

Sermon 44: Luke 9:18-22: 'Who Do You Say That I Am?'

OUTLINE

A prophet
The Messiah
The Suffering Saviour

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important questions we need to answer in life is in this text, 'Who do you say that I am?' This is the question that Jesus puts to His disciples. We live in a day and age where many think we cannot answer that question with any confidence. For the more scientifically minded the problem is one of historical distance and having to rely on prescientific eye witnesses. For the more sceptical certainty about anything even our own experiences is doubted. But God has given us His word that we can know things truly, though not necessarily exhaustively. In particular the gospels have been given that we can know who Jesus Christ is. John at the end of his gospel writes, 20:30-31, 'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.'

Luke's gospel on the one hand gives very clear evidence to who Jesus is, while on the other hand documenting the growing understanding of the disciples. One commentator writes: 'Like the other three historians, Luke clearly records the identity of Jesus Christ. The angel Gabriel said of Him, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end" (1:32-33). Later in chapter 1, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, testified that Jesus would fulfill all the promises of the Old Testament (1:68-69, 76-79). At His birth an angel said to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (2:10-11). Later Simeon (2:25-32) and Anna (2:36-38), testified that He was indeed the Messiah, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. At the age of twelve, Jesus told His parents that He had to be in His heavenly Father's house (2:49). John the Baptist, His herald and forerunner, also identified Jesus as the Messiah (3:16-18). At His baptism the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus and the Father affirmed Him as His Son (3:21-22) as He did at the transfiguration (9:35). Even Satan had to acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God (4:3), as did the demons (4:34, 41; 8:28).'¹

A lot of commentators documenting the growing understanding of who Jesus is make out as if this were the first time that the disciples realized that Jesus was the Christ. The impression is often given that when Jesus asks this question the only one who knows the answer is Peter and all the other disciples are amazed at this idea they had just now only learned. This is not the case. The disciples knew who He was, Jesus first disciples were disciples of John the Baptist who prepared the way for the Messiah. Peter's confession of Jesus as Lord while confessing his own sinfulness is telling, 5:8. The miracles, the teachings, and having been with Jesus for about 2 years, and even going in His authority to perform various miracles can leave us in no doubt that the disciples knew that Jesus was the Messiah. Luke is not giving us this account to let us know that it was here that the disciples

1 MacArthur, J. (2011). [Luke 6-10](#) (p. 258). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

learned that Jesus was the Messiah. No, rather he records this event to relate how the disciples had to learn about a Suffering Messiah.

Our text records three levels of understanding about the identity of Jesus. The first is the opinion of the general populace that Jesus is some kind of prophet; the second is the opinion of the disciples that Jesus is the Messiah; the third is the new information that the Messiah must suffer. We are in a long section that has been establishing the identity of Jesus, this all comes to a climax now as Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, as Christ reveals Himself that He must suffer, and this will be followed by the transfiguration as a kind of divine attesting to Jesus identity.

Let's look at these three levels of understanding as our three points.

A Prophet

V18, 'Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" Our portion begins with Jesus alone in prayer. The other gospels tell us that they are at Caesarea Philippi which is on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were of course in the vicinity, but this is Jesus typical practice of withdrawing for prayer. Luke more than any other records the details of Jesus prayer life. He also shows how prayer in the life of Christ preceded important events. In Luke 6:12 before choosing the 12 apostles Jesus spends a whole night in prayer; before His arrest and death He withdrew to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, 22:41; and now here just before He drops the bomb that the Messiah must suffer and the turn of His ministry moves from Galilee towards Jerusalem, we find Him in prayer. This is a signal to us that something significant is occurring.

Now the apostles have been out ministering, they have been interacting with the crowds that have followed Jesus, in many ways they have the information that could give a fairly good survey of public opinion. So in v19 we see a good representation of what the apostles have encountered so far in people's opinion about Jesus, 'And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." We see that the crowds think that Jesus could be one of three options. What is important to note is that all three have a prophetic cast to them. Today if we asked people this question the answer would be very different. What is clearly missing from this survey is the typical naturalistic, and skeptical, and personalized views that would be prevalent today. Naturalistic views would be those who talk about Jesus as a moral teacher who gives good lessons on love and being nice; it would include all those who views that see Jesus merely as a man with political ambitions and trying to build some kind of ideal political kingdom where everyone is nice to each other. What is missing as well is the modern skeptical views that say that the gospels are nothing more than inflated hero myths that have a natural historical event at the core around which miracles, myths and legends arose. What is missing is those attempts by people from other religions to try and synthesize Jesus with their own worldviews making Jesus an alien hybrid who was artificially inseminated into Mary; or a New Age guru who brought teachings from India.

No, what all three views have in common is that they recognize the prophetic aspect of His ministry. They recognize that He is sent from God, not only because of His message but because of the miracles that they had observed with their own eyes and many would have personally experienced. This slams the door on so many of the modern perspectives on Jesus, they are not even in the ball park. Even the religious leaders who rejected Jesus knew that He was from God and the miracles His performed were by the Spirit of God. This

is why they are guilty of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be done in ignorance but only knowing that God is working and crediting His work to satan.

So why would they have thought that Jesus was John the Baptist back from the dead? There were obvious similarities between Jesus and John, both preached a message about the Kingdom of God; both baptized with a baptism of repentance; both had disciples who baptized. Both criticized the religious establishment. Some thought that Jesus was Elijah. Mal. 4:5 prophesied that Elijah would come to Israel before the day of the Lord. Jesus has already explained though that John is the prophesied Elijah not Himself. Some thought that another prophet from the OT had risen from the dead, Matt. 16:14 records the possibility of Jeremiah. Why Jeremiah? Both Jesus and Jeremiah foretold of God's judgement on Jerusalem.

Today Islam and the Bahai faith would agree with this assessment that Jesus was merely a prophet, but the trouble with this is that Jesus told that He was God, John 8:58; that He was the object of people's faith, Matt. 11:28-30, John 6:35; He received the worship of monotheistic Jews, John 20:28. C. S. Lewis put it well: 'I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sorts of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be a devil of hell. You must make your choice... You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. *He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.*²

The Messiah

V20, 'Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God.'" In contrast to the general populace Jesus asks the disciples who they think He is. Peter, who is typically the most outspoken, and often represents the other disciples answers clearly, 'The Christ of God.' Matt. 16:17 records, 'Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" The word Christ is the Greek translation of the word Messiah, and the meaning of both is anointed one. There were various offices in the OT where people were anointed into their office. The prophets, priests and kings were the anointed ones of the OT. And the OT also prophesies and promises a Saviour who would be The Anointed One. Deut. 18:15 is Moses prophesying about this future Prophet, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.' 2 Sam. 7:12-13, 'When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.' Psalm 110:4 prophesies a new Highpriest, 'The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.'" Peter is confessing that he believes that Jesus is this promised One from God.

² Blanchard, p572.

But there is also the second part of His confession that Matthew records, 'Son of the living God.' This is a huge statement. This label of Son has several connotations. It points back to Adam, and Christ as the Last Adam. It was what God called Israel, and point to Christ as the ideal Israelite and the Federal Head of Israel. It was a title for the King of Israel, and Jesus is the Son of David. But we know that it also carries connotations of divinity, it points towards God's nature as being tripersonal. Every Monotheistic Jew would have known that God is one, that God could not have a Son, that to have a Son would be to have another divine being. John 5:18, before the feeding of the 5000 records this, 'This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.' Any of John the Baptist's disciples who were now following Jesus will know of John's baptizing of Jesus and how the Spirit manifested and descended upon Him, and the Father spoke audibly that Jesus was God's Son and was well pleased with Him. It is unlikely that Peter knew all of the ramifications of what this meant, we must remember that the disciples are developing and progressing in their understanding of Christ's identity, he may have confessed better than he knew at this point, but it is a key part of his confession. What he only beginning to know we know the fullness of. The second person of the Trinity came down to earth to become fully human without ceasing to be God.

Matt. 16:17 says, 'And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.' Jesus tells us that though all the evidence is there, Christ's identity is not happened upon by a process of inductive reasoning. No, the Holy Spirit has to reveal who Christ is. Our natural unbelief is unwilling to believe, God must by His Spirit reveal this to us. Any who believe, believe because God has worked by His Spirit.

The Suffering Saviour

V21, 'And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, ²² saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." First off we see that Jesus charges the disciples to be silent about this. This is likely because the people have already tried to make Him King and Jesus is not interested in a political revolution. One day Jesus will impose His rule on all of Creation and all His enemies will be put under His feet but that day is for His Second Coming. No we see that the main focus of Christ's present mission is His suffering.

Now the disciples knew that Jesus was the Messiah where the crowds did not. They struggled with notions of the Messiah establishing a political system even after Jesus died, Acts 1:6. They thought they knew what the Messiah had come to do, to judge and to rule. This was part of the reason why they fought over who would sit at His right and left hand, and who was the greatest, because they thought that He would soon set up His court. This also accounts for their willingness to call down judgement 9:51-56. But here is where Jesus drops the bomb on the disciples. They have come round to the astounding truth that He is the promised Messiah and the Son of God, and now He tells them that He must suffer.

He uses the title, 'The Son of Man.' This is the title of the promised one in Daniels' vision in 7:13-14, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass

away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.' In this vision He rules over an everlasting dominion. But now Jesus tells the disciples that this Son of Man, must suffer.

That one word 'must' is the difference between Liberal and Biblical Christianity. Jesus was born of a virgin, gave up His divine prerogatives and the abode of heaven, He suffered the indignities of rejection, mistrials, torture and death, all because He had to. In the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed, 'My Father if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,' but it was not possible Jesus had to drink the cup of God's wrath. God did not send His own Son to die this way because He thought it would be fun, or a nice gesture but because it was the only way that our sins could be fully paid for and God's holy justice be perfectly satisfied.

Jesus prophesies that He must suffer many things. Many of these things were prophesied in the OT. It was prophesied that He would be rejected by men, Is. 53:3, 'He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.' He was betrayed by a friend; forsaken by the disciples; suffer the bloody sweat of Gethsemane; the indignities of His arrest, abuse at the hands of the authorities, several unjust trials, the pains of crucifixion but the worst of all was His being forsaken by God for the payment of our sins. We are told that He would be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, together these made up the Sanhedrin, the ruling council in Israel.

Jesus here tells His disciples that He must be killed, and then on the third day be raised. Death is the wages of sin, Christ's death pays for our sins. But then Jesus will rise on the third day, here He is prophesying His resurrection. There are those who deny that Jesus did die like the Muslims, claiming that someone else, perhaps Judas or Simon of Cyrene died. If Jesus did not die for our sins, they are not paid for and we are still under the judgment of God. Jesus must die. Some deny that Jesus rose from the dead. Liberals deny Jesus bodily resurrection; the JW's believe that Jesus only rose spiritually. It is necessary that Jesus rise from death, to prove His own innocence, and to be the firstfruits of our own resurrection. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 15:17, 'And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.' The death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ and not peripheral doctrines, they are central. They divide but so what, Jesus Himself tells us that He must die and be raised.

This way of thinking went against what the disciples expected. Peter famously puts his foot in it. Matt. 16:22-23, 'And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." This will be the first of several mistakes that feature largely in the rest of this chapter. Peter here rebukes Christ for saying He must suffer; at the transfiguration Peter will put his foot in it again wanting to make 3 Tents for Elijah, Moses and Jesus. The disciples will not have enough faith to cast out a demon; they will argue about who is the greatest; will complain about others casting our demons in Jesus name and will want to call down judgement on an unbelieving Samaritan village.

Here we see that the idea that Jesus must not suffer is not merely wrong, it is satanic in its origin. You will remember when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness how the devil sought to give Jesus the kingdoms of this earth, but not by Jesus finishing His work of dying on the cross and being raised again, but by going around the cross. By shortcutting to the reward without the cross. Jesus has been tempted by the devil already in this fashion and rebukes Peter for being an instrument in Satan's hand to bring this temptation against Him again.

Who then is Jesus? Who do you say that He is? We have seen that naturalistic explanations; skeptical theories; and syncretistic notions are off the table. We have seen that Jesus is more than a mere prophet, but the Messiah and the Son of the living God. He is the Suffering Saviour who must die and be raised. Is this the Jesus you believe in? is this the Jesus you confess?