

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.'"

"The Christ of God." We call this Peter's confession of faith. In history Peter was the first person who saw God in Jesus and who made a confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ of God. According to Matthew's Gospel, this was not revealed by man, but by the heavenly Father (Mt 16:17). This passage falls into three distinct parts: First, Peter's confession (18-20); second, the meaning of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection (21,22); third, two basic requirements as his people (23-27). May God help us to see who Jesus really is and what he did for us and what our duties are as his people.

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

Matthew and Mark locate this incident in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, near the foot of Mount Hermon, which is known to be Gentile territory. Jesus had withdrawn from Herod's dominion and from the crowd. Here Jesus wanted to talk quietly with his disciples about the meaning of his suffering, death and resurrection as the Messiah of the world. Jesus also wanted to hear their confession of faith directly from them.

What did Jesus do when he came to a quiet place with his disciples? Look at verse 18. He prayed in private, even though his disciples were with him. In this quiet place, Jesus prayed first before talking to his disciples. Luke emphasizes the fact that Jesus prayed. No doubt Jesus prayed first that the Father's name might be glorified by his son through his suffering, death and resurrection in obedience to his world salvation plan (Jn 17:1). Jesus also prayed for his disciples, that God would sanctify them by the truth (Jn 17:17), so that they might uphold the torch of the gospel to the whole world after his ascension. This is the reason Jesus prayed first. Here we learn that we must pray first before doing anything. This is the secret of spiritual growth.

After prayer he asked his disciples, "Who do the crowds say I am?" This

was an objective question, and easy to answer. So they replied, in unison, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life." People of the times said many things about Jesus. But all of them acknowledged that Jesus was one of the prophets, if anything, a man from God. For they had seen in Jesus divine power and the fullness of grace and truth. For example, once Jesus and his disciples passed by Jericho. There the blind beggar, called Bartimaeus, heard that it was Jesus passing by. He shouted, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Out of his messianic compassion, Jesus gave him sight (Mk 10:46-52). Ironically, even the government agents who came to check up on Jesus on behalf of King Herod were helpless, because of the general idea of the people that Jesus was a man from God.

Look at verse 20a. "'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?'" This was a subjective question, and hard to answer. Usually Peter's answers were incorrect. He used to get a C-. But this time Peter's answer was correct and prompt, "The Christ of God." Biblically, the Christ of God means, "God's anointed King." Human logic fails to explain the meaning of the Christ of God. We can ponder it further on the basis of the Bible.

In the first place, the Christ of God is originally Almighty God. God made man to live for the glory of God as well as for the happiness of mankind. But because of one man, Adam's disobedience, sin came into the world. Soon sin spread to all men and all men were very sick with sin. The Creator God was grieved that he made man on the earth and his heart was filled with pain (Ge 6:6). In order to solve the sin problem, God punished all men on earth by the Flood except Grandfather Noah, who obeyed God's command to make the ark of covenant (Ge 6:14). Even after the Flood, God saw that each person's inclination of heart was evil (Ge 8:21). So God regretted and said, "Never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done" (Ge 8:21). Here we learn how strong the power of sin is. It is easy to commit sin. But it is not easy to get out of the power of sin.

In the second place, the Christ of God is the promised Messiah. From that time on, God changed his way of salvation of mankind. In Genesis 3:15, God gave the primitive gospel. This became the basis of God's covenant. This covenant was repeated many times in the Bible. God promised Abraham that he would bless all peoples on earth through him (Ge 12:3). God also promised David that he would establish his kingdom, which is the model of the kingdom of God (2Sa 7:12). God confirmed his promise in Isaiah 7:14 that God would send his Son to

this world to save men from their sins. Matthew quoted Isaiah's prophecy as the summary of God's world salvation plan, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). As the Bible testifies, Jesus is the promised Messiah.

In the third place, the Christ of God is our Friend and Shepherd. As we have studied, Jesus is the Creator God. But he renounced his power and glory of the kingdom of God and came down to this world to save men from their sins. John interprets God's coming to this world excellently in John 1:14. It says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Our God is the Almighty Creator God. But he is our Friend and Shepherd.

At a town called Sychar near Jacob's well, Jesus met a Samaritan woman whose heart was bitter because of her past sins. No one could talk to her, because she looked bitter and offensive. Probably, someone said, "Good morning!" Then she would talk back, saying, "What do you mean by that?" But Jesus humbled himself and asked a favor, "Will you give me a drink?" (Jn 4:7) She was moved by Jesus' divine friendship. And when Jesus offered living water, welling up to eternal life (Jn 4:14), she was happy to drink. There was a man called Levi. He was brilliant. But he lived under the occupation of the Roman Empire. The people of Israel suffered and bled by the cruelty of Roman rule. In this situation, Levi overcame his despair. He became a tax collector and made some money. He had some money, but he could not buy happiness with money. So he was in deep agony of life. One day Jesus visited his tax collector's office and said, "Follow me." In the matter of time, Levi grew up to be St. Matthew, who wrote the Sermon on the Mount, the constitution of the kingdom of God. Jesus also shepherded Bartholomew. He was Israel's version of "rain-man." He was a man of no interest in anything. But to him, one thing was clear, it was catching the eating time. Jesus shepherded him until he became one of the great disciples who lived with martyrdom spirit in the early church.

Second, the Son of Man (22).

Worldly rulers come to power by smashing their political opponents to pieces. They rule people with their political power and oppressive system. There is a story about how Julius Caesar was killed and Antony came to power. There is a story about Judas the Galilean who led a rebellion against Rome. He raided the Roman armory at Sepphoris, four miles away from Nazareth. Roman vengeance

was swift and sudden. Sepphoris was burned to the ground, its inhabitants were sold into slavery and two thousand rebels were crucified on crosses which were set in lines along the roadside so that these might be a dreadful warning to those who were tempted to rebel.

But Jesus is quite different. Look at verse 22. "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." Jesus calls himself "The Son of Man." This title, "Son of Man," is the title given to Ezekiel, as a suffering servant. Jesus' kingship is not a political kingship, but a spiritual one. Look at verse 22 again. This verse tells us Jesus' specific mission: it was to be rejected and despised in our places. It was to suffer many things and finally die for the sin of the world. Isaiah cries out, "Oh! Oh! Who could believe that he should receive such great suffering!" Because of our sins he was despised, rejected. Because of our sins, he became a man of sorrows. He took up our infirmities and iniquities. He was smitten and afflicted, all because of our sins (Isa 53). In this way, Jesus became the Christ of God. He is forever worthy to receive our praise and honor, for he was slain in our places (Rev 5:12).

Third, two basic requirements as his people (23-27).

First requirement, he must deny himself. 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.'" The first requirement is to deny oneself. But it is not easy for anyone to deny himself. For God gave each person individuality, creativity and the freedom of choice. So each person can discover himself and live in his own way. What then does it mean to deny himself? First of all, to deny oneself means to deny one's pride. Among many sinful natures, pride is the hardest one to overcome, for pride is the root of man's sin. Proud people do not have the fear of God in their hearts. Proud people try to keep "myself" at the center of the universe, suppressing the truth of God. As a result, their lives are marked by defeat and discouragement. But when we want to follow Jesus as our King we must deny our pride, admitting that we are incorrigible sinners who need God's grace. To deny one's pride might be a most painful spiritual battle. But we must not shun this spiritual battle. Paul said in Galatians 5:24, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." Here, "passion" refers to pride. When we deny our pride, Jesus can abide in our soul.

To deny oneself also means to respect God's word more than our own idea. These days many Christians say that they accept Jesus as their Lord and Christ. They want to obey his word. But in their daily lives they respect their own thinking a little more than the word of God. When we love Jesus truly, we can deny ourselves and obey his word (Jn 15:10).

Second requirement, he must take up his cross daily. At the creation, God made man to carry out mission as God assigned to each. Therefore, mission is the meaning of man's life and it is glorious. But it involves sacrifice and obedience and absolute allegiance to God. Jesus took up the cross of mission and obeyed God's will unto death, death on a cross. In light of Jesus' example, we must take up our own cross daily and follow him. These days we see many people who have become so-called yuppies. In light of hippies' failure, they began to exert all their strength to obtain their fame and wealth. With money, most of them bought a house in the suburbs and an expensive car. But they are swimming in the tragic events and accidents. If they are really happy, why is the divorce rate going up? Why are there so many husband beatings and wife-beatings and child abuse? Why are there so many suicides? As I said before, we must remember the simple truth that man is born to take up the cross of mission.

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 and he will separate those who are ashamed of him and his words from those who suffered because they loved Jesus and his words. Those who are ashamed of him and his words will be condemned. On the other hand, those who suffered because they loved him and his words will be accepted into

his kingdom.

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. May God bless us to make a confession of faith, "You are the Christ of God."