

JESUS IS GOD'S MESSIAH

Luke 9:18-27

Key Verse: 9:20

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

In this passage Peter confesses that Jesus is God’s Messiah. It is a climactic moment which reveals that Peter came to know who Jesus really was. Knowing Jesus is most important in our Christian life. Generally, there are two views of Jesus: as merely a human being, or as God. If we see Jesus as a great teacher, or a great prophet, or a great humanitarian, we can respect him, but he cannot be our Savior or our object of worship. On the other hand, when we see Jesus as God, we can have a vital relationship with Jesus: as sinners with our Savior, and as worshipers with our God. Knowing Jesus is the way of salvation and eternal life. Knowing Jesus also includes following Jesus; they cannot be separated. Knowing Jesus is to have gospel-centered faith. Following Jesus is to live a gospel-centered life. Many Christians say they know who Jesus is, but their lifestyle is not one of following him. They don’t experience Jesus’ life-giving power, remain in their sins, and give a bad influence to others. So it is very important not only to know who Jesus is, but to follow him. Let’s learn who Jesus is and how to follow him seriously.

First, knowing who Jesus is (18-20). Verse 18 begins, **“Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him....”** The word “Once” indicates the significance of this event; it is distinctive and climactic to Jesus’ Galilean ministry. Luke shows us that before important events, Jesus prays. For example, Jesus prayed before his baptism (3:21), before calling his disciples (6:12), here, at Peter’s confession (9:18), at his transfiguration (9:28-29), before teaching the Lord’s Prayer (11:1a), and at Gethsemane (22:41,44, 45,46). This emphasizes that Jesus, in his humanity, depended on God in prayer. Though Jesus is God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped (Php 2:6). But he humbled himself and asked God everything in prayer. In this way he showed a good example to us regarding why we need to pray.

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Why did Jesus pray at this moment? It was for his disciples to know who he really was. No human being can recognize God in Jesus without the work of the Holy Spirit (Mt 16:17). Though Jesus had been with his disciples and taught them many things, they needed the spirit of wisdom and revelation to have personal conviction about who he was (Eph 1:17). Without the Spirit of God, no one can understand spiritual realities (1Co 2:13-14). Jesus prayed that his disciples might open their spiritual eyes to see who he really was. Here we learn from Jesus that in raising disciples, prayer is very important. No one can coerce another person, even one's children, to genuinely confess Christ as their Savior; it must come from the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit personally. This is why we have to pray in raising disciples of Jesus.

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 about what he taught or what he did, but about who he was. He was not looking for a statement of doctrine or a recollection of events, but a confession of his identity. The good news is not about a doctrine, but about a person—Jesus himself. This is the key distinction between Christianity and other religions in terms of salvation. While other religions claim that we can be saved by keeping their doctrines, Jesus teaches us that we are saved by knowing him. Knowing Jesus gives us new birth, eternal life, and living hope in the kingdom of God (Jn 17:3; 1Pe 1:3).

When Jesus asked, **"Who do the crowds say I am?"** what did his disciples answer? **"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; 9:7-8). The common factor was that each was a great prophet. Both then and now, people regard Jesus as a great man of God. Jesus is great (1:32). In so many areas, Jesus is the greatest example who ever lived. Richard Dawkins is a renowned evolutionary biologist, and was a professor at Oxford University. Widely known to be an outspoken atheist, even he acknowledges that Jesus was a great moral teacher and an extraordinary man. Though people saw Jesus as a great man, they did not recognize his divinity.

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Jesus' second question was, **“But what about you? Who do you say I am?”** (20a) Jesus wanted to hear his disciples' testimony about who he was, regardless of public opinion or other people's ideas. This question requires a personal confession. It is so easy for us to be influenced by public opinion or peer groups. Sometimes it is hard to stand on the truth. But Jesus wants us to stand on the truth anyway. It is because this confession is a matter of life and death. How did the disciples respond? Peter pressed the answer button first, and said, **“God's Messiah”** (20b). It was precisely what Jesus wanted to hear. It was the answer to Jesus' prayer.

What does **“God's Messiah”** mean? **“Messiah”** is a Hebrew word, translated **“Christ”** in Greek, which means **“anointed one.”** This means Jesus came from God as the promised Savior and King. Luke 2:11 says, **“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”** Jesus is the Lord—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). Hebrews 1:3a says, **“The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.”** The Bible declares that Jesus is fully God and fully man. Believing that Jesus is God is the distinctive characteristic of Christian faith. Throughout history so many people have confessed that Jesus is God. Among them, Napoleon Bonaparte is impressive. While he was in exile in St. Helena in 1820, he confessed, “I know men; and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him...He asks for the human heart and will have it entirely for himself...All who sincerely believe in him experience supernatural love towards him...This is it which proves to me quite convincingly the Divinity of Jesus Christ.”¹

Jesus is God's Messiah. Many people have claimed to be messiahs throughout history, especially in a time of crisis. Every year someone arises

¹ <http://www.godtheoriginalintent.com/PDF%20Chapters/Napoleon%20Bonaparte.pdf>

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claiming to be the Messiah.² Their common characteristics include a claim to be the second coming of Jesus, profiting from their followers, and engaging in immorality. Either they die, or commit crimes and go to jail. These are all self-proclaimed messiahs. But Jesus is God's Messiah. He is the One sent by God. False messiahs come to steal, kill and destroy. But God's Messiah came to die for us and gives us life to the full (Jn 10:10).

Peter's answer, "**God's Messiah,**" is a confession of faith that establishes a relationship. One person compared it to making a love confession to a woman. That confession changed their relationship and established a lifelong bond of love and commitment. Yet our relationship with Jesus is even more than that. It is a life relationship, like that of a vine and branch. Jesus is our source of life that constantly flows through us to invigorate us and make us fruitful. We can grow endlessly in the image of Jesus. Let's confess that Jesus is God's Messiah, my Savior and King.

Second, following Jesus (21-27). After Peter's confession, "**God's Messiah,**" Jesus began to tell what the work of the Messiah was. In the original Greek, verses 21-22 are one sentence: "**And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised'**" (ESV). At this moment, Jesus prohibited the proclamation of his Messianic identity. Jesus knew that people, including his disciples, could not understand the Biblical Messiah. First, Jesus wanted to correct his disciples' concept of the Messiah. Jesus used a strong word, "must." This "must" is related to his suffering, rejection, death and resurrection. This was God's will for Jesus. Why was suffering and rejection necessary? If we think of solving our sin and death problem as a mere transaction, Jesus could just come down, die quickly and painlessly, rise again and ascend into heaven and pay our debt. But sin is more than a debt that needs to be paid. It damages and destroys people's inner being and leaves wounds and scars that cause deep sorrow, shame and pain. People need healing from these wounds and scars. That is why Jesus had to suffer many things and be rejected and killed in a very shameful and painful

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_messiah_claimants

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way. Isaiah says, **“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief...Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all”** (Isa 53:3a,4a,6b, ESV). In this way Jesus saves us from our sins and heals us from our wounds and scars. Thank you, Jesus!

Another thing we can learn here is that suffering and death is the way of victory and glory. The disciples had no idea that the Messiah had to suffer, be rejected and die. So when they confessed Jesus as God's Messiah, they had a great expectation of victory, honor and glory. To their surprise, Jesus talked about suffering, rejection and death. They were shocked. By the time Jesus said **“be raised to life”** their hearts were already closed. We can understand this very well. We have an advantage over the disciples in that we know Jesus became the glorious Messiah through his suffering and death. However, we too naturally recoil at the mention of these things. In fact, no one wants to hear about them. But it was God's way for the Messiah to accomplish his salvation work. In reality, in and through Jesus, God suffers with us. Here we learn something about God. When we suffer due to our sins, God does not abandon us. He enters into our humanity, bears our diseases and takes up our infirmities (Mt 8:17). Finally, he suffered many things, was rejected by the religious leaders and was killed in the cruelest way on the cross. In this way, God demonstrated his love for us.

However, this was not the end. After his suffering and death, God raised Jesus to life. Victory, honor and glory followed. This is God's way of salvation which those who follow Jesus must accept. Christian life is the way of suffering first, and then entering glory. Without suffering, there is no glory. Without pain, there is no gain. Without death, there is no resurrection. This principle applies to all areas of Christian life. Anyone who wants to receive honor and glory must decide to go through many hardships. Apostle Paul said, **“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God”** (Ac 14:22b). Suffering in Christ is very meaningful. Apostle Peter later understood the meaning of suffering. So he encouraged suffering Christians, **“...rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed”** (1Pe 4:13).

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In verses 23-27 Jesus explained practically how we can participate in his suffering and glory. These teachings apply not only to the twelve disciples, but universally, to anyone 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 asceticism or self-torture. It is not a repression of one’s God-given personality. It is to renounce one’s rule over their own life and to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. It is renounce a self-centered life for one’s own glory, and to live a Christ-centered life for the glory of God. It is to say “no” to ungodliness and worldly passion, and “yes” to Christ. Basically it is to die to myself and to live for Christ. In addition to self-denial, Jesus also calls us to take up our cross daily. This means pain and shame—perhaps even death—in order to obey God’s will. Usually, teachers call disciples to deny their own idea and follow them, but not to die for them. But when Jesus calls a man to follow him, he bids him, “come and die.” Why? As our King, Jesus wants us not only to live under his reign, but to follow his lifestyle. As he died to obey the will of God, so must we. To follow Jesus like this is the way of life and glory.

Jesus’ teaching applies not only personally, but also in our relationships with others: to husbands and wives, and among coworkers in the Christian fellowship. If a husband and wife love one another, their children naturally grow well under their care. If members of a Christian fellowship love one another, God will surely bless their work. God’s work is not done just by individuals, but where two or more work together in Jesus’ name. The problem is that conflicts always arise. People have different ideas and emphases, and sometime sin problems arise. If people insist on their own ideas—even though they are right—they fail to work together and fall into conflict. Then they spend most of their energy fighting with each other, complaining about each other, and feeling sorry for themselves. In such an environment, no one is happy and no one grows; we cannot expect God’s blessing or any fruit.

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How can we solve this problem? The answer is very simple. Each of us must learn to die to myself for Jesus' sake. There is no other way. "Die to myself?" It sounds simple, but it is not easy. It seems that if I die to myself I will become nobody and nothing. But that is not true. Paradoxically, when "I die," "I gain life." When I die to myself for Jesus' sake, Christ is exalted in me. I can experience the joy and peace that Jesus gives. Furthermore, I can win over the other person as my friend in Christ. God will surely bless this relationship and we can experience the kingdom of God. Jesus said very clearly, **"For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very soul?"** (24-25) Jesus continued by saying, **"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"** (26-27). These words are Jesus' warning and promise. If we lose our lives for Jesus—in other words, deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Jesus—we will gain life.

Let's confess that Jesus is God's Messiah, my Savior and King and follow Jesus by denying myself, taking up my cross. This is the way of everlasting victory and glory.