

Transcript

The Jesus Story - Jesus asks two very important questions

In the chapter that we have been looking at, Luke Chapter 9, there are two questions that I feel that we need to take a closer look at, because these are two questions that we need find the answer to.

In verse 18, we find the first question: "Who do the crowds say that I am?", and then in verse 20, we find the second question: "But who do you say that I am?"

Now, Jesus does not ask these questions because He wants to know the answer. He asks these questions because we need to know the answer. These are two of the most serious questions that any person will ever be asked, because how we answer these questions will determine the whole of our life on earth, and where we will spend eternity.

And, we need to look very carefully at the verses around these questions to see just what we can learn. That will help us to understand just who Jesus really is? And perhaps far more importantly, what is our relationship with him?

First of all we need to see the context that these two very important questions are set in. At the beginning of Luke Chapter 9, in the first 17 verses, Jesus gives the disciples power to cast out demons and heal the sick. He then sends them out to preach the gospel.

On the return from their very successful trip, this is what we read in verse 10:

10 And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done. Then He took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.

This was intended to be a time for Jesus and his disciples to rest to have a time of fellowship and a time for them to relax. That is why Jesus took them aside into a deserted place. But this is what we find in verse eleven:

11 But when the multitudes knew it, they followed Him; and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed all those who had need of healing.

Here we find that Jesus preaches to the multitude, heals their sick, and then performs the miracle of feeding the 5,000. Luke tells us in verse seventeen:

17 After the people had all eaten their fill, twelve baskets of leftovers were gathered up.

Now, all these miraculous events would have had most people asking the question, "Just who this Jesus really is?" This is what we read in the next verses, from verse eighteen, and, there is so much that we can learn from these verses:

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

19 So they answered and said, "John the Baptist, but some say

Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again.”

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

21 And He strictly warned 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 be raised the third day.”

For our starting point today I would like us to look at how Luke's' gospel describes this incident, and I think it may help us to understand a little better as we look at the context that it is set in, and try to get into the flow of the whole situation. To try and walk with the disciples. To try to see and hear how they would see and hear.

We can begin in verse ten on their return from their very successful trip; this is what we read in verse 10:

10 The apostles returned and reported on what they had done. Jesus took them away, off by themselves, near the town called Bethsaida.

The idea was that Jesus and his disciples would have some kind of a break from ministering for a while, and have a rest. I heard one preacher once say: "If you do not come apart to rest, there is a danger that, you will just come apart."

This is what we find in verse eleven:

11 But the crowds got wind of it and followed. Jesus graciously welcomed them and talked to them about the kingdom of God. Those who needed healing, he healed.

Not much of a time to relax and unwind here.

It would appear though that when we come to verse eighteen that Jesus and his disciples did find a little time for themselves. This is what we read in verse eighteen:

18 And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, “Who do the crowds say that I am?”

So here we come to the first question: “Who do the crowds say that I am?” The disciples would have been fully aware of what was being talked about among people in the nearby villages. They would just repeat what they had heard the people saying. “John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen”.

All of these responses were wrong, revealing that the people still did not recognize Jesus' true identity. They did not see that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. To declare him as the Messiah, the one and only Son of the living God, calls for a response, and that was a response that even in those days, the crowd were not prepared to accept.

Today a good many people would describe Jesus as a great man, a master teacher, the greatest moralist that ever lived. They would be prepared to place Jesus on the highest pedestal that you could place any man on, but no higher.

Even in the church, some have claimed that, while on earth, Jesus was just a man. Some say that He gave up His Deity, or that He gave up all or some of the unique characteristics of Deity. But this is no different from what the crowds were saying when they claimed He was just a man. A great prophet, but still just human.

Men's opinions of Jesus are almost universally high, but often not high enough. We see this very clearly in the religious views held by many. The opinions of men do not agree with the truth of God. Here are just a few examples.

Muslims respect and revere Jesus. They consider him one of the greatest of God's messengers to mankind. But, Muslims do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Muslims hold that Jesus was a great prophet, second only to Mohammad.

According to Judaism, Jesus was a Jewish man who was executed and later given divine status by the Christian church. The Talmud describes Jesus as a heretic who dabbled in sorcery and lead the people astray.

Mormons Brigham Young taught that Jesus was not born with any involvement of the Holy Spirit.

Jehovah's Witnesses they believe that Jesus Christ was a perfect man, and that He is a person distinct from God the Father. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus is a mighty one, although not almighty as Jehovah God is. They teach that Jesus "was and is and always will be beneath Jehovah" and that "Christ and God are not coequal."

Many others hold that Jesus was a great teacher who promoted a doctrine of peace and love. There are good many believe that Jesus never existed, and is only a mythical character. Many simply give little or no consideration of the truth of Jesus. Very few people in this world actually hold to a biblical view of Jesus.

So, why do we need to know, who others think that Jesus is? Well, perhaps for no other reason that Jesus asked the disciples: "Who do the crowds say that I am?" Jesus asked them who the crowds thought He was. The crowds were deeply impressed with Jesus' powers of healing, but rather than respond with faith they were simply "overwhelmed with amazement."

There was a way of determining the truth in the Bible. Matthew used it in his gospel Mt 18:16:

16 'By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'

Then again Paul uses this method when writing to the Corinthians, 2Co 13:1:

1 "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established."

Who do you think the best two witnesses would be to determine just who Jesus really is?

It may help if we look at just how Jesus describes himself. This what we read in John 14v6:

6 “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

In Mat 3v17 We have God the Father' description of Jesus:

17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

His disciples may still be very confused about the meaning of what they had seen, but despite their lack of understanding they grasped the one central and essential truth: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

It is here, at this point that Luke, like Matthew and Mark, sharply establish a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus' ministry is about to change dramatically. When we come to verse twenty, we are at that turning point. Up to this point Luke has given us the account of the birth and life of Jesus. Luke now sets the scene for the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Even though Jesus was the Messiah, He still had to undergo great suffering, be rejected by the Jewish religious leaders, and be killed. Jesus knew that he would be hated and killed by the Elders, the Chief Priests, and the Scribes. All three groups made up the Jewish supreme court that would sentence Jesus to die. His mission now was to be the Suffering Servant and to provide atonement for sin.

This is what we read in Mark 10:45:

45 “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many.”

Jesus' purpose at this time was to clarify the true meaning of himself as “The Christ”, the Anointed One. The Messiah as conquering king and national liberator would take place at his second coming.

So, now it is now time to look at the second question. This was a turning point for the disciples, and this should a turning point for all of us:

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

21 And He strictly warned 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 be raised the third day.”

Who do you say that I am? It was fine for the disciples to know what the crowds thought about Jesus. But now Jesus has to ask them, as individuals, what they believed about Him. Jesus assumed that the disciples would have a different opinion of Him from the crowds.

They should know who Jesus was. For two and a half years they had walked with Jesus. They had witnessed his ministry and heard his message, but there was still so much more for them to learn. The crowds couldn't understand that Jesus really was the Messiah, yet had to suffer. The disciples had to learn this first.

“Before they could preach that Jesus was the Messiah, they too had to learn what that meant.” The Son of Man must suffer many things. After hearing what the crowd thought of Him, Jesus then told them what He had really come to do - to suffer, be rejected, be killed, and be raised the third day.

This wasn't what His disciples or the crowds expected or wanted at all. This was an unbelievable shock to all who expected or hoped that Jesus was the national and political Messiah. What we read in verse 22 must have come as a real blow:

22 “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.”

Must suffer many things, an important word here is 'must'. This wasn't just a plan or an idea or a prediction; this was the fulfilment of what was planned before the world began. This was the pathway for our salvation. 1 Peter 1:20:

20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.

And be raised the third day, the resurrection was as much a must as any other aspect of His suffering. Jesus had to rise from the dead. In verse twenty, Jesus asks the disciples:

20 “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.”

In other words, “God with us, the Messiah.” Jesus had taken what would appear to be a general question, and makes it very personal. “But who do you say that I am?”

I would imagine that there would be very few people in this country anyway, who do not have enough information about Jesus to have formed some opinion as to His real identity, but, the only question that really needs an answer as far as we are concerned is what do we think about Jesus?

That is the most important question anybody could ever ask. What you think of Jesus determines your whole life and makes such a difference. “Who do you say that I am?” That was the big question.

Jesus had waited two and a half years to ask his disciples this. He had taken them with him and preached the Kingdom, and healed the sick and delivered people from demons. He had done all that and given them clues. Now it was make your mind up time for the disciples.

The disciples had heard His teaching, they had seen His life, and His miracles, they had abundant evidence Of just who Jesus was, enough to make their minds up.

Jesus predicted His death and resurrection. The time of Jesus' death was drawing closer, He knew it was God's will for Him to die, and He wanted the disciples to understand this too. So, he stated it plainly and openly:

21 And He strictly warned 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 be raised the third day.”

That was the first time Jesus had mentioned either his death or his resurrection. It wasn't the last time; he is going to tell them again and again what is going to happen to him in Jerusalem. But, He commanded them to tell no-one.

Now he could go to Jerusalem; now he could die. At the age of thirty-three he says that now he can die. From that moment he set his face to go south into his worst enemies' camp in Jerusalem, tThey knew what would happen to him. Above all, he knew.

Jesus has told them what is going to happen to him; now he is going to tell them what will happen to them:

23 Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

24 “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.

25 “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?

26 “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory,

The first thing Jesus says is: if you are going to follow me, It means a cross. You will need to take up your cross every day. In other words, it is tough to be a disciple. It is tough to be a Christian. It involves a daily crucifixion. The central issue of our life today should be the person of Jesus Christ. If Jesus is the Messiah, then we must accept that as true and receive him as Lord:

23 Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

In these verses Jesus says to His disciples that now that they know who He is, they must make a response. They are to take up their cross and follow Him. The agenda He has for us seems clear here. We are to pick up our cross and follow Him. The cross He has for us should not be confused with the thorns of life, our common human inheritance. The cross is chosen willingly.

We tend to say if someone is ill, bereaved, or suffering financial difficulties that they “have their cross to bear,” but those unfortunate happenings are not crosses. Those are the thorns we have not chosen. There is nothing noble about suffering, it is simply part of life. But bearing your cross is quite a different matter.

Jesus tells his disciples here, and He tells us the same today, that we are to take up our cross daily. Our cross is the difficult things we choose to do because we are His people. The glory comes as we pick up our cross for His sake. We choose a hard place, a difficult relationship, a thankless job. We serve on a committee, or get involved with a neighbour. We do the things we don't have to do because we feel it is God's will for us.

We need the same response to the call of God that Isaiah had, this is what we read in, Isa 6:8:

8 I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

Our answer to this question is a good indication of whether or not we have picked up our cross and followed Jesus. Taking up your cross is making a decision, to follow a course of action because as a Christian, you know that is the right thing to do.

Let us take a quick look at thorns. There is a right way to react to thorns. Thorns are those hard things in life that we did not choose. The best illustration of this we find with Paul the Apostle. Paul had a problem, we are not told what the problem was, but we do know that it caused him a great deal of distress.

Paul tells us that the problem was so severe, that he pleaded with the Lord three times to remove this problem, but the Lord refused and told him the reason for his thorn. We find this in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians 12v7:

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in your weakness."

Let us return to our text still in Luke nine and starting with verse:

23 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

24 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.

25 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?

26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory.

Jesus begins this message by predicting His death. Here He shows what we must do to follow after Him. "If anyone desires to come after Me". Coming after Jesus is simply describing what it means to be a disciple, so what Jesus' is describing here what are the fundamental requirements of being one of His disciples. If we want to be a disciple of Jesus then first of all we must be prepared to deny our self. Denying self requires us to give up anything that would hinder our doing the will of God.

This does not mean a thing is automatically wrong if we want it. It simply means all our wants and desires must take second place. Jesus and His will must now be the governing priority in our lives. Each life has room for only one master.

Paul makes this very clear when writing to the saints at Rome, Romans 12v1-2:

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

If God is to rule our lives, then our will must be made submissive to His. We must be willing to give up anything in life to please God. Jesus is showing us what a true disciple is. He or she is one who truly follows Jesus. First, it is done by denying one's self. In other words, we are not to be selfish. Instead, we are to be submissive to the Word of God. Our biggest enemy is often our own selfish desires.

I think that we should be really clear about this. It takes more than just belief in Jesus to be saved. The Bible says that faith without works, that's obedience, is dead (James 2:20). So, a faith without obedience is not a saving faith contrary to popular belief.

Jesus also tells us that we must pick up our crosses daily while following Him. Remember, the cross is a symbol of crucifixion, meaning suffering. So Jesus is showing us that the life of a Christian is not going to be an easy one.

"Who do you say I am?" Jesus asked the disciples. What is your answer? Who do you say Jesus is? The Christian faith goes beyond knowing what others believe. It requires individuals to hold their own beliefs. People may have had various opinions and ideas about Jesus' identity, but Jesus was concerned about what his chosen twelve believed about him.

So he asked, "Who do you say I am?" Peter did not understand the exact nature of Jesus' ministry, but he knew one fact for sure Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. The word "Christ" is Hebrew for "the Anointed One"

From this point on, Jesus would speak plainly and directly to his disciples about what it would mean that he was the Messiah. It would involve his death and resurrection. Jesus began to prepare the disciples for what was going to happen to him by telling them three times that he would soon suffer and die, and then be raised back to life.

Jesus could not have made this any clearer:

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 be raised the third day."

We began this message with two questions. So it would seem to be fitting to finish with two questions. The first question is the question that Jesus asked his disciples. "Who do you say that I am". And perhaps far more importantly. The question that we should asking ourselves. "What is my relationship with him".