

“WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”
LUKE 9:18-22

When George H. W. Bush was President of the United States, he made a visit to a Virginia elementary school. And although he was introduced as the President and was surrounded by his Secret Service detail, one skeptical third grader refused to believe that Bush really was who he said he was. How do you prove your identity to a skeptic? He pulled out his American Express card with his name on it! (In case you are wondering why the President, who never has to pay for anything, had an AmEx card, it's because he used it to buy Christmas presents!)

Our Savior also faced many questions about His identity, and much of His teaching was given to address those questions, as were the miracles that affirmed His messianic work. We have seen that through the gospel of Luke — Gabriel, the angels, the shepherds, and Mary and Joseph all spoke of Christ's identity at His birth. And Jesus' first teaching episode (when He was 12) addressed His identity (2:41ff), as did His interaction with Satan (4:1-13), His first sermon (4:18), and virtually every miracle he performed and sermon he spoke.

Having preached and taught and performed miracles for almost two years, Jesus tested the disciples about how well they had been observing and listening by asking two questions about His identity (9:18-22). The questions for the disciples are good questions for us as well. On Christmas Eve it is fitting to ask and answer the most important question about Jesus — it is a single question that is asked and answered in three ways in these verses: *who is Jesus?* Who is the baby in the manger?

- 1. Who Do People Say Christ Is? (vv. 18-19)**
- 2. Who Do the Disciples Say Christ Is? (v. 20)**
- 3. Who Does Christ Say He Is? (vv. 21-22)**

Consider the first question:

1. Who Do People Say Christ Is? (vv. 18-19)

- The question Jesus asks in v. 18 is important on its own — but it's also important because Jesus will shortly leave Galilee. After about two years of ministry there, how have they evaluated His ministry?
 - ✓ Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus and the Twelve have left Bethsaida and they are now in Caesarea Philippi on the northwestern side of Israel.
 - ✓ But Jesus is still training and equipping the disciples for His departure and their ministry in His place. He's building both their theological and practical skills. This is a theology exam.
 - ✓ And as Jesus asks this question, the events of vv. 1-17 still have to be in the minds of the disciples — they will remember what the crowds said as they traveled in Galilee (vv. 1ff) and they will remember what Christ did in feeding the 5000.

- Jesus and the disciples are finally **alone**, away from the crowds and while He was praying they come to Him and He asks them a question — **who do people say that I am?**
 - ✓ This is not the only time this question has been asked.
 - The Pharisees had asked it (5:21; 7:49; 20:2). [They asked in disbelief, doubting He was Messiah.]
 - John's disciples had asked the question for John (7:19-20).
 - The disciples had also asked the question (8:25).
 - And Herod was perplexed by the question (9:9).
 - ✓ This repeated question emphasizes that the identity of Christ is of paramount importance. This question is the theme of the opening section of this chapter, and the conclusion of Jesus' Galilean ministry (v. 20). There is no greater question to answer in all of life. And everyone must answer the question — from the poorest peasant in Galilee to the governor of Galilee. All must answer.
- There was a three-fold answer for who Jesus was (interestingly, Herod had the same categories) —
 - ✓ He is the resurrected **John** the Baptist (v. 7; Herod also thought this but dismissed it, v. 9).
 - ✓ He is a resurrected **Elijah** (the one who would come before the day of the Lord; Mal. 4:5; Lk. 1:17).
 - ✓ He is a resurrected **prophet** (Matthew says the specifically identify Jeremiah). While the Pharisees wondered who Christ was, they weren't even willing to acknowledge He was a prophet (7:39).
 - ✓ All three categories end up in the same place — a good man, but a man who is less than God. They all attribute humanity to Christ but deny His deity. The answers are respectful but incomplete.
 - ✓ The average Israelite was attracted to Jesus and His prophetic ministry (and miracles!), but they had no comprehension of His role as Messiah and Son of Man, though He repeatedly explained it.
- We have similar categories today. The masses are willing to attribute humanity to Christ, but not more.
 - ✓ They are happy to acknowledge the tenderness and wonder of the birth narrative — Mary (though obviously not accepting a divine conception), Joseph, the manger, the angels, the innkeeper, the shepherds, and even the antagonist Herod all make a wonderful story that they happily embrace. But nothing more than that.
 - ✓ They are willing to say He is an inspiring teacher (even a great teacher), but not more.
 - ✓ They happily acknowledge that He is a compassionate servant, but not the sinless Son of God.
 - ✓ They happily celebrate the birth of Christ as long as they can mix it with the advent of Santa Clause, Frosty the Snowman, Rudolph, and a host of other fantasies. Jesus is just that — another fantasy.
 - ✓ Like the people of Jesus' day, the people of our day will happily have a human Jesus; they want nothing to do with a divine Jesus. But to deny the deity of Christ is to strip the authority and power from Christ (which is why they deny His deity — they don't want a King to live over them).
 - ✓ Preach any Christ but the divine Christ and you do not have Christ.
 - ✓ Preach any Christ but a sovereign Christ and you do not have Christ.
 - ✓ Preach any Christ but an authoritative and kingly Christ and you do not have Christ.

- ✓ Preach any Christ but a divine, sovereign, and authoritative Christ and you have a man — only a man.
- ✓ But preach Christ who is divine, sovereign, authoritative and King, and you have the Savior Christ.
- Jesus makes no evaluation on the speculation of the crowds or the disciples' report. He wants to know what the Twelve think. He is preparing them for ministry; what they believe about Him is paramount. So the second question arises...

2. Who Do the Disciples Say Christ Is? (v. 20)

- **Peter** might answer for the Twelve, but Jesus asks all of them, and He emphatically asks what *they* think of Him — “Y’all — who do you say *I* [emphatic] am?”
 - ✓ Jesus is not just asking about “identity,” He is asking about faith. “Who do you *believe* I am?” They have been unclear about who He was and have had episodes of doubt (and would again). What do they believe about Jesus?
 - ✓ Peter’s answer is short and concise — ***the Christ of God***.
 - “Christ” is the Greek term for “Anointed One.” It is the NT equivalent of “Messiah.”
 - Israel had been waiting for the unique Messiah since Deut. 18:15.
 - The nation wanted a political Messiah who would overthrow Rome; Peter is affirming that they (not just he) believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah who would sit on David’s throne.
 - ✓ And He is ***of God*** — from God and belonging to God. He is the Son of the Most High (1:32, 35) and the Son of Man (5:24; 6:5; Dan. 7:14).
- While we use the title ***Christ*** for Jesus regularly and freely, Luke used it much more rarely. He only uses the title 12x in his gospel — and after this declaration it isn’t used again until chapter 20 (20:41).
 - ✓ And then it is used several more times culminating in His rejection by the people as the Messiah (22:67; 23:2, 35, 39). The disciples embraced Jesus as the Messiah (***the Christ***); the crowds did not.
 - ✓ Preach Jesus as the Christ and you will reach men — but you will also offend men and they will reject Him, for they do not want Him as Christ and King.
- Who is Jesus?
 - ✓ He is a genuine child born to Mary some 2000 years ago — and He is far more.
 - ✓ He is the Son of God, the Son of Man (Dan. 7:14), the promised Messiah of Israel, and the Lord of all.
 - ✓ And He is (at least) one thing more: He is the Savior of the world...

3. Who Does Christ Say He Is? (vv. 21-22)

- Jesus doesn’t ask the question of Himself and the disciples don’t ask Him who He says He is, but His statements in vv. 21-22 reveal more about His identity...

- Jesus first warns the disciples not to say anything to anyone about this declaration (v. 21) — they were not to preach that He was only a healer and provider, but that He was also the Savior of sin (v. 22) —
 - ✓ ***The Son of Man must suffer...*** He *must* be ***rejected, killed, and resurrected*** — not for His benefit.
 - ✓ He must endure those things for our benefit. He died to absorb God's right anger against *my* sin.
 - ✓ In fact, at the end of Luke's gospel, Jesus connects His title ***Christ*** (Messiah) to His death and resurrection (24:26, 46).
 - ✓ There is no Christ (Messiah), there is no Son of God, there is no Son of Man, without the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. That's the message of Christ and the message of Christmas.
 - ✓ And if you love the cross, then you have a Christmas to celebrate; if you hate the cross and don't love the resurrection, then you have nothing of Christ and nothing of value at Christmas.
- On this Christmas Eve, we remember that Christ came to earth. We remember His humility and condescension. And we remember that the humility of Christ culminated at the cross.
 - ✓ If you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, would you tonight repent of your sin, and believe that He died on the cross for your sin and would you believe that He is worth living for today?
 - ✓ The disciples were affirming that they believed in Jesus as Savior from sin — would you similarly repent and believe in Him? He is worth everything. You will never be disappointed in Him.

CONCLUSION: How do you answer this question? Who do you say that Christ is? Life both now and in eternity is determined by how you answer.

“And now what do we think of Christ? This is the question that ought to occupy our minds. What thoughts does He call forth in our hearts? This is the inquiry which ought to receive our attention. Are we for Him or are we against Him? Do we love Him or do we neglect Him? Do we stumble at His doctrine or do we find it life from the dead? Let us never rest until these questions are satisfactorily answered.” [Ryle, *Christmas Meditations*, 77.]

PRAYER (prep for communion)