

Who Is Jesus

Living as we do in this southern bible belt, the question that's being asked in the scripture passage that we'll study in a few moments might seem to you and me at first to be a relatively easy one to answer, but is it? The question being asked is, "Who is Jesus Christ"? And how really well do we know this man that is supposed to be the center of our weekly worship services in this church.

As I've read about the history of the Christian church in America, it seems that over the recent several decades, with the migration of more and more people from other countries, especially those coming from the middle-east and Arab nations, it's very evident that they have brought their own religious beliefs and customs with them. And with the political agendas being protective of those newly arrived religious beliefs, the answer to this question about Jesus is becoming even more and more obscure.

Slowly but surely, more is becoming known about the Muslim, the Buddhist and the Hindu religions than we have ever known before. And for some people, perhaps even more is known about those other religious leaders than is known about Jesus.

And may I go further and make the bold statement that the same is true even for many of the people who have grown up in the church, spending many hours in youth groups and Sunday school classes. It seems that many, many of the people who call themselves Christians know surprisingly little about the Person they call God.

Here, in the scriptures that we have been reading in this Book of Luke, we find that in those days that Jesus walked among us, many people, especially those within the nation of Israel were also asking that question, "Who is this man Jesus?"

You might recall from an earlier passage that we studied, King Herod was asking that question about Jesus. Listen to these words given in Luke chapter 9, verse 7,

⁷ Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening (concerning Jesus), and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, ⁸ by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. (Luke 9:7-8)

And now here in the passage that we'll study today, Jesus asked His disciples the same question. And it is a question that you and I will also need to answer. Listen and follow along as I read these words given to us in Luke chapter 9, beginning in verse 18.

¹⁸And it happened, as He (the Lord Jesus) was alone praying, *that* His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"

¹⁹So they answered and said, "John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again."

²⁰He said to them, "But who do **you** say that I am?"

Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God."

²¹And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one, ²²saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day." (Luke 9:18-22)

This same conversation was recorded in the Book of Matthew, chapter 16. There we read,

¹³ . . . Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do **you** say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ 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 (Matthew 16:13-17)

Folks, the question that's being asked within these few words is unquestionably the most important question that any man or any woman could ever be confronted with in all their days of existence on this earth. And let me assure each of us that there will, without exception, come a moment in time when each of us will be confronted with this question in one way or another, personally and individually. And woe be unto us if we do not have, if we do not own, the one answer that the Lord Jesus requires of us.

And that question from Jesus once again is, "But who do **you** say that I am?"

Folks, think with me for a moment! What is your answer to this question?

Would you perhaps answer, as so many do in our day, saying that Jesus was a good teacher, and a good example for us to follow, or perhaps using some other elusive and vague wording.

I say that because that was an answer that I received from one young man in the very earliest years of my being saved. I was still trying to figure out what my Christianity was supposed to be like. And so, I asked a friend whom I believed to be a lifelong Christian. And after stammering for a moment, the young man finally said that “Jesus was a good teacher and that He showed us a good example to follow.”

While I agreed with that young man that Jesus was those things, I knew in my heart, even as a new Christian, that Jesus was so much, much more.

I have also noticed over these many years that many people in the public eye, politicians, and media stars, will often stammer when they are asked about their relationship with God. And seemingly, with no quick answer coming to their mind, they respond that they prefer to keep their religion private.

Folks, may I say with great emphasis that God forbid your or my answer would be like those! And why would that be? It's because, the answer that a person, you or me, is able to give to this one question, will determine how and where we will spend all the remaining days of our eternity.

Thankfully, the answer, the only acceptable answer, is never far from us. As the words of Deuteronomy 30 remind us,

11 “For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. 12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ 13 Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ 14 But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

God is generous to each of us in that His perfect answer to this all-important question, “But who do **you** say that I am?” is right here within our grasp, if we will only reach for it.

Why then do men and women struggle and not simply reach for the right answer and grab hold of it and own it for their own?

It is because, while Christ and His word, His truth is truly not far from us, the separation that still yet remains between Him and all of the other answers that this secular world has to offer is still a difficult gap to pass through. His way is a very narrow way with a narrow gate that few are able to find.

And please, we must not be confused. The narrowness of that gate and the narrowness of that narrow way is by God's own design. Righteousness, by its very nature, is not an easy path to walk. And added to that, each of us comes into this life already severely corrupt from birth having a sinful nature that tends toward and even desires that broader way that leads to destruction. Those words in Luke chapter 13,

¹³“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴ . . . narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Luke 13:13-14)

A question that many will ask is, “But why does God make it so difficult to be righteous?” And the answer is, “He doesn't”. It is our own sinful nature that makes it so difficult. Sin and our sin nature are continually at war against the things, the ways, the path of the Spirit of Christ.

And we don't have to work hard at all to be sinful. It comes so very natural to us. But not so the ability to be “righteous”.

Righteousness is and always will be a difficult and narrow way. Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes that daily battle in Romans chapter 7. He cries out in anguish . . .

¹⁵I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, that I do. . . .

¹⁸I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. (Romans 7:15-19)

And then the Apostle Paul concludes his cry for mercy by saying,

²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
(Romans 7:24)

I know personally just how the Apostle Paul felt because I have often cried out in this same way, pleading with God to help me get from where I am to where I know that I need to be?

How do I, how does any person bridge that difficult gap of sin's control? The answer is, we cannot. We don't have that ability or that strength. It is only as the Apostle Paul concluded in his cry to the Lord there in the words of Romans chapter 7. Listen!

24 Oh Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:24-25)

Folks, these precious words reveal to us not only how we can be delivered out of our bondage to sin, but also exactly who it is who can deliver us. It is Christ, and Christ alone, the "Son of the Living God!" The One whom this question is being asked about.

And in the Book of Matthew, where Jesus asked this question of His disciples, "but who do you say that I am", Jesus included a very important addendum that sheds further light for us to see by. Let me read it for us, and carefully note the ending words! This from Matthew chapter 16, beginning with verse 13,

¹³ . . . He (the Lord Jesus) asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" ¹⁴So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵He said to them, "But who do **you** say that I am?"

¹⁶Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 16:13-17)

Note those ending words,

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 16:17)

This is the answer for how we can get from where we are to where we need to be.

Only the Spirit of God can discern the deep and spiritual things of God. No man or woman can, through their intellectual reasoning or study ever even begin to comprehend the mind, the thoughts, the plans of God. As Jesus said here to Simon Peter, such things are only revealed to us through the intimate presence of the Spirit of God.

That truth is spoken to us over and over again in these scriptures. It is ever and only through God's Spirit that our minds are able to comprehend the Spiritual truths of God. In

1 Corinthians 2, we are told . . .

¹⁰But God has revealed (His truths) to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. (1 Corinthians 2:10-12)

So then, by the unction of the Holy Spirit, Peter was able to respond with the words,

¹⁶ . . . "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:17)

May I say this again! The only way that Peter was able to know this blessed truth was because it was revealed to him by God's Spirit.

But again, the question before us today is why would this one question of Jesus, "But who do **you** say that I am?" be so demandingly important for us?

First of all, it's because of the words that are being confessed . . .

¹⁶ . . . "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:17)

Here, Peter is confessing that Jesus is more than John the Baptist, more than Elijah, more than Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He is the very Person of God who came to earth as the Christ, the Messiah, the chosen one sent from God the Father to be the spotless Lamb whose sacrifice would be the acceptable propitiation that would cleanse each soul from the curse of sin.

None of those other men and prophets mentioned here were able to do that. Their righteousness was not enough. Only the righteousness of the “Christ of God” could satisfy the eternal debt of sin.

And then on beyond that, no other person could satisfy the desires of God for relationship. As it was in the beginning in the Garden of Eden, God’s desire was for intimate fellowship and kinship with His beloved creation.

There can be no casual acquaintance in the family of God. He desires people who are willing to love Him with all of their heart, all of their soul and all of their strength. He desires deep loving intimacy with sons and daughters. And His beloved Christ would bring that relationship into being.

By the blessed work that Jesus would accomplish on the cross, He would birth into existence sons and daughters of God. Listen to those words given in Romans 8, there beginning in verse 14.

¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (Romans 8:14-16)

Folks, God desires the intimate relationship of a Father with His son or His daughter. But to be able to enter into that kind of relationship with Him, we must enter through the only doorway available to us, through the Christ of God, the Good Shepherd.

And we must not only be willing to enter by that narrow gate, we must also be willing to walk that narrow way every day of our lives.

Folks, only Christ is the “Way, the Truth and the Life”. “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”, that name, that Man, that “Christ of God”, the Lord Jesus.

And listen, even further, you and I must be willing to do as Simon Peter did here, and openly and publicly confess who Jesus really is, saying,

¹⁶ . . . “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:17)

Why? Why must that be so? Why must we be able to openly confess Him as being the Christ, the Son of the Living God? It is because, as we read in Romans 10,

⁹ . . . if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)

Did you hear what those words tell us? Folks, these words are not only true, they are confrontational and they are demanding. Confrontational in that we cannot stand on the sidelines and repeat what other people say about Jesus. We have to own Him and who He is for our own personal self. If we are not willing to do that, and if we are not willing to confess Him publicly, as Simon Peter did, then He will have no part in us. Those words given in Matthew 10,

³²"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. ³³ But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32-33)

As we close here today, what is your answer to this all-important question? Do you only know Jesus casually, perhaps as a teacher or prophet? Or do you know Him personally and intimately as Savior and Lord? And are you willing to confess Him openly and publicly, without shame or discomfort?

I plead with each of us to believe in Him with all our heart and to confess Him with our mouth so that our salvation will be full and complete. Matthew 10 again as we close.

³² . . . whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. ³³ But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32-33)

And from Romans 10,

⁹ . . . if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)

Let's pray!

