

Luke 9:18-36

“Who Is Jesus, How Do I Follow Him?”

It’s a critical question and one that confronts us all. “Who is Jesus?” It’s a question that’s been thought through and debated literally for centuries... That debate didn’t begin a few yrs after Jesus was gone and people were looking back as if to say, “Who was that masked man?” While He was walking this earth people were wondering, trying to figure out exactly who He was and how that should impact their lives. It’s a question that people are still wrestling with today but let me say it’s a question that needs not be laced with uncertainty or clouded by ambiguity it needs to be resolved with stark clarity in each and every one of our hearts who are in this place today. Because the answer to that question will impact your life *presently* and will determine your fate *eternally*; that is, it’s the question upon which hangs our eternal destiny. Who *is* Jesus?

Now as we enter into this section; this scene that begins in Vs 18 understand Jesus has ended what’s been called the “Great Galilean Ministry” and He will shortly begin to make His way toward Jerusalem. This specific scene happens (according to Matt’s gospel) in the region of Caesarea Philippi, which is about 24-25 miles North of Bethsaida where He just fed the multitudes by miraculously multiplying 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish.

Vs18-19

One of the primary things that Luke seeks to emphasize in his gospel is the *humanity* of Jesus. Therefore you will find Jesus in prayer in Luke’s gospel more so than any other. At every major “crossroad” of sorts we find Jesus praying. He prayed all night before He chose His disciples; and here before He confronts them with the reality of who He is, who it is that they *think* He is we find Him praying.

The application is obvious. If Jesus found it necessary (even essential) to spend time alone before the Father in prayer how much more do we need to find that private place whereby we might get alone with God and pray? Be it a minor issue, a major crossroad or simply the everyday on-goings of life we do well to bring them *before* God and lift up the details of our lives *to* God seeking the *heart* of God as to how to approach and handle the things that enter into the arena that makes for our lives.

Jesus separates Himself from them, but they close in on Him and when He's finished praying He asks them a question. "What's the pulse of the people out there concerning Me?" "What's being reported *about* Me, what's the word as it pertains *to* Me?" "Who do men say that I am?" Now why would Jesus ask this question? Undoubtedly as they were out and about ministering they would hear of the way people were speaking about Jesus and He wanted to know. Why?

Well, if it were you or me asking this question it might be indicative of pride. But as it pertains to Jesus His concern is well justified because you *need to know* who Jesus is; because as we mentioned a moment ago what you believe about Jesus will decide your eternal destiny... You cannot be *wrong* about Jesus and *right* with God.

I was sharing Christ with a man the other day who kept trying to convince me that Jesus never said that He was anything more than a Rabbi who came to *teach us about* the way...Of course I challenged him to find that particular passage and show it to me because the bible I read doesn't say that at all! Jesus never claimed to be a Rabbi that was only teaching us *about* the way; in my bible Jesus claims that He is the way; and that He is the truth and that He is the life and no one comes to the Father except through Him!

Now we should also realize that it's not that Jesus didn't know what people thought; He most certainly did. But He was using this question as a segue, or a transitional platform in order to confront them with another, more important question. This was a leading question; because He was seeking to crystallize in their own hearts and minds who it is that He actually was.

Because back then it was a whole lot like it is today; many people were thoroughly confused as to the true identity of Jesus. Oh there were some high opinions of Him (J.B., maybe Elijah [all the miracles He was working], maybe it was Jeremiah [the obvious burden He had for His nation]) but they all fell short of who He actually was, who He is.

They all saw Him as a man; they perceived His humanity, but wasn't making the connection of Deity. The questions that should've been thought through are questions like, "What man ever claimed to be completely sinless?" Yet Jesus did. "What man ever claimed to be the exclusive way to God and that only by faith in Him would one ever be reconciled/accepted by God?" Yet Jesus did. "What man ever claimed the authority to grant someone eternal life?" Yet Jesus did. "What man ever claimed that He would rise from the dead and return one day from heaven to rule the earth and judge the world?" Yet Jesus...did.

In that book that some of you are reading right now; "Mere Christianity" by C.S. Lewis, he makes this statement. "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 the level with a man who says he is a poached egg - or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool 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."

Think through the statements that Jesus made and make your decision; was He a liar? Or is He Lord? You would never say of someone "They're a good man" who claimed to be God, who said he could forgive sins and that you couldn't get to heaven apart from believing in him. We're forced to make a decision. Is this man insane? Or is He Lord of all?

Vs20

Underline that question right there in Vs 20, "But who do *you* say that I am?" That's the critical question right there. It brings the matter straight to our front door and makes it real personal. Other people might say other things; the important thing is what do *you* say? Think it through carefully because there's an awful lot that's riding on the way you answer...

It's common for us to go through life trusting others to watch out for us. We have the FDA overseeing/approving our foods and medications; different quality control associations, and that's not a bad thing, it's a good thing. But listen, when it comes to your eternal destiny; when the eternal fate of your soul is weighing in the balance...

Don't go with the flow, don't take someone else's opinion, search it out for yourself. Jesus makes it real clear that it has to be an individual assessment and a personal decision. You won't go to heaven because your grandma believes in Jesus, or because you were raised in a Christian home and went to church. Jesus wants to know, "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter looks at Him and says, "The Christ of God." "You are God's Messiah, the Deliverer sent from God to save us."

Vs21-22

According to Matt's gospel Jesus commended Peter for his response, informing him that his understanding didn't come from intellectual rationalization but rather it was a spiritual revelation given to Him by His Father in heaven.

Then directly on the heels of His affirmation He charges them (strictly warned them) to tell no one; why? It would seem as though Jesus had perhaps 2 reasons. #1 The people didn't understand His purpose and #2 The disciples didn't get it fully either. You start flashing the word "Messiah" to this crowd and they're thinking, "Political King" "Over-thrower of Rome" "World domination with Israel on top" things of that nature. Not only that but even though the disciples had insight into who He was, they didn't understand the full implications of what that meant themselves. It wouldn't be until *after* the resurrection that all the dots would connect; they're all picturing the Messiah in this glorious light, and when Jesus began to speak of His suffering Peter (we read in Matt's gospel) actually began to *rebuke* Jesus saying, "Far be it from You Lord, this isn't going to happen to You." You know, "Quit talking like this Jesus, You're the *Messiah!*" To which Jesus answered, "Get behind Me Satan, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of man."

The scriptures had to be fulfilled. Ps 22, Isaiah 53, Zech 12:10 etc; thee passages that portray the suffering of the Messiah had to be fulfilled. It was the plan of redemption set in motion (literally [1 Pet 1:20, Rev 13:8]) before the world began.

He was sent from God to deliver us alright, but not from the oppression of man; He came to set us free from the power and the bondage of sin. Oh, He *will* rule the world, but not on His 1st coming, but rather on His 2nd.

Now that they understand exactly who He is; He begins to tell them how it's all going to unfold. "I've come here" Jesus said, "Not to ascend to some position of worldly prominence, but to suffer shame; spill My blood, be nailed to a cross and rise again the 3rd day."

Believe me when I tell you that by the time He got the words, "and be raised the 3rd day" out, they weren't even tracking with Him anymore. There were circuits frying; hard-drives crashing; these guys were in a state of shock; He couldn't have said anything more the opposite of what they were thinking. How in the world can Messiah; the Deliverer be put to death? It would be sort of like if a presidential candidate announced toward the end of his campaign to his primary supporters that he was now going to Washington to be tried, condemned and executed. These guys are being stretched right now; it's no wonder that Jesus was praying (undoubtedly at least in part for them).

He didn't mention that He would be crucified to *them* until after there was revelation about *Him*. After they received the revelation; Jesus entrusted them with understanding concerning coming tribulation. They were strengthened in their understanding *of* Him before they were told this devastating news *about* Him.

He would suffer many things; He would be rejected by the nations "spiritual leaders", He would be killed and He would be raised on the 3rd day. This is when Peter starts in with the rebuke, "What are You talking about Lord? You're obviously under a lot of stress because that's just not going to happen..." Jesus turns to him, rebukes him and then addresses the people that are always around them, notice.

Vs23

There are obviously a # of things that we want to take the time to consider here for just a few minutes. The very 1st thing that I want to make sure that we all notice is that this invitation extends to anyone. "If *anyone* desires to come after Me." What's that mean? It means exactly what it says; that the door is open to all of mankind to be where Jesus is. He didn't say, "To those who you who have been chosen," Jesus didn't say that. He opened the door to all of humanity with these words, "If *anyone*" that's what we call an open invitation.

However here's the kicker; it's not an invitation that offers good times and great memories along the problem free path of life. It was bad enough for them to hear that Jesus would suffer, be rejected and even be put to death. But now He tells them that if they want to be where He is; that if they want to walk in His footsteps that they've got to do the same thing...

Now I do want to point out that this Vs is a reference to *discipleship*, not *son-ship*. Salvation is free, discipleship will cost you. We're saved by grace through faith; but if you long to be like Christ, to follow Him and know Him intimately you will pay a price for that. It's part of God's plan for each of His children; after He "adopts" you He begins to *disciple* you.

What's the requirements? What is it that God demands of us if we're to be disciples of Christ? Now that I know *who* He is, *how* do I follow Him? 3 words that Jesus employs in Vs 23 that basically define discipleship. (Defining Discipleship) #1 Desire, #2 Denial, and #3 Daily, we're talking denying ourselves that we might be fully devoted daily to Christ.

#1 Desire, "If anyone *desires* to come after Me," again this brings it into the realm of that which is personal; we're talking here about a personal decision that only you can make. How hardcore do you wanna be as it pertains to your relationship with Christ. Do you want to know how much you can sin and still have salvation? Or do you want to lead a radical life set *apart* to Christ, drawing *near* to Christ, being *used* by Christ for the eternal *glory* of Christ. It's got to be a personal decision, something you desire. Mom, dad, you can desire it for your children, but until they desire it for themselves it won't do them any good. We all have to have that inward desire/drive to want to be like Christ.

#2 Denial, "Let him *deny* himself." What does it mean to "deny yourself"? What it *doesn't* mean is some sort of self-rejection or self loathing or even a cessation/termination of everything you enjoy because if you enjoy it, it must be bad... 1 Tim Ch 6 teaches us that God gives us *richly all things to enjoy*. So being able to enjoy something is a good thing. So it doesn't mean you consider yourself worthless (Jesus didn't think that, He placed enough value upon you to die for you), nor does it mean deny yourself of any enjoyable opportunity. The idea here speaks to that indwelling selfishness that's rooted in every one of us. It speaks of denying everything rooted in the old life.

We're talking here about denying and rejecting the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1Jhn 2:16). Deny yourself of your own dreams, your own ambitions and pursue the desires of Christ for your life instead; true discipleship speaks of total devotion to Christ; His purpose, His plan for your life.

It's a discipline that has to be resolved upon #3 Daily; Jesus says here that we're to take up our cross daily and follow Him. It's a day by day, moment by moment determination to follow God's will as opposed to my wants.

What does it mean to take up our cross? Well it doesn't speak of that anger problem you have, or that bad habit you've succumbed to, "We all have our cross to bear". Those things aren't your cross, they're your sin; if you seen a man carrying a cross on that day and at that time you knew exactly what it meant.

It meant that this was a person submitted to the will of another (namely Rome), he wasn't doing his own will and that what he was carrying was an unrelenting instrument of death; death to self. Even so when you see a Christian, you should see a person submitted to the will of another (namely Christ), not doing his own will but rather he's about death to his/her own will and is pursuing the path of God's will for his/her life.

If you're taking up your cross, you're submitted to God's will and identified with Christ in surrender, in suffering and in sacrifice. It's impossible for someone to crucify themselves; all you can do is submit, yield your body as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2) and submit to the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

We've ritualized/sanitized the cross; wear it as jewelry, associate it with religious ceremonies and traditions; believe me when I tell you that was not the way the perceived this statement when Jesus said it. Today it would be like Jesus saying, "Walk death row daily and follow me." It was never a round trip ticket; death was the destiny of the one carrying the cross. How willing are you to die to self? It's probably a question best addressed to your spouse; she would tell you that I'm probably not too interested (based upon the way I like to esteem my own self interests around the house). The bearer of the cross never served his own interests, only the will of another; are we serving our will, or the will of Christ for our lives?

Vs24

One of the many paradoxical truths of the scriptures; if you seek to hang on to your life and refuse to relinquish your wants, your goals, your desires and your ambitions; in seeking to save your life you'll sacrifice it, you'll lose it. However if you're willing to let go of your life; sacrifice your wants, your dreams and surrender your life to Christ; you'll find out what true life is all about. Paul said it like this, "*For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*" Romans 8:13 We're talking the difference something that's temporary Vs all of eternity. We mentioned it Wednesday evening; it's never wise to trade off the temporary for that which is a reality eternally.

Vs 24-25

This is the 2 fold rationale that Jesus employs both of which are practical though 1 is personal, the other prophetic.

On a personal level even if you set out to make your fortune and leave your mark and you accomplish everything you ever wanted but in the process forfeit your soul is that really commendable? You sacrificed eternity, for something incredibly temporary, congratulations...

On a prophetic level if we're too ashamed to be identified with Him now, than He will be ashamed to be identified with us when He comes again in all the glory of the triune Godhead and that of the holy angels.

To be ashamed *of* Him now, will be to stand ashamed *before* Him then; Jesus didn't say these words were easy, but He wasn't pulling punches He was speaking quite clearly. If we stand ashamed of Him now, He will render shame to us on that day; don't be deceived, God is not mocked; whatever a man sows that will he also reap.

Vs27

We'll talk about this Vs next time... We want to finish up focusing on who Jesus is and how it is we follow Him.

Who is Jesus? He is the Christ of God; the One (God in the flesh) who came forth from heaven; sent to deliver us from the penalty, the wages, the ramifications of our sins that we might be reconciled to God; that we might have peace with God through the blood of His cross...

How do we follow Him? We deny ourselves, our sinful inclinations and self centered tendencies and submit to the power/working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Death to the self-life that Christ might simply have His way and lead *His* life through us...

Prayer Points:

Lord Jesus all kinds of people have all kinds of things they say about You. May we not be persuaded by the opinions of the people but stand crystallized in the truth of who You are: the Christ of God; the only begotten Son of the Living God. May we long to be like You, to come after You, to lead a life that brings glory to You, denying ourselves; taking up our cross and serving Your desires, Your will for our lives. Give us strength, make us bold; help us that we never stand ashamed of You, but that we might boldly declare You, The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world...

We've talked today about what it means to follow Christ; but that doesn't begin until you 1st surrender unconditionally *to* Christ. I want you to know that God loves you, He sees value in you; therefore Christ came to die, to lay down His life for you. He came to shed His blood; suffer rejection, humiliation, shame and ultimately death so that He might reconcile you to God through His blood. You don't have to understand it, you only have to believe it.

If you're in a place whereby you know you've sinned; you've fallen short of the perfect righteousness of God. Yet you want to be reconciled to God, accepted by God and forgiven of your sin; surrender to Christ today. Jesus wants to know, "Who do you say that I am?"