

Jesus' First Question.¹ (slide.1)

Since the first of the year, we've been working our way through the stories of our Savior that are found in the Gospel of Luke. Today we're looking at Christ's identity, His work of redemption, and what it means for us to follow Him. Becky already read our text, so let's begin by looking to our Lord in prayer (slide/black.2).

We look at Luke's Gospel and at the record of the many miracles that took place. And on the surface, it might be tempting to see this Gospel as a handbook that shows us how to get the things we want. What to do if we're a leper? Or a centurion with a sick servant? Or a hemorrhaging woman seeking relief? Or a fisherman caught in a bad storm? But to do that, to think that way, is to miss the point. After all, this Gospel is not a formula that shows us how to get healed when we're sick (after all, each of these people did eventually die). No, as Mark shared at the very beginning of this series, the purpose of this Gospel and the purpose of all of Scripture is bigger than that. It's to show us who Christ is and what He came to do. **It's not about the miracles. It's about what and who these miracles point to.**

So we (slide.3) read of Jesus; He's praying alone. He (slide.4) approaches His disciples and asks them a question. He asks them "*Who do the crowds say that I am?*" James Edwards writes that, ordinarily in Judaism, it was the disciples who posed questions to the rabbi rather than the other way around. But Jesus was no ordinary rabbi, so He reverses the order.² And He does so in an interesting way. Jesus does not put the disciples on the spot. He doesn't ask them what *they* think (that will come later). Instead, the question is softer. He's asking them for the word on the street. What are people saying? And their answers (slide.5) come as no surprise. We see similar names bandied about elsewhere in this same Gospel.³ ± "*Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, still others are wondering if one of the prophets of old rose from the dead.*" On paper, those all seem like good choices. It's clear that Jesus is no ordinary teacher. He was kind of like John the Baptist, and His miracles were similar to those of Elijah, and He certainly seemed wise like the prophets of old. So, while there were religious leaders that accused Jesus of blasphemy and said bad things about Him, many *respected* Him and were even *impressed* by His teachings. But typically, not all of His teachings —but instead, those teaching they liked, those teachings that were agreeable to them.

And I suppose (slide/black.6) we see versions of this in our own day and age. You go out and ask people what they think of Christianity. They may not say the best things about Christians, but they'll often speak positively about Jesus. They'll say that He was a wise teacher, and they like the stuff He had to say about loving one another, turning the other cheek, and not casting the first stone. They'll mention the things He said that they like; the things that line up with their own opinions and convictions. The other things Jesus said? *Maybe, not so much.*

There's this guy (slide.7); his name is Malachi Martin; I've mentioned him before. He's an Irish-Catholic theologian (died in 1999). Back in the 1970s, Martin wrote a book; the title of the book was (slide.8) *Jesus Now*. In his book, Martin observes that in most parts of our society, the Jesus revealed in the Bible has been replaced by another Jesus. A Jesus cultures create, based not on the revelation of Scripture, based not on the Jesus of Nazareth spoken of in the Gospels, but rather based on one's opinion—a *Jesus for the moment, a Jesus now!* In his book, Martin speculates that if Jesus were to walk into a building, identifying Himself would not be His greatest difficulty. Rather, His greatest difficulty would be finding room; finding a place to sit. Because you see, in that same room would already be another Jesus. A Jesus of our own construct, a Jesus of our own design. And, of course, not just *one* Jesus, but (slide.9) *several Jesuses*—a Jesus for every taste; a Jesus for every ambition (slide.10).⁴

Conservative Jesus, Progressive Jesus,
Revolutionary Jesus, Santa Claus Jesus,
New Age Jesus, Rastafarian Jesus, Hindu Jesus,
Corporate Jesus, Hipster Jesus,
Jesus the example; Jesus the role model,
A Jesus for every preference/desire/cultural norm.

R. C. Sproul famously called this (slide.11) "God-to-me-ism." And it's not just a phenomenon we see "out there" in the world around us. No, it's something that can happen even to those of us in this room. It can happen to you and me as we get a particular idea about Jesus into our heads, and we turn this idea into our definition of Christ, and we allow that definition to shape us, and form us, and define us (slide/black.12).

Jesus' Second Question.

Which leads into Christ's (slide.13) follow up question; He asks (slide.14), "*But who do you say that I am?*" Jesus brings it home. He takes His first question and turns it into something more specific and personal. He's not asking because He needs the answer (He already knows answer). He's asking because His disciples need to answer that question.⁵ The form of the word (slide.15) "you" used here is what's called an *emphatic pronoun*.⁶ It would be like underlining it and putting it in a bold font—kind of like saying, "you yourself" ("*Who do you yourself say that I am?*"). Furthermore, the word is plural. Jesus is not simply singling out one of His disciples. No, He's asking this question of all of them—and by extension, to all of us! ("*Who do we say He is?*")

And in truth there is no urgent question for any of us here today, whether we see ourselves as followers of Christ or not. Our understanding of Jesus (not the Jesus we imagine Him to be, but the Jesus He is according to the pages of Scripture) is of vital importance.

Fortunately (slide.16), Peter has an answer. That's not surprising. Peter is like the kid in class who's always first to raise his hand even if he's not sure what he's going to say. But this time he gets it right. Something clicks, and without missing a beat Peter says, ±"*You are the Christ of God.*"

This Jesus who in previous chapters healed the paralytic, declared Himself "Lord of the Sabbath," healed the centurion's servant, extended forgiveness to the woman of the city, calmed the storm, delivered the demoniac, healed Jairus' daughter, and healed the hemorrhaging woman Gabe spoke of last week. This Jesus is more than John the Baptist, He's more than Elijah, He's more than one of the prophets. He is God, Himself.

Of course, Peter saw this, not because he was a master biblical exegete who deduced this from a collection of clues found in the pages of Scripture. Rather, Simon Peter saw this because of a revelation from God the Father. Matthew's (slide.17) account of this same event says as much. Jesus turns to Peter and says, "*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven.*"

The word "Christ" means (slide.18) "the Messiah/anointed one." It was the title confessed (slide.19) by the angels (2:11), by Luke (2:26), by demons (4:41), and by Jesus Himself (4:18). This was the Messiah longed for by the people of Israel. This was the king spoken of in the psalm (slide.20) James led us in earlier in our service: "*the King of glory, the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.*" The prince of heaven. The deliverer who would usher in the kingdom of God, and bring the world to rights, and bring an end to evil and oppression. But how Jesus would do this was unexpected. In verse 22 (slide.21) He speaks of the Son of Man "suffering many things," and being "rejected by the elders and chief priests," and being "killed."

Of all the things Jesus ever said to His disciples, this was by far the most confusing and impossible to understand. After all, the nationalistic expectations of the Jewish people living at that time pointed to a political deliverer—a warrior/champion. Even for the disciples who had been walking with Him for all these years, this would have sounded like crazy talk. Yet Jesus did not come to meet the disciple's expectations or anyone else's expectations. He came to do His Father's will in the plan of salvation, which meant suffering and dying for sin.⁷ The Victorious King and the Suffering Servant found in the book of Isaiah are brought together. Furthermore, Jesus is not simply saying that these things "would" happen, but that they [\(slide.22\)](#) "must" happen. Not just, "*I'm going to die,*" but "*I have to die.*"⁸

But it's not just Christ's death, but it's also His [\(slide.23\)](#) resurrection. It's not just Good Friday; it's also Easter Sunday. Christ is promising in advance that death will not hold Him, but instead, the tomb will be left empty on the third day. There's a fifth-century, North African church father; his name is [\(slide.24\)](#) Cyril of Alexandria. I love his description of the resurrection from his commentary on Luke's Gospel; he writes that [\(slide.25\)](#):

Christ utterly abolished death and wiped out destruction.
He robbed hell and overthrew the tyranny of the devil.
He took away the sin of the world, opened the gates above
to the dwellers upon earth, and united earth to heaven.⁹

Take Up Your Cross.

So how [\(slide/black.26\)](#) are the disciples (and how are we) to respond to so great a salvation? Christ tells us in verses 23-25; He declares [\(slide.27\)](#):

²³ If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and [\(slide.28\)](#) *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. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

We look at our [\(slide.29\)](#) modern corporations and how they spend sometimes tens of thousands of dollars creating corporate logos with the hope that they will somehow communicate to the public that their company is innovative or hip or family-friendly or all the above. And yet here's the early church, and what image do they pick? They pick the image of [\(slide.30\)](#) the cross. This Roman torture device becomes the Christian logo. And these crosses are placed on [\(slide.31\)](#) cathedrals, and painted [\(slide.32\)](#) on altarpieces, and become a common image for [\(slide.33\)](#)

baptismal fonts, and as (slide.34) ornamentation one might wear, and as (slide.35) grave markers beneath which Christians were buried. And these artifacts (group.36) served reminders of Christ and of His work at Calvary. But it was more than that. They also served as reminders of the call placed on the believer to (slide.37) take up the cross, and to follow Christ, and to pay heed to His words here in Luke 9.

These words He speaks fight against the notion of a life without self-denial, obedience, sacrifice, or service. Instead, these words speak of the paradox of a life that is "lost" when we attempt to save it and "saved" when we're willing to lose it and die to our own self interests. These words militate against the notion that the cross is little more than an optional extra in the life of the believer, or maybe something reserved for saints and missionaries, or something that's fine for that brand-new Christian, but can be set aside as we grow older. In fact, in reading Scripture, *the opposite* seems to be the case (slide/black.38). Toward the end of John's Gospel, just after Christ's resurrection, Jesus speaks these words to Peter; He says (slide.39):

"Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." (slide.40) Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. And after saying this He said to Peter, "Follow me!"

As Christians, our lives are never our own. Instead (slide/black.41), we're always dying to something. So what has to die? Most of all our pride. That's the big thing:

That need we have to defend ourselves;

That need to be right.

That selfishness; that laziness.

That animosity and anger and unforgiveness pride compels us to hang on to.

It's other things as well:

Our time and our resources.

Our call to serve and sacrifice.

(We imagine they belong to us, but they really don't.)

The reason why is because we do not belong to ourselves; we belong to God.

I love this quote. I share it every couple of years or so. I share it mainly because I need to be reminded of it. It comes from a guy named (slide.42) George Müller. Müller was a serious man with a serious beard. Back in England, back in the late 1800s, he begins to accomplish these remarkable things in his family and these remarkable things with orphans as he tirelessly aided

thousands and thousands of children that were under his care. So people asked him for the secret of his success, anticipating a technique, or a structure, or a system. But instead, this was his answer; he said (slide.43): *±"There was a day when I died. I died to George Müller; I died to his opinions, I died to his preferences, I died to his tastes, I died to his will."* ¹⁰

And, as best as I can tell, that's the kind of death that glorifies God. It always has been. But to do what Müller is talking about is not simply a matter of asking God to help you become "a little more humble" or "a little more virtuous." As if humility or virtue or patience is a superpower you can put on when you need it. It doesn't work that way. You don't simply ask God to help you be better. It's much bigger than that. I think Watchman Nee puts it perfectly; he wrote (slide.44):

God will not give me humility, or patience, or holiness, or love as separate investments of His grace. Instead, He has given only one gift to meet our need. And that gift is His Son, Christ Jesus.¹¹

We need Jesus. We need Jesus to die to our ambitions, to die to our pride, to die to those things that we think are our rights. We need the work of the gospel, and the grace of the cross, and the resurrection power of Christ. (slide/black.45)

This Jesus who died so we might live. This Jesus who on the cross gave up His humanity, so we might become fully human. This Jesus who lost His identity with His Father, so we might be sons and daughters. Not through our own work or ability, but through a life given to us by God. Not by our own power or strength, but by the power and strength of our Lord and Savior; our Messiah and Christ.

Let's pray.

¹ **OT congregational reading: Psalm 24:7-10 (ESV).**

² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 246.

³ See Luke 9:7-9.

⁴ Malachi Martin, *Jesus Now* (New York: Dutton & Co. Inc., 1973), 5.

⁵ Michael Card, *Luke: The Gospel of Amazement*, BIS (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 123.

⁶ Wayne Grudem, "Luke," *ESV Study Bible*, ed. Lane Dennis (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 1972.

⁷ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2009), 453.

⁸ Timothy Keller, *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 97.

⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, "Commentary on the Gospel of Luke" (Homily 44), in *Luke*, ACCS, vol. III, ed. Arthur A. Just Jr., (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 155.

¹⁰ Müller quoted in, Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Illustrating the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1973), 156.

¹¹ Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishes, 1957), 184.