

“The Christ of God”

Luke 9:18-22

In this text Jesus asked His disciples two questions and then Jesus gave them some incredible revelation about His earthly ministry. And these verses serve as an introduction to what Jesus was about to teach His disciples concerning the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God rests upon this foundation: The Christ of God. The rejected, slain, and risen again Christ of God.

I. What the People Said About Jesus (vs. 18-19)

Verse 18 begins, “And it came to pass, as he (Jesus) was alone praying, his disciples were with him.” This is a detail unique to Luke’s gospel account. The conversation that is recorded in this text took place privately. Only Jesus and the disciples were present, and they were separated from the crowds on this occasion for prayer.

There are several things we can learn from this. First, though Jesus was busy with public ministry, He still made time to be alone with His Father and His disciples. If we are not faithful in our personal devotion and in our immediate sphere of ministry with our family and our friends, we cannot expect God to bless our other work. No one had a greater earthly work than Jesus, yet He still took time to be alone with God the Father and his disciples.

Second, when Jesus was alone he prayed. We know that God is omnipresent and that we are never truly alone. Yet how often when we are alone do we allow our minds to wander aimlessly. Time of solitude is best spent in prayer. That is how our Lord used His private time.

When we are busy with work, whether it is secular or spiritual work, there is a great temptation to become self-reliant. How will I get all this work done? How will I make this work fruitful? Very quickly we can begin to trust in our labor instead of resting in God. We should be faithful to use the common means God has given us to accomplish the work that is before us. We must work diligently with our hands and our minds. The Lord has given these to us and He expects us to use them faithfully. But we should never look to ourselves as sufficient for the tasks before us.

We know ourselves. We know our weaknesses and our failings. We must constantly be reminded that all we have comes from God, and in prayer we acknowledge Him and ask for strength and diligence to perform the work that is before us. Martin Luther said, "In human affairs we accomplish everything through prayer. What has been properly arranged we keep in order, what has gone amiss we change and improve, what cannot be changed and improved we bear, overcoming all the trouble and sustaining all the good by prayer. Against force there is no help but prayer alone." May we follow our Lord's example as seen in our text and be faithful in prayer.

In this private setting, Jesus asked His disciples, “Whom say the people that I am?” Why did Jesus ask this question? He knew the hearts of the people. Jesus understood better than the disciples what the people thought about Him and His ministry. Yet Jesus asked the disciples.

Clearly this question wasn't for the benefit of Jesus, but for the benefit of the disciples and for our benefit. In their answer, the disciples would consider the mistakes that others made about the identity of Jesus, and in contrast see how merciful and gracious God had been to them by revealing to them the truth.

Before we look at how the disciples answered Jesus in our text, let's think about how we would answer this question. If Jesus asked you this question, how would you answer: “Whom say the people that I am?”

Many in our day would say that Jesus is a myth. Oh, these stories might be based on some real person or a compilation of real people. But Jesus as a real person never existed. The Jesus of the gospels is a myth.

A great many people consider Jesus to be a great teacher and even a prophet. You cannot read what Jesus said without recognizing the wisdom and beauty with which He spoke. He was a great teacher, and many people think that's all He was.

Some people think Jesus is a way to the Father. That He is one truth among many. There might be many paths to God, Jesus is one of those paths. If Jesus is truth for you, great. He just might not be truth for me or for someone else. We can all have our own truths, and Jesus can be truth for some people.

But maybe the most bizarre answer in our time is this: Many people would say that Jesus is God, but they live as if they are god. This is nothing less than blasphemy, terrible blasphemy. To acknowledge Jesus as God with your lips and not with your life is to say, “I know Jesus is to be worshipped and obeyed, I know He is God and He alone is worthy to be served, but I am going to openly and defiantly rebel against him.” As II Peter 2:21 says, it would be better to have never known the way of righteousness than to have known it and turned away from it. The mercy of God unto salvation is not found in a bare profession from the lips that Jesus is God. But rather, true confession from the heart that Jesus is God. This is a fruit of faith. And it inescapable leads to a transformed life. Beware of a vain profession.

Now look at how the disciples answered Jesus’ question in verse 19: John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the old prophets. This list should sound familiar. This is the same list we saw back in verses 7 and 8 of this chapter when Herod was perplexed by what he heard about Jesus. He heard the same thing from the people. Some people said Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Some said Jesus was Elijah returned from heaven. Some said Jesus was one of the other Old Testament prophets.

What is the significance of this list? All these people were prophets. Israel had been hundreds of years without a prophet. The Jews were well-aware that there had been no new prophetic revelation since the days of Malachi. But now, with

John the Baptist and Jesus, the people widely believed that prophets had returned to Israel.

The people had received John the Baptist as a prophet and from the testimony we see here Luke 9, it's clear the people also thought Jesus was a prophet. They may not have known or agreed upon His actual identity. But they were convinced he was a prophet.

I'm reminded of the words of Nicodemus when he came to Jesus at night in John 3:2 and said, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

And the blind man healed in John 9 who said of Jesus, "He is a prophet . . . If this man were not of God, he could do nothing." (John 9:17 and 33)

It's also interesting that the people do not think Jesus is a new prophet. Why? John the Baptist was received as a new prophet. Why not Jesus?

At the very least, this demonstrates the hardness of their hearts. The people were looking back at what God had done for them in the past. They were not looking forward in anticipation of the promises of God surrounding the Messiah. Not a Messiah like Jesus.

The people believed Jesus was a prophet. They did not agree upon which prophet, but they were confident Jesus was a prophet. That's what the people thought about Jesus. Next, we see what the disciples believed about Jesus.

II. What the Disciples Believed About Jesus (vs. 20-21)

Jesus continued this line of questioning with the disciples and asked them in verse 20: “But whom say ye that I am?” Again, Jesus knew what was in the hearts of the 12 disciples. Jesus knew that 11 of the disciples would ultimately be faithful, but that Judas Iscariot would betray Him. Jesus knew about their secret conversations, like when they argued about who would be greatest in the kingdom (Luke 9:46-47). Jesus knew that what they professed and what they would actually do would be different, like when Peter said he was ready to die for Jesus, and Jesus replied, “Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.” (Luke 22:34)

Again, this question was for the benefit of the disciples, and for us. When the disciples answered this question they could clearly see what an advantage they had over the people. Not because they were more wise. Not because they were better, but because God had revealed truth to them.

If God has revealed Himself to us, may that never make us proud when we consider the darkness others dwell in. We have nothing in ourselves to glory in. We glory in God. It is by His mercy and grace that we are anything. May this make us patient and compassionate toward others who are still dwelling in darkness.

Again, before we look at the answer the disciples gave, let’s think about how we would answer this question. How would you answer if Jesus said to you:

“Whom say ye that I am?”

Truth doesn't change no matter what you say about Jesus. Jesus is Lord. One day every tongue will confess that truth to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:11) On the day of judgment the damned will confess this truth to the glory of God's perfect justice. And the redeemed will confess this truth to the glory of God's incredible mercy and grace. What you believe now does not change what is true. You can believe what you want about Jesus. That doesn't change who He is as God.

But this question is the most important question for you, as an individual, to answer. Who is Jesus?

Do you answer like the world? Jesus is a myth. Jesus was a great teacher, maybe even a prophet. Jesus is one of many ways to the Father. Jesus is God, but I won't worship and obey Him.

The end of answers like this is damnation. If you are wrong about Jesus, you will be wrong about everything else. You can build a beautiful house, but if it has no foundation it will fall apart. You can build a beautiful, successful, moral, upright, respectable life but if it is not built upon the biblical revelation of Jesus Christ it is as worthless as a house without a foundation. Such a life is worth nothing on the day of judgment.

Who is Jesus? Most of you are disciples of Jesus. How would you answer this question?

This question can be answered with wonderful depth from the Word of God like this statement found in the *1689 Baptist Confession*: “[Jesus] the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, is truly and eternally God. He is the brightness of the Father’s glory, the same in substance and equal with him. He made the world and sustains and governs everything he has made. When the fullness of time came, he took upon himself human nature, with all the essential properties and common weaknesses of it but without sin. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit came down upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her. Thus, he was born of a woman from the tribe of Judah, a descendant of Abraham and David in fulfillment of the Scriptures. Two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without converting one into the other or mixing them together to produce a different or blended nature. This person is truly God and truly man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and humanity.”

Amen. There is a lot of wonderful truth given in that statement, drawn directly from the Word of God.

This question can also be answered in child-like simplicity. Who is Jesus? Jesus is my savior. There may be much you don’t know about Jesus, but if you know this you have the right beginning. Rejoice in such simple faith and be faithful to grow in your understanding of what God has revealed in His Word.

Verse 20 goes on to record a brief but profound response from Peter on behalf of the disciples. Jesus asked, “Whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered: “The Christ of God.”

Notice how this answer is different from the speculation of the people. There is assurance and conviction. This is a real answer. Peter knew who Jesus was. The disciples believed that Jesus was distinct in His ministry. They did not believe he was some other prophet come back from the dead. But that He had a separate and unique ministry. And not the ministry of a prophet, though that was an exalted ministry.

The disciple believed that Jesus was the Christ. Christ is not a name. Sometimes this word “Christ” is used like a title and sometimes it is just descriptive of a person’s position. It is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for “anointed.” That Hebrew word is also where we get the word “messiah.” The first time we find this Hebrew word in the Old Testament is in Leviticus 4 and 6 in reference to priests who are anointed to serve as ministers in the tabernacle. This word isn’t used again until I Samuel where it is frequently used to refer to the kings of Israel. And other times it refers to God’s anointed prophets. So in the Old Testament prophets, priests, and kings are all referred to as “anointed,” as small “m” messiahs.

This gives us further insight into the person and work of Jesus. He came to do what could not be done by the people of God, nor their anointed representatives

— the prophets, priests, and kings: Jesus came to fulfill the Law of God. Jesus Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power to be the true Messiah, the Christ. (Acts 10:38) He is the true Prophet — In response to His miracles the people rightly said in John 6:14, “This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.” He is the true High Priest — The book of Hebrews demonstrates this at great length. He is the true King — Jesus left no question about his kingship when questioned by Pilate in John 18. So we see that “Christ” is not merely a name, but a significant title and description of the promised redeemer.

I would remind you again that Judas Iscariot was present when Peter said this on behalf of the disciples. He did not disagree. If you had specifically asked Judas Iscariot this same question I have no doubt that he would have given an answer similar to Peter’s answer. Judas Iscariot would have said that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah.

You can believe great things about Jesus and still not belong to Him. You can confess great truth, but if it is not joined with true faith, then it is an empty profession. You can say, “Jesus is God,” but then live like you are god, the final arbitrator of right and wrong. Our hearts are deceitful, and we are just as likely to deceive ourselves as we are to deceive others. Beware of a vain profession. To confess great truth, apart from faith, serves only to demonstrate our guilt and brings us under just condemnation. By the grace of God, may the truth we confess be joined with true faith in our hearts.

After this profound confession from Peter on behalf of the disciples, verse 21 tells us that Jesus “straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing.”

We have seen this earlier in Luke’s gospel. Back in Luke 4:34 a demon-possessed man, under the influence of the demon, said “Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God.” On that occasion Jesus rebuked the demon and silenced Him. He would not allow the demon to testify about His identity as the Messiah. When we looked at that passage we noted several reasons for this. Jesus had no common cause with demons. He had no need for their testimony. The demon had no interest in submission, obedience, or association with Jesus. Though the demon had great knowledge about Jesus, he would not use that knowledge to the glory of God and so Jesus silenced the demon.

Now we see Jesus again silence those who knew His identity as the Messiah, but this situation seems very different. These are disciples, not demons. These are men Jesus chose and was training to declare the gospel. These men had already been sent out to preach the kingdom of God. Why did Jesus so strictly command them not to declare, at this time, that he was the Christ?

His time had not yet come. His work of redemption had not yet been accomplished, and Jesus goes on in this text to speak about these things. When the time came, the disciples would boldly declare Jesus to be the Christ, the Messiah.

In Acts 2:36 Peter concluded his Pentecost sermon with these words: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Now, in the time in which we live, Christ must be declared to the nations. But when Jesus spoke to His disciples in our text, it was not yet time. This is why He commanded them not to tell anyone that He was the Christ. His time had not yet come.

But what does that mean? What does it mean that Jesus’ time had not yet come? Jesus elaborated in verse 22. In verse 22 Jesus revealed future details about His ministry to His disciples.

III. What Jesus Revealed to the Disciples (vs. 22)

Verse 22 begins with these words from Jesus: “The Son of Man must suffer many things.” Jesus used this title for himself, “the Son of Man,” more than any other title. This title is a prophetic title for the Messiah. In Daniel 7:13-14 we read, “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”

Just as Adam was the representative of the human race at the first creation, so Jesus, the “Son of Man,” is the representative of the human race in the new creation. I Corinthians 15:45 says, “And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.”

The first Adam failed in his role. He transgressed the command of God. And through his headship, we are all born with a sin nature. We are sinners by nature as well as sinners by choice. And don’t get mad at Adam. Adam was created perfect. He was in a perfect environment. He was humanity’s best shot at keeping the law of God. Where Adam failed, you and I would also fail.

In our Wednesday night family group we are going through the New City Catechism. The question this past week was: “What does the Law of God require?” And the full answer is: “Personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience; that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love our neighbor as ourselves. What God forbids should never be done and what God commands should always be done.”

There is no hope in the Law. There is no comfort in the Law. There is no good news in the Law. The Law demands personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience. Had Adam never sinned, his righteousness would still not be secure because his righteousness rested on his personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience. Every single day there would be the same question: “Is today the day Adam fails?”

Not so with the last Adam, Jesus Christ. Jesus fulfilled the Law. Jesus completed the work of redemption. When we enter the new creation, when we are born again by the Holy Spirit of God, Jesus Christ is our new head. The righteousness of Jesus Christ is secure. He cannot fail. There is no question. We can have blessed assurance in our salvation. Not based on anything we have done, but based on the identity of our Savior: the Son of Man, Jesus Christ.

Jesus said the Son of Man must suffer many things. He must suffer. Not may suffer. Not might suffer. Not even will suffer. He *must* suffer. Why?

Why did Jesus have to suffer? Hebrews 9:22b says, “Without shedding of blood is no remission.” He had to suffer and He had to die to accomplish the salvation that God the Father had ordained.

Beware of anyone who tells you otherwise. Beware of false teachers who try to soften the blow of Christ’s death upon the cross and call it something else. Some false teachers say that Christ’s death on the cross is just an example of injustice. That Jesus was an innocent man put to death by wicked men. And that’s true, but that’s not the whole story. While Christ’s suffering was human injustice, it was also Divine justice.

The early Christians recognized this. They prayed in Acts 4:26-28, “The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of

Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” Christ’s death on the cross was God’s appointed way to accomplish salvation.

Beware also of false teachers who decry the sufferings of Jesus Christ as “Divine child-abuse.” That’s blasphemous. First, if you “abuse” someone you are mistreating them to a bad end: bad intentions and bad actions. Christ’s suffering was for the most noble of ends: for the glory of the triune God through the redemption of sinners.

And second, Jesus willingly suffered. Hebrews 12:2 says, “Jesus . . . for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” For the joy that was set before Him, Christ suffered. And He now sits triumphantly at the right hand of the throne of God.

From Christ’s suffering may we learn to suffer. Again, beware of false teachers who tell you that it is never God’s will for you to suffer. Are we better than our Lord? In the very next verse, Luke 9:23 Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” The way of Christ is often a way of suffering. Scripture does not tell us how to avoid unjust suffering. Scripture tells us to follow the example of our Lord and honor God in the midst of unjust suffering. (That’s the major theme in the book of I Peter.) May we follow the example of our Lord and patiently endure unjust suffering for the glory of God.

In the rest of verse 22 Jesus revealed details about this suffering. First, that he would be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes. These men who made up the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews, would reject Jesus, the Messiah. Those who should have been at the front of the crowds to welcome Him would reject Him. They would be at the front of the crowds crying out, “Crucify Him!” When given the option to release Jesus or a murderer, they chose the murderer.

This rejection was no surprise to Jesus. Here at the north end of the Sea of Galilee, far removed from Jerusalem, when the people still came out in crowds by the thousands to hear Jesus teach and see the miracles, at the height of His popularity, Jesus knew He would ultimately be rejected. It was no surprise to Him, and it should have been no surprise to the disciples. Jesus warned them that it would happen.

Next, Jesus told His disciples that He would be killed. Jesus understood His role as the Messiah. Jesus knew that He would be put to death, and he told others. He told his disciples. He alluded to his death when He spoke in public. And we will see this more in Luke’s gospel as we get closer and closer to the cross. But when Jesus spoke of His death, he also spoke of His resurrection.

At the end of verse 22 Jesus said He would be “raised the third day.” Lest the disciples should despair, Jesus tells them this wonderful truth: that He would be raised from the dead on the third day. Christ’s resurrection was the seal upon His life, His work of redemption, and the gospel He preached. And to tie verse 22 in

with verse 21 in our text, when this sign was set as a seal upon Jesus, then it would be time to declare Him as Christ.

This is exactly what we see in Peter's Pentecost sermon. There in Acts 2 Peter pointed to the resurrection as proof that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. And then he called upon the people to acknowledge Jesus as Lord (Acts 2:30-36).

How did the disciples receive this teaching from Jesus? Our text doesn't tell us, but we know from parallel accounts that they didn't receive it well. The glory of the resurrection was lost to them, and they could not tolerate the thought that Jesus would suffer, be rejected, and ultimately killed.

From Matthew 16:22 we learn that Peter actually took Jesus aside after He had taught this to the disciples and Peter began to rebuke Him, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee."

To which Jesus replied, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. (Matthew 16:23)

It would not be until after the resurrection that the disciples finally understood the work of Jesus as Messiah.

What are we to learn from our text this morning?

We have learned what the people said about Jesus. They thought he was a prophet. Maybe John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the other old prophets.

We have learned what the disciples said about Jesus. They believed he was the Christ. The Son of the living God.

And we have learned what Jesus said about Himself. That He must suffer, be rejected, and killed. But that He would be raised again the third day.

As we close, I want you to consider how you would answer this question: Who do you say Jesus is? Do you answer this question like the people who say, “He is a prophet. He is a great teacher. He is God, but I will not serve Him.”

Or do you echo the confession of Peter: “Jesus is the Christ of God. The Messiah. My Messiah.”

Our text doesn't record this, but in Matthew's parallel account Jesus replied to Peter's confession: “Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17)

It is God the Father that revealed Jesus as Christ to us. If God have given you this revelation, do not squander it. Praise God for revealing Jesus as the Christ.