

THE CHRIST OF GOD

Luke 9:18-27

Key Verse: 9:20

““But what about you?” he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter answered, ‘The Christ of God.’”

In the last passage we heard Jesus’ words, “You give them something to eat.” Jesus challenged his disciples to have a shepherd’s heart for needy people. Jesus challenged his disciples to learn the power of faith in God Almighty. Jesus taught us that when we offer five loaves and two fish by faith, he can do mighty work with it. Last week we offered fellowship summer Bible conferences to Jesus. Jesus blessed them and raised dynamic new Bible speakers. Shepherd David Lovi was born again through John 3:16, “For God soooooo loved the world....” God can make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation through our five loaves and two fish.

In today’s passage Peter makes a confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ of God. It is a turning point in Jesus’ ministry. Until now, Jesus has served crowds of people in the Galilean district, healing the sick and preaching the kingdom of God. But now Jesus turns toward Jerusalem where the rugged cross is waiting for him. Moreover, he turns his full attention toward his disciples to plant the meaning of his suffering, death and resurrection in their hearts. Peter’s confession of Christ is of utmost importance in the gospel (Mt 16:18). As we study Peter’s confession of Christ we can learn who Jesus really is: the Christ of God. It is important for each of us to make our own confession of faith, “Jesus is the Christ of God.” May God help us to do so.

First, Jesus is the Christ of God (18-20).

Look at verse 18. “Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say I am?’” St. Luke notes that Jesus was praying in private. At this time, Jesus’ Galilean ministry was at the apex of its popularity. In the previous event Jesus had fed five thousand men with five loaves and two fish. Now the crowd of people wanted to make Jesus king by force (Jn 6:15). It was a politician’s dream. But Jesus had no thought of political ambition (Lk 4:8). Instead, he withdrew by himself to have some private time in prayer. It was time for him to begin his ascent to Jerusalem where he would become the Lamb of God for the sin of the world. Jesus prepared for this with prayer. Jesus prayed first, before doing anything. Through prayer Jesus received God’s strength to start for Jerusalem. Through prayer Jesus could focus precisely on God’s mission for him. Through prayer Jesus received wisdom to help his disciples in the best way.

On the other hand, the disciples did not pray. To their credit, they had followed Jesus faithfully, shedding many tears to sacrifice for the work of God and receive spiritual training. But in their deep hearts they did not know why Jesus came. Instead, they were full of great expectations. They envisioned a messianic kingdom on earth in which they would reign with Jesus. Maybe John secretly began to design his prime minister’s robe. Maybe Matthew devised the most efficient way to administer the treasury department. In any case, the disciples were living in two worlds. Consciously, they lived in fellowship with Jesus, serving in his ministry. But subconsciously, they lived in a fantasy with great expectations for their future glory on earth.

How did Jesus help his disciples? After much prayer, Jesus asked them a question: “Who do the crowds say I am?” This was a general and objective question that was not too difficult to answer. They simply needed to gather information from public opinion polls. They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life” (19). Here we learn what people of the time thought about Jesus. They saw Jesus as a prophet who represented the power of resurrection. They knew that Jesus was one of the greatest servants of God in history. They associated him with moral and spiritual reform, and a return to the pure worship of God. They acknowledged Jesus as a man of God’s Spirit. Indeed, the crowd held Jesus in high regard. Likewise, in our day as well, Jesus is held in high regard. Many consider him a prophet, a great teacher, an example for all mankind to follow. All the major religions try to fit Jesus into their scheme in some way. In fact, there is even an association called, “Atheists for Jesus,” who encourage people everywhere to follow Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount without accepting Jesus’ claim to divinity. Then and now, Jesus’ approval rating has always been sky high.

However, there is a very strange phenomenon in our day. In a recent survey by some of our coworkers, many students on Chicago’s college campuses were asked who Jesus is. A significant number said that Jesus is a myth.

What a surprise! To them, video games are real, but Jesus is a myth. Such people have no sense of history at all. Without a sense of history, we cannot begin to understand who Jesus is. Without a sense of history we cannot understand the purpose of our nation or even the meaning of our own lives. May God restore a sense of history in our nation's young people.

The disciples did well on the first question. Then Jesus asked them another question. Look at verse 20a. “But what about you?” he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’” This was a more difficult question. It was specific and personal. It required his disciples to confess their own beliefs about who Jesus was. And Jesus expected their answers to show superior understanding to that of the crowd. Silence must have fallen as they thought about Jesus’ question, like students in a classroom who have to give an oral answer on the spot. Spontaneously, Peter burst out, “The Christ of God.” It was the right answer. It was the answer that Jesus was looking for. Peter’s answers were not always correct; they were usually wrong. But this time Peter was right on target. What does “the Christ of God” mean?

In the first place, the Christ of God is God’s anointed King. The Christ of God is the one promised to come who would restore God’s rightful rule in men’s hearts. He was promised to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15 as the one who would crush the serpent’s head. He was promised to Abraham in Genesis 22:18 as his offspring, through whom all nations on earth would be blessed. He was promised to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16 as the one who would establish his kingdom and reign over it forever and ever. In Luke 1:31-33, the angel Gabriel said to Mary, “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” By birth Jesus is qualified to be God’s King promised in the Scriptures.

Moreover, when Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit descended on him and God’s voice from heaven said, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Lk 3:22). Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. After this anointing, Jesus did the work of the Christ. Among a myriad of revelations of his supernatural character and power, he gave sight to the blind. This was the unique mark of the Christ (Isa 35:5). Indeed, when Jesus answered John the Baptist’s question whether he was the one to come or not, Jesus said, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight...” (Lk 7:22). Thus Jesus had proven himself to be the Christ promised to come. Jesus is the Christ of God, God’s anointed King.

In the second place, Jesus, the Christ of God, is everything to everyone. When we think of a human king, images of abuse of power come into our minds. We don’t want a king. We don’t even want a supervisor. But Jesus’ rule is different than that of mere human kings. Jesus’ reign is characterized in Isaiah 9:6, which says, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

As the Wonderful Counselor, Jesus is like a mother who listens to her children’s problems and gives them the best wisdom to live a blessed and fruitful life. For example, Jesus understood and counseled the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4. Everyone thought she was a totally evil woman and a menace to society. But Jesus understood that her problem was simply misdirected worship. She worshiped men instead of God. Through a tender and poignant conversation by the well of Jacob, Jesus exposed her real problem and led her to realize that he was the Christ. Jesus satisfied her soul and she became the first woman missionary to Samaria.

As the Mighty God, Jesus empowers those who are suffering in their weaknesses. There was a paralytic who came to Jesus carried by his friends. Jesus embraced him with the love of God and said, “Friend your sins are forgiven” (Lk 5:20). And, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home” (Lk 5:24). This man was healed physically and spiritually. He was no longer a powerless paralytic. He became a man of power, of love and of self-discipline.

As the Everlasting Father, Jesus fills the void in every heart that longs for a father’s love and care. In a certain house in Bethany there lived two sisters, Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus. Mary was a delicate, sensitive and beautiful woman who did not like to cook or wash the dishes. But she loved to study the Bible. Jesus understood her and took time to teach her the Bible until her thirsty soul was satisfied. Martha was a hardworking woman and a good manager. But in her abrupt manner and bossy nature, she needed to be rebuked from time to time for her own good. Jesus helped her spiritually to remain under the influence of God’s word. Lazarus was weak and sickly. But

Jesus healed him and made him strong. In fact, Jesus raised him from the dead. Jesus was a good father to this family and he became their Everlasting Father through his death and resurrection.

As the Prince of Peace, Jesus brings peace to any weary and distraught heart. Mary Magdalene was possessed by seven demons. These demons made her restless all the time and made her do what she really did not want to do. Then they tormented her with dissatisfaction and condemnation. But Jesus drove out the demons from her soul. Jesus gave her true peace. Jesus, the Christ of God, is everything to everyone.

When Peter made his confession, “The Christ of God,” it was not just a recognition of fact. It was a personal confession of faith and love. It was a personal acceptance of Jesus as God’s anointed King. This kind of confession of faith produces a remarkable change in a person’s life. We human beings sometimes hope that we can be our own man, as the English poet and playwright W. E. Henley (1849-1903) said, “I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.” But this is an illusion. In fact, all men are under the power of sin and death, and subject to the devil’s schemes. However, when we make a confession of faith in Jesus, he comes into our hearts to reign as king. Romans 10:9 says, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Jesus saves us from the power of sin and death and the devil. Jesus gives us true peace and joy, eternal life and the kingdom of God. May God help each of us confess, “Jesus is the Christ of God.”

Second, the mission of the Christ (21-22).

Look at verse 21. “Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone.” As we have studied, Jesus is the Christ of God, God’s anointed King, everything to everyone. It seems that his disciples would want to tell this good news everywhere. But Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. It was not because Jesus wanted to keep people from knowing that he is the Christ. It was to prevent a terrible misunderstanding. Many thought that the Christ would deliver them from political and economic trouble and establish an earthly messianic kingdom. Moreover, the disciples themselves did not really know what the work of the Christ was. Jesus first wanted them to deeply understand his mission as the Christ before they began to preach to others.

Look at verse 22. “And he said, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.’” This is the way that Jesus would become the Christ of God. It is different than the way of worldly kings. Worldly kings come to power by crushing their adversaries into fine powder until nothing is left. But Jesus gained power from God when he suffered and died for the sins of the world. Isaiah 53:3-5 describes how Jesus became the Christ of God. It says, “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Jesus suffered so much and died on the cross for our sins. He became the Christ of God by giving his own life as a ransom sacrifice for us. Then God raised him on the third day. Those who accept him surrender willingly to King Jesus in gratitude and praise. Revelation 5:12 says, “In a loud voice they sang: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’”

Third, “If anyone would come after me...” (23).

In this part Jesus tells us what we must do to follow him. Look at verse 23. “Then he said to them all: ‘If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’” King Jesus requires an absolute commitment from his disciples. We must obey his word absolutely. There is no other way. In verse 23, Jesus tells us three things we must do. The first is to deny oneself. In this verse, “self” refers to one’s ego, or his fallen nature. This “self” is the enemy of King Jesus. This “self” wants to rule one’s life for its own glory and to satisfy its own desires and passion. This “self” is hostile to God and others. Jesus’ people must learn to deny this “self.” In this, St. Paul may be the champion. He once burned with passion and pride to glorify his own name and advance his career even by destroying others’ lives. But when he met Jesus, he surrendered to Jesus as his King. Spiritually speaking, he died and Christ lived in him. He said in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Then St. Paul could love God at the cost of his life and love God’s children like a

nursing mother.

Jesus also said we must take up our cross daily. Here, “our cross” is associated with Jesus’ cross. It is to participate in the suffering of Jesus to fulfill God’s will for world salvation. Practically, it means to spread the gospel through teaching the Bible and helping people live according to its teachings, even though this may invite misunderstanding and rejection. Jesus said we must take this cross daily. Sometimes we want to take it weekly or monthly. But every day we must share Jesus’ word with others though it is inconvenient and requires sacrifice. Finally Jesus said that we must follow him. Simply speaking it means that we must grow in the image of Jesus. Jesus’ disciples are not primarily people of achievement in the work of God. They must be people who grow to be like Jesus in their character.

Fourth, when he comes in his glory (24-26).

Look at verses 24,25. "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" In these verses, Jesus teaches us not to live a selfish life, but to live for the glory of God. When we live for the glory of God, God will give us eternal life and make us his heirs in his glorious kingdom.

Look at verse 26. "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." According to God's promise, Jesus will come again in glory and power. He will separate those who are ashamed of him and his words from those who suffered because they loved him and his words. Those who are ashamed of him will be condemned. Those who suffered for him will share his glory in the kingdom of God.

Look at verse 27. "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God." There are many who are tasting death excessively living in this world because of their unbelief. On the other hand, those who live for the glory of God do not taste death. Instead, they taste the kingdom of God and its joy and peace. This is a spiritual secret given only to Jesus' people.

Today we learned who Jesus really is: “The Christ of God.” May God help each of us to confess personally, “Jesus is the Christ of God.”