalem by King Herod, were located. Instead, Jesus deliberately moved away from the densely religious atmosphere and led the disciples northward until they reached the foot of Mount Hermon.

Mount Hermon is the highest peak in the land of Canaan, and when the south wind blows, the dew from Hermon moistens the dry land of Israel. Jesus deliberately chose a village far from the Jewish religious atmosphere to give the disciples a new revelation. Originally named Panias, this place has springs flowing from crevices in the rocks, surrounded by mountains, water, and forests, making it a beautiful environment and the headwaters of the Jordan River. During the Greek Empire period, it was a place where Greeks worshiped the god Pan, their god of shepherds, and they carved their idols from large rocks on the mountain. Until the end of the first century BC, the Roman Emperor Augustus granted this city to King Herod the Great. King Herod then built a temple dedicated to Augustus there as a tribute. After King Herod's death, his kingdom was divided among his three sons, and Philip inherited this land, establishing his capital in Panias. In honor of Augustus, the place was renamed Caesarea. To distinguish it from Caesarea on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, this city was called Caesarea Philippi. Today, if you visit the holy land, you will likely come to this place, where there is an archaeological park of Panias.

Jesus deliberately brought the disciples to this place, facing the massive rocks on the mountain. Here, Jesus asked the disciples two very important questions. The first question was, "Who do men say that I am?" Jesus' identity was a mystery at that time. He preached the word, cast out demons, healed the sick, and performed many miracles in the region of Galilee. Wherever He went, crowds followed Him, crowded around Him, and wanted to make Him king, but Jesus deliberately avoided the crowds. On the contrary, the elites of Jewish society, the elders, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, all wanted to get rid of Jesus. Jesus caused polarized reactions in society at that time, and now He asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I am?"

Verse 28: "So they answered, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'"

At this point, the disciples had been following Jesus for some time, so they were well aware of how others perceived their Master. They immediately responded. Some said He was John the Baptist, which was likely the belief among people in Herod's palace, as Herod had killed John, yet was troubled by guilt. When he witnessed Jesus performed many miracles, led him to think John had been resurrected. Others said He was Elijah, the most powerful prophet of the Old Testament, who was expected to return according to many prophetic scriptures. Therefore, they believed Jesus to be Elijah or one of the prophets, because His preaching was full of power and authority, resembling that of a prophet. This was how others viewed Jesus.

Dear brothers and sisters, if Jesus were to ask you this question today, how would you answer? In the past 2000 years, God has raised up many preachers and inspired numerous writings about the person and work of Jesus. These works are assets given by God to the Church, aiding us in understanding Jesus more deeply. Therefore, we should engage with these works to broaden our perspectives and expand our understanding. They form the foundation of our knowledge of Jesus Christ. However, on the other hand, we must also recognize that these are all objective resources, providing background knowledge. The most important aspect is the second question Jesus posed to His disciples.

Verse 29: "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered and said to Him, 'You are the Christ.'"

Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?" is a question that every saint will inevitably face in his lifetime, "Who do you say that I am?" And you must answer this question seriously, from the depths of your heart, truthfully. Your answer to this question determines how you will live your life. If you cannot answer this question now, it's okay; after some time, Jesus Christ will still repeat this question

to you. So, we must hold this question in our hearts and try to answer it from the depths of our hearts. Let's first see how the disciples answered.

The account in the Gospel of Mark is brief; Peter answered, "You are the Christ." Christ is the Greek term, while in Hebrew, it is Messiah, meaning the Anointed One. The prophets of the Old Testament repeatedly prophesied that God would send His Anointed One, the Messiah, to save the Israelites. Since the fall of man, the Israelites have been eagerly awaiting the coming of that Savior. The simple recording in the Gospel of Mark of Peter's answer, "You are the Christ," demonstrates Peter's humility and modesty. He wants to learn to serve as a servant of Christ and the church, so he deliberately does not mention his moments of glory. To better understand the significance of this revelation, let's turn to Matthew 16:16-19 to reconstruct the truth of the time.

In verse 16, "Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" Perhaps "the Son of the living God" can also be translated as "the Son of the everlasting God." Peter recognized Jesus not only as the Anointed One but also as the Son of God, which is truly a great revelation. When Jesus heard Peter's answer, He was truly excited. Jesus immediately said to Peter, "Simon Bar-Jonah, you are blessed! Because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." Jesus said to Peter, "Simon Bar-Jonah," Simon is Peter's original name, Bar means son, and Jonah is Peter's father's name. In today's terms, it's like calling someone by their full name, including their father's name, ensuring there's no mistaking the identity.

Jesus declared Peter blessed because his understanding did not come from man, but from God the Father in heaven. Jesus knew that the Father had revealed His true identity to Peter. On the surface, Jesus appeared to be a man, a carpenter who grew up in Nazareth. But within Him, He was unmistakably the second person of the Holy Trinity, the beloved Son of the Father, who had now become the Anointed One, sent by the Father to fulfill His mission on earth – to accomplish redemption through His death on the cross, reconciling humanity to God.

Upon hearing Peter's insightful answer, Jesus was exceedingly excited. He immediately added to Peter's revelation, layering revelation upon revelation. Jesus did this not only to help His disciples understand His mission but also to participate in it and inherit it. Therefore, He said to Peter, "I also say to you," indicating that merely recognizing Jesus as the Christ, as the Son of the living God, was not enough. He intended to give Peter an even deeper and more glorious revelation. What revelation? The next statement is crucial: "You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church." The term "church" appears for the first time in the New Testament here. The Greek word for "church," Ekklesia, means the called-out assembly. With Christ's revelation, there must also be the revelation of the church. And Jesus said, "This is My church." The church does not belong to any individual; it belongs to Christ Himself. And the church is meant to be built, and the builder is Jesus Christ Himself. This is the most fundamental and straightforward understanding we should have about the church: it belongs to Christ, and the one building the church is Christ Himself.

To understand how Christ will build the church, we must understand the relationship between Peter and the rock. In Chinese or English, these two words seem unrelated, but in Greek, Peter is Petros, and the rock is Petra. To understand how the church is built, we must grasp the relationship between these two words. Peter, whose original name was Simon, was renamed by Jesus when they first met. Peter, or Petros, means "small stone." A stone is a building material, but natural stones cannot be built upon; they must undergo a transformation process. A rugged stone, full of its own character and temper, cannot be matched or connected with others. This stone must undergo transformation. On the other hand, Petra, which is the female form of Petros, means "a large mass of rocks." Jesus intends to build His church on this rock.

Firstly, Christ Himself is the rock, so the church is built on the foundation of Christ. If we delve deeper, we must ask, what kind of Christ? After Christ's resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God the Father, He sent the Holy Spirit as the Comforter to dwell with the saints. The Holy Spirit works to transform each saint, removing their rough edges and natural inclinations. Through the Holy Spirit's

connection, individual stones are joined together to form a large rock, which is the unity of Christ within each believer, constituting the rock, which is the church and the church is the body of Christ.

God has given the church a very exalted position: the gates of Hades cannot prevail against her. Hades, traditionally understood as the realm of the dead, where death reigns and imprisons souls, cannot overcome the church that has been successfully built. When every saved saint is united together as the church, death no longer has the power to confine, and the church has already passed from death to life.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must recognize the exalted position that God has given to the church, that she has authority over death, she prevails over the dominion of Hades. The church, in God's design, is so glorious. Perhaps you may ask, why can't I see such a glorious scene in the church I attend? It's because what you see is the outward appearance of the church, not the essence. The essence of the church is the assembly of Christ within each believer, and that is the true church, one that is holy and without blemish.

Peter served the church throughout his life, and in his older years, he was very clear about this. Therefore, in 1 Peter 2:4-5, he says: "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious." This initially speaks of Jesus Himself, and then he speaks of the saints in the church. In verse 5: "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Christ is the living stone, and each of us is to be transformed into living stones, and these living stones are to be built up into a spiritual house; coming together, all become a holy priesthood, offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. Peter's lifelong ministry was about building this spiritual house.

Jesus also said in Matthew 16:19, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." An established church not only has authority over Hades, and death cannot imprison her, but she will also enter the kingdom of

heaven. Christ handed the keys of the kingdom to Peter, making him the one who opens the doors. He first opened the door to the Gospel for the Jews, establishing the church in Jerusalem. Then, he opened the door to the Gospel for the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. And today, these keys are also given to every saved saint. These keys are, in fact, the Gospel. We spread the Gospel to bring people into the church, into the kingdom of heaven. Peter's initial role given by Christ, being the first to open the doors, is now entrusted to every saved saint, to spread the Gospel and bring people to salvation.

Dear brothers and sisters, Peter's response to Jesus Christ is also our response: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus' commission to Peter is also His commission to every saved saint today: Christ will build us into a church that will prevail over the dominion of Hades; the church will bring people to salvation by spreading the Gospel, liberating them from the power of Satan, and ushering them into the kingdom of heaven.

Let us pray together: Lord, what a glorious ministry this is. We are saved by grace, not only having eternal life but also entrusted with the task of building up the church. Bless the church where I belong, not only to spread the Gospel and bring people to salvation but also to transform each saved saint into a living stone, collectively being built into a spiritual house. May every saint be a royal priest, serving God and the church together. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.