

JESUS IS GOD'S MESSIAH

Luke 9:18-27

Key Verse: 9:29

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

Today’s passage marks the climax of Jesus’ Galilean ministry and is a turning point in Luke’s Gospel. Jesus had revealed who he is in many ways through his words and deeds. Now he asks his disciples to confess who they believe he is. Peter answers: “God’s Messiah.” Then Jesus teaches what the Messiah must do and what his followers must do. These teachings may be familiar to us. But they are so deep and significant that we need to study them again and again. They reveal the very essence of who Jesus is and what it means to be his disciple. Jesus teaches the requirements for being his disciples; they are not recommendations or options. If we do not accept Jesus’ words, we are not his disciples. So we must listen very carefully to Jesus’ words, accept them, and practice them.

First, “Who do you say I am”? (18-22). After feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, Jesus withdrew to a private place along with his disciples. Luke does not mention where they were, but according to Mark they were near Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8:27). Jesus was praying in private. Luke notes that Jesus frequently prayed, especially before significant events: his baptism (3:21), his ministry (5:12), calling the Twelve (6:12), his transfiguration (9:28-29), teaching the Lord’s Prayer (11:1), his impending death while in Gethsemane (22:44-45), and even on the cross (23:34a).

At this time, too, Jesus prayed. Why? He was about to ask his disciples who he was. No human being can perceive Jesus’ real identity without the help of the Holy Spirit (1Co 2:14). Though they had heard Jesus’ lifegiving words and experienced his mighty work, they still needed the Holy Spirit’s revelation (Mt 16:17; Eph 1:17). A genuine confession of faith cannot be willed by people or coerced. It only comes through the work of the Holy Spirit. While in Moscow last winter, I heard a young man’s genuine confession of Christ. Shortly afterward, his father told me that he had prayed earnestly for his son. As we pray for people, the Holy Spirit enables them to perceive who Jesus really is. Let’s learn to pray for our beloved ones.

After prayer, Jesus asked his disciples two questions, both beginning with “Who?” These questions have to do with Jesus’ identity. Jesus did not ask them what he taught or what he did, but who he was. He was not looking for a statement of doctrine, but a confession of his identity. This distinguishes Christianity from other religions. They all claim that we can be saved by keeping their doctrines. But Jesus teaches us that we are saved by knowing him. It is not just knowing information about Jesus, but knowing Jesus

personally, in a relationship. It is like the relationship between a husband and wife, or a vine and its branches. Knowing and confessing Jesus is not a small matter; it brings transformation of our entire being. It gives new birth, living hope in the kingdom of God, and eternal life (Jn 17:3; 1Pe 1:3).

Jesus' first question was, "Who do the crowds say I am?" It was like asking a survey question. His disciples answered, "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; cf. 9:7-8). Each person mentioned was a great man of God, a prophet. It seems to be a good answer but falls short of what Jesus wants. People glimpsed Jesus' greatness but did not understand who he really was. The same is true today. In a poll taken in 2020, 3,000 Americans responded to this statement: "Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God." 52% agreed, 36% disagreed.¹ Those who think of Jesus merely as a great teacher or a prophet do not really know him. Jesus is so much more. His true identity is incomprehensible. In the time of Judges, an angel of the Lord—likely preincarnate Christ—appeared to Manoah, Samson's father. When Manoah asked his name, he answered, "Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding" (Jdg 13:18,22). Jesus' identity is beyond human understanding. Many Americans need to know who Jesus really is. For this, they need to experience the Holy Spirit's work in their hearts. Our prayer can be the means the Holy Spirit uses. As the ISBC 2023 approaches, let's pray that many people may truly come to know Jesus, confess him as God's Messiah, and see his glory. Amen!

Jesus' second question was, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" (20a) Through this question, Jesus wanted his disciples to testify about him personally. It is more difficult to answer, for it means standing on our own conviction of truth—which is not easy. It is easy to be influenced by social consensus or peers. But Jesus wants us to stand on a personal conviction of truth about him, and it is a matter of eternal consequence. Peter did not hesitate to respond: "God's Messiah" (20b). It was precisely what Jesus wanted to hear. Recently, a family in Kazakhstan was accused by a Muslim neighbor of carrying out Christian activity. Suddenly police began to investigate them in detail. The consequences could be serious. Nevertheless, they stand on the truth that Jesus is God's Messiah—their Savior and Lord.

What does "God's Messiah" mean? "Messiah" is a Hebrew word, translated "Christ" in Greek, which means "anointed one." This "anointed one" is the central figure of God's revelation in the Bible. When man fell through disobedience, God promised to send a Messiah who would crush Satan's head and deliver mankind from the power of sin and death. God spoke to his people through the prophets at many times and in various ways, foretelling the coming of this Messiah (Heb 1:1-2). For example, Isaiah prophesied the Messiah's coming as "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of

¹ <https://thestateoftheology.com/>

Peace” (Isa 9:6). All the prophets in the Old Testament pointed to the Messiah (Lk 24:44; Jn 5:39). Jesus came to fulfill all of God’s promises (2Co 1:20). As Luke 2:11 says, at his birth, angels declared, “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” Jesus is God’s Messiah. This is really good news to all mankind.

In truth, the Messiah is in very nature God. The Jewish people thought of the Messiah as a great deliverer and king like David, but not as God in the flesh. Once, Jesus taught them from Psalm 110:1: “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’” (Mk 12:35-37). In this verse, the Father God speaks to the Messiah, who is David’s Lord. In this way, Jesus proved from Scripture that the Messiah is God himself. Apostle Paul says, “The Son is the image of the invisible God...in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form” (Col 1:15a; 2:9). The Bible declares that Jesus is fully God. Believing that “Jesus is God” is the distinctive characteristic of Christian faith.

Peter’s words “God’s Messiah” are unique. The other synoptic gospels say simply “the Messiah.” By recording Peter’s confession in this way, Luke emphasizes that Jesus is the way of salvation God has given us. In fact, Jesus is the only way of salvation. In Acts 4:12, Peter declared, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Why is it important to confess the one, true Messiah? It is because many false messiahs arise, especially in times of crisis. They are self-proclaimed. They come to steal, kill and destroy. But God’s Messiah came to die for us and give us life, life to the full (Jn 10:10).

Peter’s answer, “God’s Messiah,” is a confession of faith that establishes a relationship. This relationship involves commitment. It can be compared to making a marriage vow. This vow establishes a lifelong bond of love and commitment. Yet our relationship with Jesus is even more than a marriage. It is an eternal union of life. Jesus is our source of life, life that constantly invigorates us and makes us fruitful. I still remember the first time I confessed Jesus as God’s Messiah. It was at a Bible conference near Niagara Falls in a small dormitory room while writing a testimony. At that moment heavenly joy and peace filled my heart; God’s life began to circulate in my soul. The small dorm room became like heaven to me. Ever since then Jesus has been my faithful Savior and Lord. Who do you say Jesus is?

After Peter’s confession, Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone (21). It was because no one could understand the Messiah, including his disciples. Jesus’ way would be contrary to people of the world. They use any means to gain power and glory, even lies and murder. They care nothing for justice or truth. Jesus is so different. In verse 22, he told them what he would do as the Messiah: “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” Jesus would suffer many things and be rejected and be killed. Jesus used a strong word, “must.” It implies there was no other

way. Why? It was because this was the will of God to solve our sin problem. To God, humankind's most serious problem is not political, social, or economic; it is sin. Sin is so serious that it requires lifeblood (Heb 9:22). The wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23a). Each of us must die for our sins. However, Jesus, the sinless Son of God, died as a substitute for us. He completely paid the debt we owe. He sets us free from slavery to sin and death and opens a new and living way to God for us (Heb 10:19-20). Now, through Jesus, we come to God freely, anytime, any place (Heb 4:16). This tremendous blessing has been given to us by God's grace, through Jesus' suffering and death. Thanks be to Jesus!

Jesus' suffering and death has profound meaning. It was not just a mere transaction. Sin is more than a debt that needs to be paid. Sin is a fatal sickness. It destroys our inner being and leaves wounds that cause deep shame, pain and sorrow. We need healing from these wounds. That is why Jesus had to suffer many things and be rejected and killed in a very shameful and painful way. Isaiah says, "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain...Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering...and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:3a,4a,6b). Accordingly, Peter said, "...by his wounds you have been healed" (1Pe 2:24a). Through his suffering and death, Jesus not only saves us from our sins, he heals our wounds. Thanks be to Jesus!

Furthermore, we learn that suffering and death is the way of glory and victory. When Jesus talked about suffering, rejection and death, the disciples were shocked. They expected the Messiah would be a glorious, powerful figure, not a suffering one. The way of suffering, rejection and death, seemed to be the way of weakness and defeat. However it was God's way for the Messiah to accomplish our salvation. The disciples needed to change their attitude toward suffering. After his resurrection, Jesus told them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (Lk 24:25-26) Suffering and death were inevitable, but not the end. God raised Jesus to life. Glory and victory followed. This is God's way of salvation: suffering first, and then glory. In fact, without suffering, there is no glory. No pain, no gain. No death, no resurrection. No suffering, no glory. Anyone who wants to receive glory and victory must go through many hardships (Ac 14:22b). Jesus began teaching his disciples to practice this principle.

Second, "Whoever wants to be my disciple..." (23-27). In verses 23-27 Jesus explains how to participate in his suffering and glory. These teachings apply universally—to any disciple who would follow Jesus. Verse 23 says, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." What does it mean to deny oneself? This is not a call to self-torture or self-hatred. Nor is it repression of one's God-given personality. It is to renounce self-rule and to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. It is to renounce a self-centered, self-glory seeking life, and to live a Christ-centered life for God's glory. It is to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passion, and "yes" to Christ and living a godly life in this present age (Ti 2:12). Basically it is to die to my own pride, ego and

sinful passion, and to live for Christ. As St. Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Many teachers have called people to follow them—denying themselves—but not to die for them. Jesus is different. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that when Jesus calls a person to follow him, he bids him “come and die.” Why? It is the way of life and glory.

What does it mean to take up our cross? We need to understand that our cross is different from Jesus’ cross. Only Jesus could suffer and die as a perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world. Jesus has already done the most difficult work. He calls his disciples to participate by preaching the gospel and making disciples of all nations (Mk 16:15; Mt 28:18-20). This is our cross. It requires sacrifice of time, energy, and money. It brings misunderstanding and persecution. We must bear pain and shame, perhaps even death. Still, it is so meaningful, for it helps us understand Jesus more deeply, who suffered and died for us. Apostle Peter encouraged the early Christians who were scattered by persecution, “But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1Pe 4:13). Jesus’ disciples participate in God’s mission and Christ’s sufferings daily—not once a year, or once a month.

Taking up our cross applies not only personally, but as we live with others. It should affect how we relate as husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters in church, with neighbors, with people we work with, and even with our enemies. When conflicts arise, we naturally insist on our own ideas and become judgmental toward others. This attitude breaks relationships. Taking up our cross means saying, “I am wrong. I am sorry. Please forgive me.” And we need to mean it from our hearts. The principle is simple: we must die to ourselves. As we consider this, we may worry that if we die to ourselves, we will disappear and become nobodies. But that is not so. Jesus said, “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it” (24). Paradoxically, when we die to ourselves for Jesus’ sake, Christ is exalted in us and we can experience true joy and peace. In this way we can win others over to the Lord.

Jesus wants us to develop an eternal perspective and value system. He said, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very soul?” (25) Mr. Kun Hee Lee, former chairman of Samsung, was one of the richest people in the world. But he suffered from lung cancer, had a heart attack, and was hospitalized. Then he said, “I have the most exotic car in the world, but now I am in a wheelchair. I have the most expensive clothes in the world, but now I am wearing a hospital gown. I have millions of dollars, jewels, and airplanes, but I cannot use any of them.” This story teaches us that the world and its riches are indeed fleeting. We should not let fleeting things distract us from what really matters. Moses said in Psalm 90:12, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Let’s learn to number our days. The time will come when the only thing that matters is our eternal destiny. In verses 26-27, Jesus gives us a warning and

a promise: "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."

Let's confess that Jesus is God's Messiah and follow Jesus by denying ourselves and taking up our crosses daily. It is the way of eternal glory.