



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau
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Who Do You Say I Am? (Hope Restored Series)
Pastor Dan Chun

If we are focused on what is worth dying for, we'll know what is worth living for.

Mark Twain said, "The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why." To be or not to be faithful, that is the question.

When I was in London I happened to visit the Shakespeare's Globe Theater, a replica of the famous theater where many of Shakespeare's plays were performed. And while I was there, Academy Award winning actor Mark Rylance was rehearsing *Othello*, one of Shakespeare's most famous plays.

Shakespeare was a great man. Some say he wrote 37 plays and 154 sonnets. I know there is a controversy of who actually wrote all of his plays, but most people seem to agree with those numbers. He has influenced our thinking and our language in more ways than we think. Here are some examples of his influence.

When you use the phrase, "That's Greek to me," you are quoting Shakespeare. When you hear people say, "It has vanished into thin air," they are quoting Shakespeare.

If you ever say, "I have refused to *budge an inch*," or "She has *green-eyed jealousy*," or "He is *tongue-tied*," or "She plays *fast and loose*," or "I have been *hoodwinked*," or "I'm in a *pickle*," you are

quoting Shakespeare, and you may not even know it!

Same for the sayings *it's too much of a good thing, laughed yourself into stitches, without rhyme or reason, sent me packing, or for goodness sake – what the dickens!* All of those are Shakespeare quotes. Somehow his thinking, his words, and his descriptions of life have penetrated how we think, write, and speak even today.

But as much as Shakespeare has influenced us with great literature as *Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, and King Lear*, his writings are NOTHING COMPARED to the Bible, which is all about a man named Jesus Christ, who has influenced our history and writings more than anyone!

Yale Historian Jaroslav Pelikan wrote: "Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about Him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of western culture for almost twenty centuries."

Jesus has impacted the world so much that, through the gospels, His story has been translated into 2,527 languages. Incredible! The second most-translated book is *Don Quixote*, and it has been translated into, get this, only 60 languages. (John Ortberg, *Who Is This Man? The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus*)

Maybe just as we have never thought about how Shakespeare has influenced our thinking, writing, and speech, we have never thought of the impact of

Jesus in our everyday life. For example, every time we use a calendar in our kitchen, on our laptops, or our watches, or even when we date a check, our time line is based on none other than Jesus! We should know that "A.D." are the initials of the Latin phrase *anno domini*, meaning the year of the Lord. "B.C." stands for "before Christ."

His fame has SURPASSED all of the so-called famous people in His time. The great people in Jesus' days, like Caesar and Nero, were influential in the 1st and 3rd centuries, but they are pretty much forgotten today, unless you like those names for pizza, dogs, and casinos.

On the other hand, Jesus and His followers' names live on, like Peter, Paul, and Mary, and Priscilla. Many cities are named after Jesus followers, like *San Francisco* for St. Francis, *San Jose* and *Santa Maria* for Joseph and Mary, *Corpus Christi* for the body of Christ, and *Sacramento* for the Sacrament of the Last Supper.

Jesus has dominated our culture. There have been centuries of paintings and sculpture and mosaics and murals and music about Jesus and His followers. Jesus is everywhere. As John Ortberg says in his book, *Who Is This Man?*

"It is in Jesus' name that desperate people pray, grateful people worship, and angry people swear. From christenings to weddings to sickrooms to funerals, it is in Jesus' name that people are hatched, matched, patched, and dispatched.

From the Dark Ages to postmodernity, He is the man who won't go away."

Though Jesus never wrote a book, His movement "started to give rise to libraries and then guilds of learning. Eventually Oxford and Harvard and Yale and virtually the entire western system of education and scholarship would arise because of His followers. ..." (Ibid. Ortberg)

Think of this: Even in death, Jesus' influence is there. The word *cemetery* is from the Greek word "sleeping place," which pointed to the hope of resurrection. Look at most tombstones, and they will often have the date of birth and then a dash and then the date of death, which indicates the person's length of life in relation to Jesus' lifetime. For example, the person died in 2004, meaning 2004 years after the birth of Christ.

Jesus' impact has changed the morals of our world. His principles and a faith in Him guided influential people like Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and William Wilberforce, and gave us great literature through the likes of C.S. Lewis, Charles Dickens, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Madeleine L'Engle. Hospitals and schools were built in Jesus' name.

Some of the greatest and largest human relief and social organizations started because of the influence of Jesus, like the Red Cross, Compassion International, World Vision, International Justice Mission, Agape International Missions, the YWCA, and the YMCA.

It all boils down to the fact that the founders of these organizations, the authors that I mentioned, and the world leaders that I spoke of, all believed that Jesus the Nazarene was actually God. That because the earth was messed up, God left Heaven and touched down on this planet for 30 years and walked this earth to tell us how to live, and to tell us to follow Him and to take care of the issue of sin in our lives.

So, the Bible passage for us and the question for us all is—how do we answer Jesus' question that soars over the centuries to you and me in this room at this time and place? And the question is: Who do you say I am?

Mark 8:27 Jesus and His disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way He asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

Mark 8:28 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

Mark 8:29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

Mark 8:30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about Him.

Mark 8:31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and after three days rise again.

Mark 8:32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

Mark 8:33 But when Jesus turned and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" He said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Mark 8:34 Then He called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Mark 8:35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Mark 8:36 What good is it for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?

Mark 8:37 Or what can you give in exchange for your soul?

Mark 8:38 If any of you are ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

There are three killer questions today, and so you will soon see. I do mean literally killer questions.

- 1) Who do you say Jesus is?
- 2) Knowing that He was killed for your sake, will you follow Him?
- 3) Are you willing to die for Him?

Each question builds and builds to a crescendo of meaning. First question:

1) Who do you say Jesus is?"

It is one of the most important questions we could ask ourselves. Is Jesus a lunatic who is just living in a demented reality? Or is He a liar, who knows better but chooses to lie and says He is the Messiah? Or is He really the Lord? Lunatic, liar, or Lord? There really is not another choice. But you can't ignore the question because if He were really the Christ—the Messiah, the God who came to Earth in human form—it would be so profound, so revolutionary, so life-changing that we would be idiots not to respond.

His story is written in the Bible, the most important book in the history of the world. The secrets of life are there, if we would just take the time to know what it says. And that is why we are encouraging you to be part of a *Just Show Up* Bible listening/reading group. We've spent much of our life not reading the entire Bible. Now is the time to finally read it.

The Bible has the secrets of how to live in a fruitful, flourishing manner. It will tell us why it is important to have an intimate friendship with God that will sustain us even in tremendous pain, as Kay Warren preached last week.

The reason we have the Alpha and Rooted groups is that they help us explore what it means to be a follower of Jesus, who, it turns out to be, is the Messiah, the Savior of the world who suffered a humiliating death on a cross for you and me for that was the only way to extinguish the spiritual sin that traps us. So learn more about Jesus through Just Show Up, Alpha, Rooted, or any of our Life Training classes.

Who do you say Jesus is? Don't wait years to answer that for you don't know when your time's up.

No one in history has ever affected us as much as Jesus. So, let's figure out who He really is. Second question:

2) Knowing that He was killed for your sake, would you follow Him?

If you were to decide that He really is the Messiah, would you follow Him? As I have said before, Satan believes Jesus is the Messiah, but belief is not enough. No one would say the Devil is a Christian because even though he believes that Jesus exists, he doesn't follow Him. So, believing that Jesus exists is not enough.

In our passage today we see that Peter above all the other disciples gets it. He answers the question correctly. Jesus asks him who He is, and Peter says, "You are the Messiah!" Very good. You go to the head of the class. But then we see that Peter doesn't REALLY get it. He believes but He doesn't fully get it.

Incredibly, we read that Peter rebukes Jesus for not understanding Jesus' role. It's shocking! Peter rebukes Jesus for being incorrect? Check it out in our passage.

Mark 8:31 Jesus then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and after three days rise again.

Mark 8:32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

Auwe! Jesus is teaching all the disciples, and then Peter takes Jesus aside and tells Him that He is completely wrong. Unbelievable. Crazy. The gall! Or to quote a run of Shakespeare quotes – *by Jove – O Lord – tut, tut. A blinking idiot! For goodness sake!*

Peter is taking Jesus aside to rebuke Him for not thinking correctly! Let's not miss the point. Peter didn't want Jesus to die. He didn't get it that he (Peter) is a sinner, and that Jesus has to die to pay the price for his sin.

Friends, there is a lot of Peter the Apostle in us. Do we at times tell Jesus He has it wrong? No, Jesus, I CAN sleep with anyone outside of marriage. I CAN take illegal drugs. I CAN eat or drink as much as I want. No, I don't have to have a heart for the poor. No, loving money is not bad because we need it to live comfortably. And by the way, Jesus, I need to correct You. I am NOT supposed to have pain in my life. You got that one wrong."

We can actually think: "Jesus, don't say I'm a sinner. All people are basically good. And so, You didn't have to die for me because I am a sinner since I'm fundamentally a good person."

In fact, maybe there is a universalist streak in us that says, "All roads lead to God, whether it's through Jesus or not." If that's the case, then Jesus' death on the cross is the most wasted, painful act in the world. Do we think God did that just for the heck of it when it really didn't matter?

It's hard to admit that we are sinners. But if we are honest to ourselves, we should admit that humankind has selfishly, sinfully hurt the earth. There have been wars in almost every year of existence. There has been tremendous greed and narcissism abuse of power in the business and political world. We

normally look out for ourselves and not others.

And when we look at human institutions that fall far from a moral high standard, we know that there is something wrong with us. Whether it's the Pennsylvania Catholic diocese or recent stories of Protestant mega church pastors there has been major sexual abuse, and it's the Christians and churches who were telling us to be more moral than others. The Bible calls that eternal terminal disease that plagues all institutions and individuals – sin.

We won't really appreciate and be passionate about Jesus until we come to grips with the fact that Jesus actually paid the price for our sin. And that was no small thing. How grateful are we for that.

Imagine getting a house sitter while you are on vacation. When you come back, your house sitter says to you, "Hey, while you were gone the postman came and said you needed to pay some delinquent postage, so I took care of it." And you say, "Wow, that was really nice for covering me for that 5 cents."

But imagine this. What if your house sitter said, "Hey, while you were gone, I noticed you were delinquent in paying your water bill, so I paid for it." Now your gratitude is even greater.

But what if you came back from holiday and your house sitter says, "Hey, I noticed you were late in paying your mortgage, so I took care of it. You don't need to pay me back. I actually took care of all of the remaining balance." The debt is paid. You would say, "You did what?" You would be stunned and so appreciative that you might actually fall at your house sitter's feet and worship him or her.

So here's the moral of the story: If we are not truly grateful in our heart for what Jesus did for us, we won't be that passionate in our faith.

If we really understood that Jesus paid the debt for all of the sin that we have done and will do (and He paid for it by going through excruciating pain and dying for us), we would be so thankful! Maybe we would fall at His feet, and pray and sing out at the top of our lungs and worship Him. We would do anything that He asked.

I would say that the level of gratitude, service, and passion for Jesus is in direct proportion to our awareness and acceptance of His paying for our sin. If we really think that Jesus is the Messiah, and we are incredibly grateful for what He has done for us, then we would be willing to TAKE UP A CROSS and die for Him.

Mark 8:34 Then Jesus called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Mark 8:35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Mark 8:36 What good is it for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?

Mark 8:37 Or what can you give in exchange for your soul?

3) Are you willing to die for Him?

It's not a question we ask of our friends or ourselves or in our small groups. Are we willing to give our life for Jesus? What is the cross He is asking us to bear? Among many things the cross, which we display and some of us wear around our necks, is a commitment to follow Him, obey Him unto death. Are you willing to die for a cause? It's not a macabre question. This is something to think about over lunch or when you drive home or later tonight. Think on this.

Terrorists are willing to die for their cause, but are we? Or do we think our faith is so that God will bless us with a nice

swimming pool that we can sit around and eat Bubbies *mochi* ice cream and drink *boba* tea?

Those who want to propagate evil and hatred are willing to die for their cause. They're working 24/7. Remember, September 11 was just a few days ago. Seventeen years ago 19 terrorists were willing to die for the mission they believed in, thereby changing the world for evil.

Are the people of good—the followers of Christ—willing to also have that passion to give up their lives for Jesus, for justice, for good in His name? The enemy is willing to die for their cause. Are we soft or are we dedicated unto death to die for the cause of Christ?

Many in our Armed services are willing to die for our country that you and others might have freedom and life. Many first responders—police, firemen, and emergency medical personnel—put their lives on the lines daily that others might be saved. Many in those professions died on 9/11.

But are we Christians willing to die for the cause of Christ to save others? Are we willing to die daily that others might know Jesus and be saved for eternity? Do we have a heart to save others through salvation or is it all about us?

Way back in January during our annual congregational meeting, I had told you that we hope to have a satellite church campus in Kaka'ako next year. It's not only for more worship services. It's not only to be a base of operations to help the disenfranchised – the homeless, the poor, and the hurting. But it's also to be another opportunity in a fast-growing area in Oahu to lead people to Christ. We want people to be saved for eternity.

It is for that reason that come November we will be having a capital appeal so we can have the finances to secure the site. We hope to lease and remodel it so we can create a missions and worship environment that would be welcoming

to all the people God will send to us to care for and later train to be sent out for Him. The capital appeal for the satellite will mean another sacrifice for us, but it's for a very good cause.

There are basically two types of Christians. The first type are those who want to use God to make themselves happy, blessed, comfortable, or whatever. These are the ones who have an agenda for their lives and want God to bless and fulfill THEIR agenda about their families and friends. Very self-centered. They unconsciously make themselves the Lord, and God has to run around serve themselves as their holy butler. Their prayer life is 90% about themselves. The irony is that if we keep trying to save our own lives, preserve it, and only make life about ourselves, we will lose our lives.

Then there is the other kind of Christians who seriously are willing to lose their lives for Christ's sake, and thereby save their lives every day, according to Jesus. These are followers of Christ who seek God's agenda for their lives and are willing to follow Him even if it means death.

My friend Ed Morgan told me there is a cemetery in South Korea where the missionaries and their children who went there to spread the gospel are buried. They died in their calling to bring Christ to that nation. Some were martyred. And now South Korea is a country of fervent Christians of prayer and action.

Now you may be thinking I am saying we should all be martyrs. No. In fact, as wonderful that some have given their life for the cause of Jesus, it is harder to stay in your jobs and die daily for Christ. It's harder to daily put to death attitudes or addictions in your life to honor Christ. It's harder to daily forgive those who have hurt you. It's harder to daily seek God's agenda and pray for what HE wants you to do rather than to pray and tell God what you want Him to do for you.

It's harder to daily be faithful and enduring in your unconditional love to love the unlovable, to love your fellow employees, their families, and your boss. It's harder to think how to make this city a better place. It's harder to daily think of ways to introduce friends and colleagues to Jesus by your loving actions that one day they might ask you, "Why do you do what you do and treat us with such sacrificial kindness, mercy, and grace?"

Picking up our cross daily means regularly carrying the commitment to follow Jesus in all that we do. Picking up our cross is to daily not accept the world's standards for living.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer the German teacher and author wrote:

"The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering, which every man must experience, is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*)

I remember reading his book *The Cost of Discipleship* many years ago and that quote always stuck with me: "When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die." It is harder to be in the world and not of it than to retreat and be like an isolated monk in a cave who doesn't have to deal with the temptations and the attacks of the world. These are hard words for us all.

We are required to give up our lives for Christ—all of our talents, time, and treasure even when there is suffering. As we heard last Sunday in Kay Warren's talks, yes, even in and especially in

suffering, don't give up and still serve God.

But we can say, "But I thought following Jesus meant that I would never have pain?" Picking up our cross means we follow Jesus even if it means more pain and stress. Kay's husband Rick Warren once asked, "Do you know the most dangerous prayer you could pray?" It's just two words, but be very careful if you ever pray those two words. And they are: **USE ME.**

At that moment there will be a target on your back. The Evil One will know you are dangerous because you are passionate to do whatever Jesus asks even unto death.

There will be people in this world who don't want the Lord's justice or His mercy and grace to those who are poor, strangers, widowed, or in prison. There will be people who will say that you are crazy. There will be people who will try to stop you from doing good. And you might grow weary in doing good.

And at some point, you might think that it's embarrassing to follow Jesus. It's scandalous to follow Him who asks of my time, talent, and treasure to go all in for Him. Am I being asked to be a goody two-shoes? To always be for justice, always being kind to the unlovable, being generous with my money? To say to my friends that I love Jesus with all of my heart? Embarrassing. Shameful.

But then, we can remember the last part of the passage. Jesus said:

Mark 8:38 If any of you are ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when He comes in His Father's glory with the holy angels."

Tough passage! If we, in how we live, are ashamed to be an authentic, genuine follower of Jesus, then Jesus will be ashamed of us when He returns. His words not mine. Big heads up!

Now we can go from this and feel guilty, which I don't think is Jesus' intent. Rather we can hear this and see it as a challenge, and say, "Okay, I'm in. The way I am going to play in the game of life is to go all out. I don't want the coach to be ashamed of my lazy, apathetic play. I'm going to be all in. And I'm not going to perform because the faith is all about performance. No, I know it is all about the heart."

If my heart is all in, then it's not about perfection of performance. It's because I have realized that I want to have a close intimate friendship with Jesus, and out of a friendship, I will do anything, even give up my life for Him, my best friend. I will see my occupation in life as a minister in His name, and I will do whatever His agenda might be for my life. I will see my neighborhood and friendships as opportunities to show the love of Christ.

If I am a student, I will see my school as the place Jesus has placed me, and even if it is tough to reject peer pressure, cyber bullying, illegal drugs, or premarital sex. I will take a stand and pick up my cross of obedience and follow Him. For in the long run, all of us will save our lives by losing it for Jesus.

It may be hard. I guess to be or not to be is the question. May we be able to say at the end of our life like the Apostle Paul: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

And that Jesus might say to us – "Well done, good and faithful servant." Let's pray.