

Sunday, September 24, 2023 | Everyday Disciple

Week 22 | Luke 9:18-27 | "Who is Jesus?"

Last week, we unpacked the *only* miracle recorded in all *four* gospels: the feeding of the five thousand (cf. Mat. 14:13–21; Mar. 6:31–44; Lu. 9:10-17; Jn. 6:1–14). And this famous passage came about because the disciples pointed out a serious problem: *no food*. And so, Jesus provided food and produced so much of it that there were twelve baskets of leftovers. But remarkably, Jesus chose not to do this fantastic thing alone. Instead, he worked through a boy's lunch and the disciples. And this teaches us that **little is much when God is in it**. We may not have a lot, but if we give our *all* to God, he will do great things through us.

Today, we'll answer the *most significant* question anyone can ask: "Who is Jesus?" If you recall, the disciples asked this question after their master calmed the storm (cf. Lu. 8:25). They didn't have an answer back then. But now, whether they were ready or not, the Lord will require they answer that all-important question. What conclusion will the apostles come to?

[Talk about Bob's ordination and how you asked this question.]

Since the first century, Jesus' identity has been the topic of much discussion. Many have weighed in on the matter, and while some have answered correctly, others have gotten it wrong (cf. Lu 5:21). How will we fair? Will we ace this test?

Moreover, assuming we get the question right, do we understand how that answer should *define* our existence? After all, it matters little if, intellectually, we know the correct answer but do not know what that truth *means*. Or, even worse, we may know its meaning but do not *know how to apply* it (cf. (cf. Lu. 4:34; Mat. 7:21-23; Ja. 2:18-20; 4:17). There's nothing more tragic than knowing what is right but refusing to amend one's behavior. *A proper understanding of Christology is always transformative*. If you have failed to change after "knowing" Jesus, then rest assured, you have failed to honestly know him.

I want you to notice two things:

- i. **Unlike the crowds, the Apostles knew Jesus' identity (vs. 18-20).**

READ: Luke 9:18-20 (ESV)

¹⁸ 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?" ¹⁹ And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen."

²⁰ Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”

Before we unpack what Peter meant when he called Jesus “the Christ of God,” it is worth pointing out that Peter had a better grasp of Jesus’ identity than the crowds. And this is, of course, how it should be. He had walked with Jesus since chapter 5. Putting aside the fact that the Lord healed his mother-in-law (4:38-39), Peter also witnessed how Jesus healed a leper (5:12-16) and made two disabled people whole (the cripple of 5:17-26 and the man with a withered hand of 6:6-11). Not only that, the Lord raised both a widow’s son (7:11-17) and Jairus’ daughter (8:40-56) from the dead, calmed a raging storm (8:22-25), cast out a demon horde (8:26-39), and, most recently, fed more than 5k people with nothing but a boy’s lunch (9:10-17). And this is to say nothing of Jesus’ teaching, which seemed, at times, to draw the crowds even more than the miracles. Peter was there for it all and likely witnessed many more things not recorded for us in Luke. After all, the four gospels are a small sampling of Jesus’ life and not the whole of it (cf. Jn. 21:25).

So, of course, Peter would better understand Jesus’ identity than the crowds. He would know that Jesus wasn’t “John the Baptist.” That was the most accessible theory to disprove, as the disciples knew the Baptizer personally. In fact, Andrew, Peter’s brother, was John’s disciple before following Jesus (Jn. 1:40-42). Peter also knew that his rabbi was not “Elijah” nor “one of the prophets of old.” If he was Elijah or some other prophet, why would Jesus constantly refer to himself as the “Son of Man” (cf. 5:24; 6:5, 22; 7:34; 9:22, 26)? Why make a Daniel 7 reference and not a 1 Ki. 17 connection?

No. Peter made a connection no one else could. This man that he had been following...this man who said such wondrous things and did such miraculous things...this man who acted unlike any man he had ever known...was something more than a prophet. This man was “The Christ of God,” which is to say, he was the long-awaited Messiah. The One who had been foretold would liberate the Israelites and establish an everlasting kingdom.

So, how did he see what others couldn’t? Peter knew Jesus because he (along with the other disciples) was the *closest* to Jesus. The Lord himself contrasted the opinions of the crowds (vs. 18) and the disciples (vs. 20). This was a *personal* question meant to draw on their *personal* experience.

But someone might point out, “Doesn’t Matthew’s version of this story (cf. Mat. 16:17) say Peter’s confession was the result of a direct revelation from God?” Yes. That is true. It was, quite literally, *inspired*. Peter’s acknowledgment did not strictly come from his own experience

but from outside himself. God the Father helped Peter see what he could not see alone. Likewise, without God's Word, we cannot hope to understand anything worth knowing. *The Scriptures, in all things, take precedence over our experience.* Though our feelings change, God's word never does. Though our context may change, the context of Scripture does not. As such, it is our first and best starting point. *We do not read into the Bible; we allow the Bible to read us.* It is like a mirror, revealing our most authentic selves (cf. Ja. 1:22-25).

However, Luke leaves the part about God telling Peter of Jesus' identity out of his version. And in doing so, *the difference between the crowd's connection to Jesus and the disciple's connection to him is brought to the forefront.* Everyone already knew what "the crowds" were saying about Jesus; even Herod the Tetrarch knew (cf. Lu. 9:7-9). But *no one had explicitly asked the disciples.* Did they agree with popular opinion? Or did they notice something more?

Bible study for the disciples was more than an academic exercise; it was a life-altering experience. Jesus was the Word incarnate. How could it be any different? But, make no mistake, this has not changed. *Christianity is grounded in a book; this is true. But it ought also to be fleshed out in real life.* When someone comes to you and asks, "Who is Jesus?" You should give a *scripture reference* and be able to *reference your own experience.* You ought to be able to say, "This is what Jesus did for Peter and James, Mary and Martha, etc....." But you also ought to be able to say, "And this is what Jesus did for me...."

The disciples had the best read on Jesus because they were the closest to him. How close are you to Jesus? Would you confuse him with someone else, as the crowds did? Or would you be able to distinguish the genuine article from the fake? If you do not know God's word and do not have a personal relationship with God, you have no hope of understanding the real Jesus.

ii. **Unlike the Apostles, Jesus knew what his identity meant (vs. 21-27).**

READ: Luke 9:21-24 (ESV)

²¹ 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."

²³ And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

[INSERT MOVIE PICTURE: PRINCESS BRIDE] Wallace Shawn's character, Vizzini, keeps using the word "inconceivable." And this word is used so often that Mandy Patinkin (Pa-teenk-in), aka

Iñigo Montoya, turns and says, "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means."

This classic scene helps to illustrate what is going on between Jesus and the disciples. They used the term "Christ" without fully understanding it. Admittedly, this movie scene isn't a perfect analogy. Unlike Vizzini, the apostles weren't completely lost about the Messiah's nature and work. However, they had a *critical* misconception (one shared by all Israelites during the first century) about Jesus' **timing**.

The Messiah was a king. In fact, he was and is the King of Kings. But he did not come, at least then, to rule an earthly kingdom. He did not come to foment rebellion against Rome. No. He came to do a **redemptive** work, not a **political** one. He came to bring a whole different kind of revolution. Everyone misunderstood this about Jesus, and it would take the resurrection to correct it. But, even then, there were still those who misunderstood Jesus. And today, that has not changed. Just as there were many "Vizzinies" in the first century, there are even more in the 21st century.

So, what we find after Peter's confession is the Lord laying the groundwork for the true legacy of his **Messiahship**. But he also used this opportunity to establish the pattern for **discipleship**.

Jesus explained two things:

A. **What it meant to be the Messiah:**

First, he would "suffer many things." There would be afflictions.

Second, he would "be rejected." There would be rejections.

Third, he would "be killed." There would be a glorification.

Lastly, he would "be resurrected." There would be a resurrection.

B. **What it means to be a disciple of the Messiah:**

First, we must "deny" ourselves; that is, we **must renounce** all claims on our lives. Or, in other words, we are required **to sacrifice** everything. There is no room for our plans. We do not hand Jesus our agenda. The Lord makes it abundantly clear that anyone following him will leave behind himself. **In doing so, we will experience our affliction.**

Second, we must "take up [our] cross daily;" that is, we **must accept** that a higher authority controls our everyday lives. In other words, we **must submit** to God's sovereignty in all things. The cross represented Roman authority. It said

to the condemned and the community, "This criminal is not in control; we are." When we take up heaven's cross, we embrace heaven's authority. We say to ourselves and those around us, "I am not in control; God is." **In doing so, we will experience our rejection.**

Thirdly, we must "follow Christ;" that is, we **must mirror** Christ's example. Or, in other words, we are required **to subscribe** to his way of living. The Lord is our pattern; we will be molded by no other. The Son of God is our instructor; we will be shaped by no other. Jesus Christ is our leader; we will shadow no other. And, **in doing so, we will experience our glorification (cf. 2 Cor. 4:16-18).**

Lastly, **when we lose our life, for Christ's sake, we are actually saving it.** A person who rejects Jesus may think they've saved themselves, but in actuality, they've forfeited their life. Similarly, a person who accepts Jesus may believe they've lost themselves when, in fact, they've saved themselves. Death comes to us all. But, for the unbeliever, death is their destination, whereas, for the believer, death is but a mere stop on the journey. Though it is inevitable, death cannot prevent the resurrection of a believer forever. **Thus, though we may lose our very lives for the cause of Christ, eventually, we will experience our resurrection.**

READ: Luke 9:25-27 (ESV)

²⁵ For what does it **profit** a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

²⁶ For whoever is **ashamed** of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be **ashamed** when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷ But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not **taste** death until they **see** the kingdom of God."

And herein is a great truth: *nothing in this life is worth forfeiting eternity*. Though it may be fun, whatever fun can be had will not last forever. All the best joys of this life are temporary; they only stay for a season. When the Lord returns, those who've whittled their life away on temporal flings, ashamed of God's word, will be put to shame. Jesus will be mortified that anyone would choose anything over him. Though thankfully, not all will make that mistake. In fact, some in Jesus' company would not "taste death"—i.e., die—before they "see the kingdom of God" with their own eyes.

So, what's the takeaway?

Jesus is the Messiah, and his followers will be like him in his afflictions, rejections, glorification, and resurrection.

Who was Jesus? He was the Messiah. And what did that mean for him? Suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. Who is the Christian? They are followers of the Messiah. And what does that mean for them? Suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. The road to glory runs through the cross for all because that is the same way that Jesus traveled. If this was true for Christ, how much more so for the Christian—i.e., the Christ follower? **Jesus is who we ought to become.** His way has to be our way. His words must be our words.

When writing to the church in Philippi, Paul reminded the believers of this very thing.

READ: Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV)

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Suffering is as much for the Christian as it was for the Christ. Jesus, who was equal with God, put aside his throne, stepped into our lowly existence, and died for us. If suffering was always a part of the plan for Jesus, it is so for all those who would follow him. The cross is not only the way for the sinner but also the way for the Christian. We are saved by the cross, we live by the cross, we die by the cross, and because of the cross, we will live again.

In the same way that it is possible to know someone only by their name or reputation without actually knowing them personally, it is possible to know Jesus without genuinely understanding his identity. To be sure, knowing that Jesus is the Christ is the first and best starting point. But, make no mistake, that is only the beginning.

Video Description

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/0gaJ7ea>

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