

# **To Seek and To Save the Lost**

## **Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ**

*Luke 9:18-20*

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# Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

## Scripture

For the past 20 months we have been studying the life of Jesus as it has been recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

Recently we invited friends and guests to our Easter Service by asking the question, “Why did Easter change history?”

Today’s text is especially appropriate in answering that question as it helps us understand Jesus’ identity and mission.

Let’s read about Peter confession in Luke 9:18-20:

**<sup>18</sup>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?” <sup>19</sup>And they answered, “John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.” <sup>20</sup>Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.” (Luke 9:18-20)**

## Introduction

On the game show *Family Feud*, hosted by Steve Harvey, contestants are asked to guess how 100 people responded to various survey questions. In a 2012 episode, a contestant had to provide the top answers to the following survey question: “When someone mentions ‘the King,’ to whom might he or she be referring?” Here were the top four answers:

1. 81 people said, “Elvis Presley.”
2. 7 people said, “God or Jesus.”
3. 3 people said, “Martin Luther King, Jr.”
4. 2 people said, “Burger King.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, how would you have responded if I had handed out

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<sup>1</sup> James Gilmore, “We Have No King but Elvis,” *White Horse Inn* blog, (9-14-2012).

a survey this morning and asked each of you the question, “When someone mentions ‘the King,’ to whom might I be referring?”

My guess is that most of you would answer, “Jesus,” especially since you are being asked in a Christian worship service and it is, after all, Easter Sunday!

But what may seem obvious and self-evident to us was not so obvious and self-evident when Jesus was alive. In fact, even Jesus’ closest disciples took a long time to understand his true identity. Massive crowds were drawn to Jesus, primarily because of his miracles. His preaching and teaching were also impressive to vast numbers of people. Nevertheless, it took years for some of them to understand his true identity.

## Lesson

The analysis of Peter’s confession in Luke 9:18-20 will teach us the significance of confessing Jesus as the Christ.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The First Question of Jesus (9:18)
2. The View of the Crowds (9:19)
3. The Second Question of Jesus (9:20a)
4. The Confession of Peter (9:20b)

### I. The First Question of Jesus (9:18)

First, let’s look at the first question of Jesus.

Luke said in verse 18a **that as Jesus was praying alone, the disciples were with him.** Luke did not say where Jesus was when **he was praying alone**, but we know from Matthew and Mark that Jesus and **the disciples** were in “the district of Caesarea Philippi” (Matthew 16:13; cf. Mark 8:27).

John MacArthur says that Caesarea Philippi was. . .

. . . located north of the Sea of Galilee on the slopes of Mt. Hermon, about forty to fifty miles southwest of Damascus. It was near the extreme northern boundary of Old Testament Israel, not far from the city of Dan. It was originally named Panion, after the god Pan, whom Greek settlers, who entered the region after the death of Alexander the Great, worshiped in a nearby cave. Herod the Great built a temple there, and dedicated it to Rome and Caesar Augustus. Herod's son Philip the Tetrarch renamed the city Caesarea and appended his own name to it to distinguish it from the other Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast. At more than one thousand feet in elevation, this scenic region offered Jesus and the apostles some relief from the crowds in the lowlands.<sup>2</sup>

Caesarea Philippi was a religiously diverse community. It was in this setting that Jesus **asked** his twelve disciples, **“Who do the crowds say that I am?”** (9:18b). Jesus wanted to know what the word on the street was about his identity. Jesus wanted to know what public opinion was about who he was.

Now Jesus was really testing his twelve apostles. They had been with him for about two years now, and he wanted to know what they understood about his identity and mission.

So Jesus began by asking, **“Who do the crowds say that I am?”**

## II. The View of the Crowds (9:19)

Second, notice the view of the crowds.

The disciples had not only been with Jesus but they also mixed with the crowds. They were quite familiar with the view of the crowds. **And they answered** Jesus, **“John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen”** (9:19).

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<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *Luke 6-10*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2011), 259.

First, I want you to notice that no one on the street thought that Jesus was the Christ. No one correctly understood Jesus' identity.

And second, I want you to notice that though the crowd did not correctly understand the identity of Jesus, they did however have a generally good opinion of him. Their best guess was that he was some kind of prophet, even perhaps an Old Testament prophet who had come back to life!

Today people have various views about the identity of Jesus. Let me suggest a few common views that are held today.

*First, Jesus was a prophet.* Interestingly, like the crowds in Jesus' day, many today believe that Jesus was a prophet. The 1.2 billion Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet. In fact, they go so far as to say that Jesus is the greatest of all prophets. But that is as far as they will go. They will not affirm that Jesus is anything more than a prophet.

*Second, Jesus was a legend.* Some believe that the Gospel authors were not writing about the historical person of Jesus but rather about a fictional character. One writer expressed it this way:

The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the Kingdom of God, who founded the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and died to give his work its final consecration, never had any existence.<sup>3</sup>

*Third, Jesus was a moral teacher.* This is perhaps the most common view in our culture today. People say that Jesus was a good man, perhaps even the best of men, and a great moral teacher. Here is what C. S. Lewis wrote to refute this view:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: "I'm ready to accept

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<sup>3</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1959), 398.

Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things 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 the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. 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 with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.<sup>4</sup>

In his book titled *The 100*, astrophysicist Michael Hart asks a provocative question: Who are the 100 most influential people in history? Of all the human beings who have ever lived, who has had the deepest impact on our lives today?<sup>5</sup>

Hart listed one hundred people he considers to be most influential in history. But what really made the book interesting and popular was that Michael Hart had the audacity to *rank* the top one hundred world changers. He established a ranking of human greatness.

So, what do you think he did with Jesus? Sure enough, Jesus did make it onto Hart's list. He said that Jesus was the inspiration for the most influential religion in history. Hart even wrote, "Jesus had an extraordinarily impressive personality." That's a nice compliment, but Jesus is so much more.

So, where did Hart rank Jesus? Based on Jesus' impressive influence throughout history, Hart ranked Jesus as the third most influential person in history, right after Muhammad and Isaac Newton.

Hart viewed Jesus as one among many. He was influential

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<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1978), 55–56.

<sup>5</sup> Michael H. Hart, *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History* (New York, NY: Citadel Press, 2000).

to be sure, along with many others, but Jesus was not unique.

Like the crowds in Jesus' day, people today may have a generally good view of him. But, most of them do not understand his true identity.

### III. The Second Question of Jesus (9:20a)

Third, note the second question of Jesus.

Jesus wanted his disciples now to give an answer about his identity. He wanted to know what they thought about his identity. **Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"** (9:20a). It is important to note that in the Greek the word "**you**" is in the emphatic position. Jesus was asking his disciples in effect, "I know that there are many views out there about my identity, but *you*, who do *you* say that I am?"

Jesus was bringing his disciples to a point of personal commitment. What other people thought of Jesus did not matter to him. What did matter to him was that the disciples believed for themselves.

Jeremy Bowen, the presenter of a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) documentary on Jesus stated, "The important thing is not what he was or what he wasn't – the important thing is what people believe him to have been. A massive world wide religion, numbering more than two billion people follows his memory – that's pretty remarkable, 2,000 years on."

Bowen couldn't be more wrong. It really is important to know who Jesus is.

The most important question in the world is the one Jesus asked his disciples, "**But who do you say that I am?**" The reason it is so important is because the most important person in the entire universe asked the question. It is also the most important question because the answer given determines our eternal destiny. Heaven and hell are hanging in the balance.

#### IV. The Confession of Peter (9:20b)

And finally, look at the confession of Peter.

In response to Jesus' question, **Peter answered, "The Christ of God"** (9:20b).

Peter usually spoke on behalf of the disciples. He sometimes said the wrong thing at the wrong time, as we shall see in the future. But on this occasion, Peter answered correctly, "Jesus is the Christ of God."

Like the other disciples and the crowds, Peter had thought through some of the alternatives regarding Jesus' identity. He had to wrestle with who Jesus was. He had considered whether Jesus might be John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets of old. But none of these answers quite seemed to fit who Jesus was. Peter had not only heard the preaching and teaching of Jesus about the good news of the kingdom of God, but he had also seen Jesus demonstrate his unique power over nature, demons, disease and even death. Jesus had done astonishing miracles and healed literally thousands of people. As Peter considered everything, he came to understand that Jesus is **the Christ of God**.

**Christ** was not Jesus' last name. It was a title, and it was the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word for *Messiah*, which means "the anointed one." In the Old Testament, kings and priests were anointed with oil when they were dedicated to their office. There was a strong expectation that God would send a king as his Anointed One who would save his people (Genesis 48:8-12). There were many prophecies that pointed to the coming Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ, who would save his people. Peter must have looked at all the prophecies, and noticed how Jesus was fulfilling each prophecy. For example, Peter would have looked at the following:

1. According to the Scriptures, the Messiah was to have



been born in Bethlehem, and Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:1-7).

2. The Messiah was to be born of a virgin, and Jesus was born of Mary, who was a virgin at the time of his birth (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:24-25; Luke 1:26-30).
3. The Messiah was to be of David's lineage, and Jesus was descended from King David (2 Samuel 7:12, 16; Isaiah 11:1-2; Matthew 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-37).
4. The Messiah was to do many great works, and Jesus had performed the miracles that were prophesied (Isaiah 61:1-2; Matthew 11:1-6; John 1:19-23).<sup>6</sup>

So Peter had come to understand that Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed One, sent by God to save his people.

Bono, lead singer of the rock group *U2*, was once asked if the claim of Jesus' divinity is farfetched. He said:

No, it's not farfetched to me. Look, the secular response to the Christ story always goes like this: he was a great prophet, obviously a very interesting guy, had a lot to say along the lines of other great prophets, be they Elijah, Muhammad, Buddha, or Confucius. But actually Christ doesn't allow you that. He doesn't let you off that hook. Christ says: No. I'm not saying I'm a teacher. Don't call me teacher. I'm not saying I'm a prophet. I'm saying: "I'm the Messiah." I'm saying: "I am God incarnate." And people say: No, no, please, just be a prophet. A prophet, we can take. . . . But don't mention the "M" word! Because, you know, we're gonna have to crucify you. And he goes: No, no. I know you're expecting me to come back with an army, and set you free from these creeps, but actually I am the Messiah. . . .

So what you're left with is: either Christ was who he said he was – the Messiah – or a complete nutcase. I mean, we're talking nutcase on the level of Charles Manson. . . . This man was strapping himself to a bomb, and had "King of the Jews" on his head, and, as they were putting him up on the Cross, was

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<sup>6</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken, *Jesus on Trial* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 67.

going: Okay, martyrdom, here we go. Bring on the pain!

The idea that the entire course of civilization. . . could have its fate changed and turned upside-down by a nutcase, for me, that's farfetched.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the account of Peter's confession in Luke 9:18-20, we should confess Jesus as the Christ.

Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ of God at Caesarea Philippi. About six months later Jesus was crucified because he was the Christ. But three days later – on Easter Sunday – God raised Jesus back to life again, an affirmation that Jesus really was the Christ, the Son of God and Savior of sinners.

Today, on Easter Sunday, I invite you to submit your entire life to Jesus the Christ. Believe that he is the Son of God and Savior of sinners, and receive him as your Lord and Savior.

Pastor Ray Ortlund asks the question, "What does it mean to accept Jesus?" Here is his answer:

You and I are not integrated, unified, whole persons. Our hearts are multi-divided. It's like we have a boardroom in every heart. Imagine: a big table, leather chairs, coffee, bottled water, and a whiteboard. A committee sits around the table in your heart. There is the social self, the private self, the work self, the sexual self, the recreational self, the religious self, and others. The committee is arguing and debating and voting, constantly agitated and upset. Rarely can they come to a unanimous, wholehearted decision. We tell ourselves we're this way because we're so busy with so many responsibilities. But the truth is that we're just divided, unfocused, hesitant, and unfree.

That kind of person can "accept Jesus" in two ways. One way is to invite him onto the committee. Give him a vote too. But then he becomes just one more complication. The other

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<sup>7</sup> Michka Assayas, *Bono in Conversation with Michka Assayas* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2006), n.p.

way to “accept Jesus” is to say to him, “My life isn’t working. Please come in and fire my committee, every last one of them. I hand myself over to you. I am your responsibility now. Please run my whole life for me.”

“Accepting Jesus” is not just adding Jesus. It is also subtracting the idols.<sup>8</sup>

The most important question you can ever answer is the one asked by Jesus himself, “But who do you say that I am?”

It was at an Easter Sunday Worship Service thirty-eight years ago that I accepted Jesus into my life. I had grown up in a fine Bible-believing, gospel-preaching church. Every Sunday I heard the good news that through faith alone in Christ I could receive the gift of eternal life. But it never seemed to penetrate my heart and mind. Then I went off to war. I suddenly realized that I was completely unprepared for death and, especially, for eternity. I believed that there really was a heaven and a hell, and I did not want to go to hell. So for months I wrestled to understand who Jesus really was. My best friend and my brother frequently talked with me about the identity and mission of Jesus. But it wasn’t until that Easter Sunday Worship Service in 1976 that I finally understood that Jesus really is the Christ, the Son of God and Savior of sinners who could save me. I accepted Jesus into my life and turned my whole life over to him. And my life was forever changed!

Today, if you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and Savior of sinners, and if you accept Jesus and submit your entire life to him, you too will receive the gift of eternal life. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Ray Ortlund, “#9: What Does It Mean to Accept Jesus?” *Ray Ortlund: Christ Is Deeper Still* blog (6-4-2010).



# **Mission Statement**

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## **Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz**

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp)
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**PRAYER:**

Father, thank you for the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi. He understood that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and Savior of sinners.

Oh God, if there is anyone here today that has not yet put his or her faith in Jesus, will you grant that person saving faith.

And for this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!