Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Life's Most Important Question
Scripture: Luke 9:18-22
Code: 42-118

Let's open our Bibles to the 9th chapter of Luke's gospel. This morning, we come to the next paragraph in the flow of this wonderful account of the life of Jesus Christ. Luke chapter 9 verses 18 through 22. The richness of this passage could easily develop into a series, but I have resisted that because so much of what is here is going to unfold in the remainder of the gospel of Luke. We'll just let it come as it comes, rather than reach forward and pull it all back in this particular context.

But I want to at least take a look at this passage because it does pose life most...life's most important question. This is the most important question that can be asked and answered. It unfolds beginning in verse 18, and I'll read down to verse 22, Luke 9.

"It came about that while He was praying alone the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them saying, 'Who do the multitudes say that I am?' They answered and said, 'John the Baptist, and others say Elijah, but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again.' And He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' And Peter answered and said, 'The Christ of God.' But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, saying the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day."

The heart of the passage is in verse 20, the question, “But who do you say that I am?” And with that question, Jesus confronted His apostles with the most critical issue that ever faced them, or ever faces any human being, the question of the identity of Jesus Christ. Getting it right is critical to one's eternal destiny. Heaven or hell is the result of the right answer and the right response to the answer to that question. It's not just an issue that affects your belief. It's not just an issue that affects your lifestyle. It affects your eternal destiny. And all souls that live on this planet are accountable to God for their answer to that question. Even if they don't yet know the answer, they are accountable to the answer. The wrong answer or no answer damns forever. The right answer opens the door to eternal life and joy. It is the question of all questions. Philosophers have offered answers. Theologians have offered answers. False religions have their answers. Secularists have answers. Atheists have answers. Humanists have answers. Sadly their answers are wrong. This is one you don't want to get wrong. Too much is at stake. Eternal heaven or eternal hell depends on the answer.

You would think it's a complex question. You would think that it's difficult to answer, since there are endless books and endless articles and endless discussions and treatments on the question of the identity of Jesus. Libraries are full, literally, of tens of thousands, if not millions of books that have been focused addressing this question in one way or another. Articles appear in journals and magazines, papers are written, discussions are held, symposiums, etc., etc. The plethora of this assault, as it were, on the issue of the identity of Jesus Christ might seem to convince us that this is a very complex and difficult question that cannot be answered easily. In fact, the consensus might indicate to us that it doesn't have any real answer, it's just something you sort of work on with no hope of resolution. Millions and millions of pages exist, giving testimony to what some would conclude as the utter impossibility of coming to the right conclusion. But the fact of the matter is: It's a very easy question to answer. It's only hard if you reject the Bible. So anybody who comes up with the wrong answer about who Jesus is has rejected the clear testimony of Scripture. In favor of that, they have placed their own rational thinking. In favor of that, they have placed the writings of some other religious false prophet. In place of that, they have substituted human wisdom. Whatever it might be, the answer to the question is straightforward, simple and absolutely cil...clear if you accept what the Bible says. If you don't accept what the Bible says, then you are hopelessly lost in your search for the real Jesus. In fact, all four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, unambiguously answer the question of who Jesus is. John writes — the purpose really not only for his own gospel, but all the others, when he says — "These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." Jesus is the Christ, He the Son of God. If you believe in Him, you'll have eternal life in His name. That's who He is, that's what comes by believing in Him. That is not ambiguous, that is not obscure. That does not take some kind of scholastic machinations to sort out. It is clear, precise information revealed on the pages of the Scripture, most clearly indicated in the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

We are looking at the gospel of Luke, one of the four writers of the biography of Jesus. And there's no way to escape the identity of Jesus in Luke's gospel because it is repeated again and again. In chapter 1 you have the testimony of an angel as to the coming of the Messiah, who was the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter 1 you have the testimony of an Old Testament priest by the name of Zacharias to the fact that he would be the father of a child who would be the forerunner of the Messiah who would come to fulfill all the promises of the Old Covenant.

In chapter 2 you have the collected testimony of angels, that the child has been born and He's born in Bethlehem and His name is Jesus. And then in the same chapter 2 you have the testimony of two Jewish saints, one by the name of Simeon and the other by the name of Anna, who testify that the baby that is held in their midst is indeed the promised Messiah who has come to fulfill Old Testament

prophecy and be the Savior of sinners. In chapter 2 at the end of the chapter, you have the testimony of Jesus Himself, who at the age of twelve is engaged in theological discussion in the temple and confesses that He has to be about His Father's business, His heavenly Father since His earthly father was a builder and a carpenter.

In the third chapter of Luke's gospel we have the testimony of John the Baptist, the herald, the forerunner of the Messiah who identifies Jesus as the promised Messiah. In chapter 3 again Jesus is baptized by John and at His baptism you have the testimony of the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, who descends on Jesus at His baptism, giving divine affirmation, as it were, and divine anointing to Him. And then you have the testimony of the Father, who out of heaven says with an audible voice, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

And then you have in the 4th chapter the testimony of Satan, who comes to tempt Jesus and says to Him: "Since You are the Son of God..." Thus even in the midst of the temptation attesting to who He is. Then in the 4th chapter further down, you have the testimony of demons, who identify Him as the Holy One of God, the Son of God. Then you have the testimony of Peter in chapter 5 verse 8 who says, "Depart from me, oh Lord," who affirms that He is none other than the sovereign Lord. Then you have the testimony of a sinful woman in chapter 7 verses 37 to 50 who gives a clear witness to His identification. You have in chapter 8 verse 28 another demon who affirms the identity of Jesus Christ by saying, "You are Jesus, the Son of the Most High God." There is no way to mistake in the gospel of Luke, or any other gospels, the identity of Jesus Christ unless you refuse to believe what the Bible says. You can take all of the efforts to discover the hor...historical Jesus, all of the confounding complexities of false religions and wrong assertions of who He is, and you can chart them all up to the fact that people refuse to believe the clear testimony of Scripture.

Here then, after all the other testimonies that I just rehearsed for you, is the testimony of the apostles, the twelve apostles. Their spokesman is Peter. He answers on behalf of all of them in verse 20 and says, "The Christ of God." This isn't the first time Jesus has been so identified. This is the first time, however, you have this final clear precise statement from the apostles collectively that they affirm that He is in fact the Messiah. They have already affirmed that He is Lord. They have already affirmed He is the healer, the miracle worker. They have already affirmed that He had the words of life and there was no one else to go to. They have called Him Lord. They have called Him master. They have called Him teacher. Here they give this singular affirmation, "You are God's Messiah." That's what the word "Christ" means. Here their complete conviction is stated. So this is climactic. This is climactic, and it comes immediately upon what really is the climactic miracle that Jesus did in Galilee. You remember He ended His...the vast part of His Galilean ministry with this massive miracle of feeding twenty to twenty-five thousand people, which we saw last time in verses...verses 10 to 17. This immense

miracle of feeding this crowd is quantitatively the largest miracle Jesus ever did. At the same time on the same day He's teaching, He's healing people. We know also that He was casting out demons as a routine. So, all of this explosion of miracles is going on on this day, and in addition to the singular miracles is this massive creating food for twenty to twenty-five thousand people. So this is sort of the culmination of the Galilean ministry.

And it's at that culmination that Luke transitions into this affirmation. This is a perfect time for Luke to say, "All the evidence was in, nothing more needed to be proven." And so Jesus then directs this question to the apostles, "Who do people say I am?" They give Him answers and then He says, "Who do you say that I am?" And they come up with the right answer. They, in some sense, have completed their education. This is the final exam and they got it right. They got it right.

I need to tell you though, however, that though in the flow of Luke's gospel this goes from the feeding of the crowd to the question to the disciples, they didn't follow each other chronologically. This is much later in time because there's an intervening period here in which Jesus went to the area of Tyre and Sidon, in which He cris...in which He came back across the north part of Galilee and dropped down into the eastern section known as Decapolis, a Gentile area of ten cities and did miracles there. So there were other things going on but this was really the culmination in Galilee itself. That Tyre and Sidon were outside of Galilee, really in Gentile territory. Decapolis was outside Galilee, again in Gentile territory. After that He moves down toward Jerusalem and there, of course, you remember that He is captured and He is executed, and then is raised from the dead. So this was the culmination and it seemed to Luke a fitting sort of climactic point at which to bring in the affirmation of the disciples that they knew who He was. The truth is, as I said, there is some intervening material.

If you want to read that intervening account, you will find it in Matthew. Matthew 14:22 to Matthew 16:12, that section will fill in the blanks of what happened between the feeding of the crowd and the affirmation of the disciple...Matthew...of the disciples...Matthew 14:22 to 16:12. It's also recorded in some greater detail in Mark 6:45 through 8:26. So you can see it covers several chapters and there are a number of things that are recorded there. Also you have a great discourse on the Bread of Life that occurred the day after Jesus fed the multitude, and that's recorded in John 6, in John 6. So between these two events that Luke backs up to each other, there is the amazing speech of Jesus the next day on the Bread of Life, there is Jesus walking on the water the night before and Peter trying to walk on the water and sinking and being rescued. There is the healing of the Syro-Phoenician's daughter. There is the healing of a man who was deaf and mute. There is the feeding of the 4,000 plus in Decapolis, and there is the opening of a blind man's eyes. All of those things are recorded in the Matthew and Mark passages that fill in the gaps. Luke skips over them.

People always want to say, "Why did he do that? Why did he do that?" Well he did it because the Holy Spirit inspired him to do it. He is writing at the behest of the Spirit of God who's prompting him. These things are recorded elsewhere. The Spirit of God chooses not to repeat them here, but rather chooses that you move to the next sort of event in the flow of Luke's emphasis. And I think it is probably true that Luke was already pressing the capability of one scroll to contain his gospel. Luke's is the longest gospel. It has the most words in it and it does press the capability of a scroll to handle it all. And so, getting it all on one scroll if that in fact was the intent of Luke would be helped by not putting everything in that could be put in. But you'll also remember John at the end of his gospel makes this very important comment, "There are many other things which Jesus did which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that were written." There were so many incredible stories, so many incredible and amazing miracles in all the stories that were surrounding those miracles, that all of the books of the world couldn't contain them all.

So what you have here is just a selection of those things, a selection that each of the gospel writers make is due to the prompting and inspiring of the Holy Spirit. In Luke's case, the material in Matthew and Mark was left out. But it fits Luke's flow. Let me show you why. Go back to chapter 8 verse 25. Luke is moving us toward this compelling question of: Who is Jesus Christ? In verse 25, after Jesus had stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee, He said, "Where's your faith?" to the disciples. "And they were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, 'Who then is this that He commands even the winds and the water and they obey Him?'" And here Luke introduces us to this question. Now we're starting to be forced to answer the question, "Who is this?" We've heard the testimony of an angel. We've heard the testimony of Zacharias. We've heard the testimony of the angels at the birth of Christ. We've heard the testimony of Anna and Simeon. We've heard the testimony of Satan. We've heard the testimony of demons. We've heard Jesus' own confession. We...We've heard all of that, the testimony again of the disciples here and there affirming who Jesus is. And now comes the time to really nail down the issue. So in verse 25 Luke surfaces the question: Who then is this? Over in chapter 9 it comes from Herod. Herod said, "I myself had John beheaded, but who is this man about whom I hear such things?" So we're starting to be led, as it were, to this question that has to be answered. And then in verse 18, He was praying alone, He comes to the disciples, He questions them saying, "Who do the multitudes say that I am?" And finally in verse 20, "Who do you say that I am?"

So we can see that starting back in the 8th chapter and the 25th verse, Luke has set in motion a flow to force us to answer this question. And it doesn't serve his purpose to stick between that great miracle of the feeding and the answer to the question, several chapters of material that would direct us away from the force and the flow of this question. He wants to come right to the answer to the

question because in the ministry of Jesus, that's the question that began to circulate: Who is this man? It is still the question that compels the cults and the liberals and even the Muslims and everybody else to come up with some answer about who Jesus is. Even though He's been gone in terms of walking on this earth for 2,000 years, it is still the great question in the world: Who is Jesus Christ? And Luke makes it the focal point of this section of his gospel and drives us to this answer in the passage before us.

A little bit about the setting in verse 18. "It came about," that tells us there's been a transition. There's clearly been a very lengthy transition of weeks if not months in which Jesus has gone to Tyre and Sidon, down to Decapolis and things I mentioned to you. So it comes about after the sequence of time that while He was praying alone. I just want to stop there for a moment and say seven times in Luke's gospel he talks about Jesus praying alone. Seven times he emphasizes Jesus' communion and dependence on the Father. As you flow through the book starting in chapter 6 verse 12, you're going to see it again later on in this same chapter in verses 28 and 29. You're going to see it in chapter 11. You're going to see it again as we flow through the book. It was absolutely critical element of the life of Jesus to spend prolonged time in the presence of God, His Father, not praying on His own behalf, for there was nothing in His life that needed to be brought before God to be altered or straightened out or forgiven or anything else, but interceding as the great High Priest on behalf of those who belong to Him, just as He did. If you want a sample of what His prayers were like, read John 17 and you have in John 17 the model of the intercessory work of Jesus Christ. It is such a profound chapter, somewhere down the road I'm going to just do a series on that chapter alone because it takes you into the Holy of Holies, into the communion between the Son and the Father. So that's what He would do, He would pray for His own. He would pray for their ministry, and their strength, and their protection and their power as they would go out to preach the gospel. And so, He was praying alone as He did so often, as Luke notes seven times.

And it says the disciples were with Him. They obviously were nearby. If He was praying alone, they weren't exactly there in His presence, but they were nearby. Two and a half years had gone by now, two and a half years since Jesus had first pulled the disciples around Him. Two and a half years it had taken for Him to come to the question, the final exam question: Who do you say that I am? Two and a half years starting in the spring in the year 27 and all the way to the summer of the year 29, now only eight or nine months before His execution, before His death He's taught them. And He's revealed and disclosed to them who He is by His teaching, by His power over demons, disease and death, power over nature. He has given evidence that He is God, that He has divine power; that He has divine knowledge and insight, and gives divine revelation; that He has all of the capabilities, the sovereign, supernatural capabilities to do what the Old Testament says Messiah will do when He sets up His kingdom. And so it's final exam time.

The location, Matthew gives us. He was in Caesarea Philippi. I've been to the land of Israel many times. I...I have some favorite places. Caesarea Philippi is one of them because when you go to Caesarea Philippi, nothing is there. You sit...I did. I sat on a rock while a little trickling stream came out of the side of the mountain at the foot of Mount Hermon, which rises over 9,000 feet on the southern border of modern Lebanon, sitting there in the coolness of that place and the magnificent beauty of that place, turning around and looking you can see down the slopes of those....of those mountains there. About twenty-five miles away is the Sea of Galilee, and on a clear day you can see Cana and Nazareth and you can even see where Capernaum was. It was a beautiful, beautiful place, away from the heat and away from the crowds of the Galilee region, and that's where they went. It was named Caesarea Philippi by Philip the tetrarch who ruled in that area, twenty-five miles of the north...north of the Sea of Galilee, about forty miles south and west from Damascus. It was at the very northernmost point of Israel, near where the old northern point was, Dan. You remember Israel used to be Dan to Beersheba in the south, way up on the north on the Gentile border. It was where Judaism mingled with paganism, if you will, away from the beaten path and the crowd. It's a beautiful spot. I remember so vividly sitting there eating some flat bread that we had purchased from an Arab lady who was selling it by the stream that was running out of the hill, the place of isolation. And it was in that area that Jesus went with the twelve. It had once been named Paneus because it was said that the god Pan was born in a cave there. But when Philip the tetrarch got into that area, he renamed it Caesarea. But there was another Caesarea in the south on the coast named for Caesar, and so Philip called this Caesarea Philippi, naming it after himself to give him a modest honor and thus distinguishing it from the other Caesarea. It was susceptible to pagan influence because it was a border kind of area. It's to that place that Jesus went, as far as He could get away from the religious establishment of Israel, to have some private time with His disciples for their private and final exam.

And to emphasize just exactly how things have gone in His ministry, He asks two questions. The first one gives us the answer of human opinion. Let's look at that in verses 18 and 19. "He questioned them saying, 'Who do the multitudes say that I am?' They answered and said, 'John the Baptist, others say Elijah, but others that one of the prophets of old has risen again.'" It was very clear, and we saw this from earlier in the chapter, that they recognized that no human could do what Jesus did, no normal human being. The power was just not available. It had never been done, never in human history had it been done, let alone in their lifetime, or in their memory, or the memory of any ancestors that they had. This was not human power. Dominant power over demons, dominant power over disease, dominant power over dead people, power over nature, nobody had that power. They therefore concluded that no earthly person could do it; therefore it had to be somebody from heaven. And so Jesus says, "Well who do the multitudes say that I am?" What is common popular opinion? What is the...what is this whole crowd of people that follow Me? It's the word *ochlos*. It's Luke's word for the uncommitted mob, the hundreds if not thousands of people who followed Jesus everywhere.

What is their conclusion?

Now remember this, they never questioned His miracle power. They never... They never debated that. There wasn't an ounce of skepticism among them. They didn't say that He was a magician, that He was using trickery. It was just no way ever to conclude that. The healed people, the resurrected people, the people who had been freed from demons were everywhere and their testimonies were available to anybody who asked any questions, as well as the fact that the mob saw with their own eyes these massive miracles going on. No, they followed because of the signs. They followed because of the miracles which they never denied. They followed because He made them food. That's why they followed. They never questioned that.

But they came up with conclusions that were short of reality. John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets dead now risen again, that's what they said. Nothing's changed. Go back to chapter 9 verse 7. When Herod was dealing with that question, he was perplexed, so he wanted an answer so he asked and it was said by some that John the Baptist had risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen again. So this is pretty much the settled opinion of the people that it had to be...it had to be John the Baptist back from the dead, it had to be Elijah who died centuries ago, it had to be one of the prophets who also died centuries ago. Nobody on earth could do that, it has to be somebody who has come down from heaven. They did understand it had to be a supernatural person. It had to be someone outside of this world because no one in this world had that kind of power. But they fell short of the right answer. In fact, Matthew says Jesus asked the question in its fullness: Who do the multitudes say that I, the Son of Man, am? He loved to use that title for Himself because it identified Him not only as human, but it was a messianic title used by Daniel. So He's affirming who do the multitudes say that I, the promised Son of Man, Messiah, am?

Really, if you study the gospel of Luke and you heard what was said, it should be easy to answer the question. In chapter 1 He is called the Son of the Most High, the King, the Son of God. In chapter 2 He's called the Savior, Christ, God. In chapter 4 He's called the Holy One of God, the Son of God, Christ. It goes all the way through, you get to the end of chapter 22, He's Christ, Son of Man, Son of God. In chapter 23 He's Christ, chosen One, King of the Jews, and there's more in between. His titles were made clear, they were made public all the time, whether it was angels, or saints or priests or apostles or Satan or demons or just the people, whoever it was, or Himself, it was clear who He claimed to be.

And yet the crowd said foolish things like John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets such as Matthew records, Jeremiah back from the dead. And you have to ask yourself the question: Why? Why do they not just say who He really is? I mean, how could they come through all of this experience of the miraculous and hearing His teaching, the likes of which they had never heard, speaking authoritatively without quoting any of the rabbis, speaking the very Word of God with power, how can they conclude what they concluded? Well that's just the way it always is. Ask yourself the same question today: How can all these quote-unquote “scholars” fuss around the Bible for their whole lifetime and come up with the wrong answer about who Jesus is? They do it all the time. The cultists do it all the time. You go to your local cult. I don't care if it's Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Mormons, or whatever cult it might be and you're going to find they've got Bibles in there. Can't they read the gospels? Can't they read the book of Acts? Can't they read the book of Romans or any of the other epistles of the New Testament? Or, how about the book of Revelation, which in no uncertain terms all identifies Jesus Christ to be the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior, the Messiah? What is it that they are missing here? What is this problem? It just seems inexplicable. And I've quoted to some people this week a statement that's made in the most popular book today on church growth, a book in which this quote is given. This is close to being accurate, "If I can find the key to someone's heart, felt need, I can lead anybody to Christ." Well why then couldn't Jesus lead anybody to Himself? Don't you think He knew what the key to their heart was? Why is it that when Jesus was finished, they killed Him? Why is it that they rejected Him? They haven't rejected Him yet wholesale, and they're going to trek along and follow all the way down to the week of His death, and they're even going to get excited as He comes into Jerusalem, they're going to throw palm branches down, they're going to say, "Hosanna to the son of David." They're going to declare that He's the Messiah. But a few days later they're going to scream for His blood and they're going to say, "We won't have this man to reign over us,” we want Him killed. And they're going to watch Him die.

So the crowd is not yet...hasn't yet turned. The final real turning doesn't come till the Passion Week when they're again manipulated by their leaders into animosity and hatred and vengeance against Jesus because He didn't pull off their coup and become their military, political Messiah, the way they thought He should. But for now, anyway, He's still popular. He still has this trailing crowd with Him and then the material that I told you is between here in Matthew and Mark, you see the crowd moving along with Jesus. They even move with Him down to Jerusalem. They're around Him when He's in Jerusalem. They're around Him in the temple area. They hail Him as the Messiah on the entry into the temple, as you know, and then by the middle of the week they want His blood.

But for now, they still think He might be John the Baptist and that's significant to them. Or He might be Elijah because in the Old Testament...The Old Testament ends with Malachi. Malachi 3 and 4 promise that before the Messiah, the Elijah will come. It might be Elijah. It might be Jeremiah. That's all...That's all in their mind a commendation. He's a prophet. That's what they're saying, all those are

prophets. John was a prophet, Elijah is a prophet, Jeremiah is a prophet. He's a preacher. He's a preacher, a powerful, powerful preacher. They're willing to say that. He's Jesus Christ Superstar in the religious sense. That's the human answer. It's just so pathetic and so sad that that is the way it still is. You can take people to the New Testament, you can teach them everything that's in the New Testament. You can have them read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and they're going to come to the conclusion that He's something other than who He is and you ask the question: Why, why, why will they not acknowledge the truth? If you want the answer, I'll show it to you, it's in the 12th chapter of John. You go with me to John chapter 12, it's ...It's important to see this. It has all kinds of important implications.

John chapter 12, "The multitude," verse 34, here's the multitude, John 12:34, "They answered Him, 'We have heard out of the Law that Christ is to remain forever and how can You say the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?'" This is so ridiculous. They are still asking the same question: Who are You? Because they refuse to believe the right answer. "Jesus said to them, 'For a little while longer the light is among you. Walk while you have the light, that darkness may not overtake you. He who walks in the darkness doesn't know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light in order that you may become sons of the light.'" He's saying to them, "Believe, you don't need any more light. There's all kinds of light. Believe the light."

And then something happens in verse 36. "These things Jesus spoke and He departed and, uh-oh, hid Himself from them." It was over. It was over. That's enough. I told you to believe, the light is here, you didn't believe, you wouldn't believe. Now, though He had performed in verse 37 so many signs before them, yet they were not believing Him. They are culpable and they are guilty and they are responsible. Does that thwart the plan of God? No, because verse 38 says that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled which He spoke, "Lord, who has believed our report? To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For this cause they could not believe." They would not believe and therefore they could not believe. What was given them as a gospel opportunity then became a judicial judgment by God Himself. He says, "Believe, believe, believe." They won't believe, He says, you can't believe, and He hid Himself. Isaiah said it, verse 40, "He" God "has blinded their eyes. God hardened their hearts lest they see with their eyes, perceive with their heart, be converted and I heal them."

Let me just tell you this very simple truth revealed in Scripture. If you won't believe, the time will come when you can't believe. Genesis 6, "My Spirit will not always strive with man." The time...There comes a time when your rejection is hardened by God Himself, when God hides from you.

You say, "Well what in the world would cause them not to believe if they saw all that?" Verse 42 of John 12: Well many even of the rulers believed in Him. I mean, they...they could see it. "But because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God." They saw what they saw but in the end they refused to believe because being affirmed by the system they were in was more important to them. That's the power of false religion, folks, to capture the soul. That is the power of false religion. They wanted to be accepted in their community, they wanted to be accepted by the people in religious leadership. They didn't want to be put out of the synagogue. That didn't just mean you couldn't go to the synagogue. That meant you were put out of the community because the synagogue was the community. You were literally excommunicated from Jewish social life. You paid the price, you lost your family, you might lose your partner in life, you might lose your children, you certainly lost your station, you might even lose your job. That happened later on, as we know, when the church unfolded in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and elsewhere. The price was too high. They weren't about to admit their sin. They weren't about to confess their bankruptcy spiritually and they weren't about to admit that they had nothing to commend themselves to God. They weren't about to pay the price of being excommunicated from their religious community, from their lives. The price was too high. They wanted to hold onto their self-righteousness, hold onto their...their sort of religious sinning. They would not believe and then they could not believe.

And so, when the question is asked, they don't give the right answer. That was all the answer they wanted to give, so that's all the answer they could give. I look at those people today who go through those efforts quote-unquote “to find the real Jesus” and I see the same flow. You can go to liberal seminaries, you can go to liberal universities, and you'll find these people studying years and years and years to try to discover the realities about Jesus and long ago they would not believe, and now with all their scholastic efforts they cannot believe. Their rejection of Jesus Christ has been hardened into permanency by God and God is hidden to them totally.

So that's the answer of human opinion. But what is the answer of divine revelation, the right answer? Verse 20: "But He said to them, 'Who do you say that I am?'" “You” is emphatic in all three gospels, "Who do you," in contrast to them, "say that I am?" And the background of human opinion is very important because it declares that when the apostles confessed Jesus as Messiah and God, they did so in full knowledge of all the options and what was religiously correct and they took the very opposite view. "You are not John the Baptist, You are not Elijah, You are not Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, You are the Christ of God," said Peter as a spokesman for all the rest. It's important that they were not just in the flow of the crowd. They were in opposition to the crowd, in absolute opposition to the crowd. You are not who they say You are, You are the Christ of God. That's a straightforward answer, straightforward answer.

You see, that is the issue in evangelism. You have to bring people to the reality of who Jesus Christ is. I was reading the last couple of days the latest issue of Ligoniers Table Talks, a wonderful series of articles in there called, "The Myth of Influence," “The Myth of Influence." Listen, evangelical Christianity is...is...has been seduced and made drunk on the concept of influence. Somehow we're going to influence the culture. Somehow if we can tweak our churches and bring in, you know, rock music and contemporary kind of lingo and...and be cool and chic and all of that, we sort of influ...that's a myth. You hear people say, "Well, you know, such and such a prominent movie person came to Christ, think of what an influence they could have, such and such an athlete came to Christ, what an influence they could have." That is a myth. Nobody was ever saved by anybody's influence. The power of the church in the world is not its influence. The power of the church in the world is its gospel. It’s its gospel. It's the specificity of the gospel that saves; not some kind of imaginary influence. I don't have any influence. Now I'm not saying you shouldn't live a righteous life to undergird your testimony, but what do you mean influence? We're not trying to influence people. We're trying to convert people. We're not trying to sort of sneak up on them and try to make them feel good and see if we can't influence them in the right direction. It is a myth. What saves is the gospel; and the gospel alone. And it's confrontive. It's not an influence, it's a command. It is a myth to think that because I'm somebody famous or well-known or because I'm slick or clever, or because I package my little presentation in lingo and terminology that's kind of at the core of contemporary vernacular that somehow this influences people. You know what gets people saved? Not that kind of influence. What gets people saved is a recognition of who Jesus Christ is and an honest evaluation of their condition and the need for the Savior. What we need is not more people trying to influence society. We need more people preaching the gospel. It's confrontation, not influence. Now that's the kind...That is an influence, but it's a confrontive kind not an oblique kind.

So, the disciples got it, against the grain, against the trends, against the popular idea, against what was, I guess you could say, a politically correct view of Jesus. They said, "You're God's Christ." I love that phrase. "You're God's Christ. You're God's Messiah." Possessive in the Greek, that's just...that's something I think maybe people overlook. But back in Luke 2:11, I'm going to hurry here, "For today in the city of David has been born for you a Savior who is Christ the Lord." The Savior has been born for you. He is Christ the Lord, the Messiah, the Messiah, the Messiah. That's been all the way through. Jesus, in Luke 4:18, reads from Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me." That's the word Messiah in the Hebrew, the Anointed One. "I am the Anointed One. I am the Lord's Messiah, anointed by the Spirit of God." Christ is the word *Christos* which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word for anointed. To be anointed meant to be ordained, to be set apart. God set apart the King, the Priest, the Prophet; Christ who is all three as His Anointed One. Read Psalm 2, read Daniel 9:25 and 26, the Messiah is God's anointed. That is to say He was anointed to be King and Priest and Prophet. He is the Christ of God. That is a magnificent possessive.

I just would...shouldn't take the time, but Luke 2:26. This is a favorite phrase of mine. It says in Luke 2:26, "It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death," this is Simeon, "before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Isn't that a great possessive? The Lord's Christ. We talk about Him as our Messiah. He is God's Anointed, God's chosen. We didn't anoint Him, God anointed Him. God anointed Him with the oil of gladness, Hebrews says, above all His fellows. He is the Lord's Messiah. That's why He said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." You didn't pick Him, you didn't make Him Savior, you didn't make Him Lord, nobody did except God Himself. In chapter 3 verse 22, at His baptism He says, "Thou art My beloved Son."

Toward the end of Luke, I can't resist this, chapter 23 verse 35, the people are mocking Him and they're...The rulers are sneering at Him and they said, "He saved others, let Him save Himself if this is God's Christ, His chosen One." That emphasized what the Messiah was. He was the Anointed who belonged to God because God chose Him. Christ, Mine elect. In Acts 3 Luke, still writing in Acts, verse 18: "The things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all His prophets that His Christ should suffer." His Christ. And then again in the 4th chapter of Acts in verse 26, "The kings of the earth took their stand, the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ, His Anointed."

Better be careful how you treat Jesus, He's God's anointed. That's why the Bible says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema," let him be cursed. You have just rejected God's choice. So Peter got it right on behalf of the apostles, "the Christ of God." The full statement, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:16 adds that in. The best the crowds could do was that He was a prophet, that's all they were willing to do. And they would become consistently disillusioned with Him when He wasn't the political, economic leader they wanted Him to be. But here the apostles got it right, against the backdrop of what was politically correct and what was the viewpoint of the scholastic elite in Judaism. And they said, "You are God's Christ, You are God's chosen, anointed Messiah." Nathanael said He's the Son of God, the King of Israel. John the Baptist said He is the Son of God. So that was at the beginning clear. Here it is more clear at the end after all that Jesus has done and said.

So at last the truth of His messiahship is settled. The disciples will experience some ups and downs now between now and the death of Christ. It will be hard, it won't be easy. There will be some bewildering things. There will be some fluctuation in their faith, but they passed the test, they got it right. How do you answer the question? "God's Christ," is that your answer? God's Anointed Savior and Messiah? The fulfiller of all prophecies, all promises, all hopes for salvation for a kingdom, for

blessing? Son of Man, Son of God, true and real God by nature, not a mythical deity like Pan, not a mortal hero like Caesar, but God?

Oh by the way, Matthew says that Jesus added a statement that's not in Luke. Matthew 16:17, "Jesus answered and said to Peter, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona, son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." You don't know this kind of truth unless it's been revealed to you by God. The reality of spiritual knowledge is it's not available to flesh and blood. "The world by wisdom knew not God." "The natural man understandeth not the things of God, they're foolishness to him." He can't know them. Flesh and blood can't know who Jesus is. That's why these people who attempt to know who Jesus is, who are doing it in their human wisdom rather than accepting the revelation of God, can't find out. The disciples believed the revelation of God. They believed the disclosure of God. They believed what Jesus said and what He claimed. They believed what heaven revealed. Because of that, God opened their hearts to receive the truth. He still does that. Matthew 11:27, "No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." This is the great mystery of conversion. You're called upon to believe. You can't believe unless God awakens your heart to believe. But in the marvelous conflux of those two great spiritual realities, the power of God works upon a sinner to bring that sinner to believe and at the same time God awakens the sinner so that that becomes a saving and life-giving faith.

So no matter what the world says about who He is, we know who He is because Scripture is absolutely crystal clear about it. We go against the popular conventional view. We will always be a small remnant. The objective of our place in the world, the calling of our ministry in the world, is not somehow to sort of influence people into being saved because they like our lifestyle, or influence people into being saved because we can solve some of their felt needs and shore up some of their weaknesses and somehow make life a little more comfortable. We're not trying to do that. The church isn't told to influence the world in the right direction, it's told to confront the world with the truth of Christ. There will be some who believe, some whose hearts the Father awakens to receive eternal life. Others reject, become hard and God confirms that hardness in judicial blindness and ignorance.

Now at this point, just closing, because we're going to unfold this as the rest of the book goes on, you would think that this would be a good point to really spread the Word and start the movement to acknowledging Jesus as Messiah. But that's not what Jesus says and it's most interesting, verse 21, "He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone." I mean, imagine, you go for two and a half years of training for ministry, you get to the culmination of your training, you now get it — yes, You are God's Messiah — and now you know what John the Baptist declared long ago, you now know that, you've seen it, you've got rampant amounts of evidence so you could literally fill up your

life with all of the stories of the power of Jesus and the revelation that comes through His teaching, you've got it all, you get it, you've got the right answer, you're ready to go, and Jesus immediately says, "Keep your mouth shut about this, don't tell anybody." What is that?

It's twofold. One, it is judicial judgment like John 12. It's hiding the truth from people who have already confirmed their rejection of it. It's like not casting your pearls before swine. And it's very strong language. Verse 21: "He warned," *epitima*, to sternly charge, "and instructed," is actually *paraggell*, military command. He charged and commanded them, “Don't tell anybody that I am God's Messiah." Don't tell anybody.

Why? Well, because, of course, it could be dangerous. It could escalate again this revolt by the crowds who wanted to grab Jesus like in John 6:14 and 15; force Him to be King, and go bring a coup against Herod and against the Roman occupation. This isn’t the time, He's said. Don't say anything. Plus, this is judgment. Don't say anything about it. It's almost as if the Lord turns the light out in Galilee. The crowd continues to follow but in the end, they call for His blood just a few days after they called Him King and Messiah.

This is really the end. Here we are. We aren't even half-way through Luke and they're already so hard-hearted that they're judicially confirmed in that hardness by God. Now remember, He had just sent out people in that area, namely the twelve, to spread the gospel one last time. That's it. That's it. God has His limits. And when the hardness is final, the message is withdrawn. He didn't want to start a revolt around a false concept of what the Messiah is and what He does. He had another thing to accomplish, verse 22: "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised up on the third day."

Shock of all shocks; are you kidding me? You're going to be killed by the religious establishment? This...It's...It’s impossible to understand what was going on in their minds at this time. Who knows what expectations Peter had in his mind when he made the confession, "You're God's Christ," like this is it, we've reached the pinnacle. It's now going to happen. And immediately Jesus follows it up with a death announcement. That Jesus would be killed by the Jewish people was too bizarre to conceive. But it was true. And He told them immediately so that they didn't go on with wrong ideas and wrong expectations. And I think they fought the reality of that in their own minds and they couldn't bring themselves to believe it. That surfaces later on. They were not to expect Jesus to rise to a throne, they were expecting Him to go to the grave and rise from there. The Son of Man must suffer many things. Must, not a mistake but God's plan, He must suffer, that's the plan. Isaiah 53, He must be bruised for our iniquities, right? He must be chastened for our peace. He must suffer for our

transgressions. He must bear the sins of many. That's what it said in Isaiah 53 the Messiah would do. In fact, He's going to suffer many things...the hatred of the leaders, betrayal by Judas, the arrest in the garden, the kiss of Judas, prison, mockery, whipping, thorns, and be rejected, *apodokimaz*, which means to be rejected after investigation. He's going to have a mock trial, very technical word, there's going to be a real careful assessment of Him and they're going to reject Him as flawed, faulty, not genuine, not the real Messiah, and they're going to kill Him.

Who's going to do this? The elders and chief priests and scribes, one definite article, the three names meaning they're seen collectively here, they make up the establishment of religion in Israel. They are the Sanhedrin, the ruling body, the temple leaders, the Old Testament experts, the authority in Israel, supreme religious court and their verdict is, "We tested Him, He is rejected as the Messiah, and He is to be killed." And that's what they got the Romans to do. That's a stunner of all stunners, killed by the religious establishment of the people He came to. What a blow to messianic hopes. They had just reached the pinnacle of affirmation that He's the Messiah, and now they're told don't tell anybody about it, this is judicial, don't tell anybody around here about this. The plan is not that we become king now; the plan is death, death at the hands of Jewish leaders. But that's because as Mark 10:45 says, "The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many," came to be “made sin for us who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." He came to bear the curse for us. He came to bear in His own body our sins on the cross. And then, verse 22 says, "be raised up on the third day."

So, Jesus introduces them now at the height of their moment of confession, at the final exam of all their training, at the highest point when they now understand it clearly, He tells them, "Don't expect to go from here to the kingdom, death is coming and so is resurrection." Yes He will die for sinners, but as Psalm 16 says, "The Lord will not allow Him to see corruption, but show them the path of life.” He will raise from the dead, Psalm 16 says. Isaiah 53:10 to 12 says the same thing in messianic promise.

What a moment it is. The supreme confession, the supreme moment when maybe they're ready now to go out and preach the messiahship of Jesus unwaveringly with absolute conviction and He says, "Don't say anything to anybody. It's past their opportunity here in Galilee. We're not going to start a messianic movement because I'm going to go to be executed to die for your sins and the sins of all who will believe and then be raised from the dead." Thus does Jesus set us on a course toward the great climax of His life.

Father, this is so glorious, to find ourselves, as it were, living in the very time when Jesus was here. The picture is so vivid, so compelling, almost feel like we're sitting around on the hill hearing these

things with the twelve. Now we start the course, now we begin to move in the direction of the cross, the glory of the cross wherein Jesus died for our sins. Fill us with gratitude for that, fill us with anticipation as the story continues to unfold. Not only did He die, but He rose again, dying for our sins and being raised for our justification. Thank You in His name. Amen.

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