

Six Marks of the Messiah's Mission, Part 1

Luke 9:21-22

Luke 9, verse 18, and we'll read from there to verse 22. "Now it happened that as he" as Jesus, "was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say that I am?' And they answered, 'John the Baptist but others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.' Then he said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' And Peter answered, 'The Christ of God.' 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.'"

You may not realize it, but there are a couple of firsts in that section of Scripture in terms of the, the Gospel narrative, the story, the narrative of Jesus' life and ministry, a couple of firsts in that section. The first, first, is the identification of Jesus as the Christ, the as the promised Jesus, the Messiah, the, the one anointed by God to rule the

nation. This is the first time that his disciples have identified him as the Christ.

All three of the synoptic Gospels record this occasion, as Jesus questions his disciples, and Peter gives this, good confession. In Mark 8:29, the, the record of the confession is very short. Peter simply answers, "You are the Christ." Here in Luke 9:20, it's "You're the Christ of God," a little more information, there. Matthew 16:16, Peter says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," very important confession.

It's about two and a half years into Jesus' ministry. Since his baptism, this is about two and a half years later. The disciples were first introduced to Jesus when he entered into his ministry at the time of his baptism in about the fall of A.D. 29, but they've really only been with Jesus now in close proximity, following along as his disciples, having left everything and followed him, for really about a year, a year and half's time.

They'd been with him. They've shared this part with him and his ministry throughout Galilee, preaching in towns and villages. A very significant first in the narrative. And it's interesting, isn't it, that Jesus has waited until now to predict his suffering? It really is about time to Jesus to inform his disciples that the goal of the next six months is to march toward the Cross.

That's the second, first, in this Gospel narrative, this prediction of suffering. Again, all three synoptic Gospels have recorded Peter's good confession, identifying Jesus as the Christ and in all three synoptic Gospels the confession is followed by Jesus' warning to silence, which is what we see in verse 21, and then Jesus' prediction of suffering, verse 22. It's been hinted at, but this is the first time in the narrative that Jesus has been absolutely explicit about his suffering, his rejection, his death, and then his following resurrection.

You can imagine yourself there. You're with the disciples. You're among them. You're walking along with Jesus for the last year and a half. And there's this growing awareness on your part, something that's solidified into a deep, deep conviction

that this is no mere man. Come to the conclusion, like Peter did, here, that Jesus is actually, he is the Christ of God.

And while this conclusion in your own mind, it may have seemed to be the product of your own internal unaided reasoning, as Jesus told Peter over in Matthew 16, the source of this conviction is actually from the God of Heaven. "Blessed are you, Simon bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father, who is in Heaven." He's come to that conclusion about Jesus that he is actually the Christ of God, was the product of divine illumination.

And today, that truth that Jesus is the Christ that may seem obvious because everybody in America, religious or irreligious, everybody here acknowledges that Jesus is the Christ. They do it every time they curse, don't they? There is a lack of clarity about the meaning and the implications that Jesus is the Christ. That lack of understanding is shared by people in the first and the twenty-first centuries alike, and by everybody in between. People don't know the nature of Jesus' ministry as the Messiah. They don't know what it means that he is, quote, "the Christ of God."

Sadly, there are many professing Christians, even many who claim to be evangelicals, who, who lack clarity about this most basic Gospel issue. They all seem to know that Jesus is the answer to, to something, but they don't know the question. Jesus is the answer for what, exactly? For my brokenness? For my poor self-esteem? For my failures and, quote, "mistakes?" Is he the answer for my loneliness? He's at least that, isn't he? But isn't he so much more than that? Doesn't he answer a question that's more profound and more, more deeply sought and needed for the soul that actually solves all those other issues as well?

You take it out of the realm of the narcissistic, individualistic, and the therapeutic, and there are many today who, see that, say that Jesus is the answer for all kinds of social evils. Did he come to eradicate poverty? World hunger? Did he come to liberate the disenfranchised? Did he come to fight for the rights of the marginalized and make sure that everybody who feels offended now has their day in court?

Beloved, there are many who misunderstand what Jesus came to do, who he really is. There are even so-called Christian missionaries, they're sent out by Christian Missions Organizations, and they lack clarity on this most basic point. They come from America, believing God told them to start a soccer ministry, to help young kids kind of grow up and do something with themselves, get a better education, go start an orphanage.

Many people come into Haiti now, starting trinket shops. God told them to do that. Even some young ladies coming down there starting a micro-brew ministry. That's helpful. Real helpful. Look, you can baptize pretty much anything you want to do if you tell everyone that God told you to do it or he's leading you and if you call it a ministry. Oh, how we've strayed off course! And by sowing the seeds of confusion around the world, oh, how we have led other nations astray as well.

But look, the confusion about the Gospel, the confusion about the nature of the Messiah's ministry didn't start in our time. It starts in an unregenerate heart. It started back in Jesus' day; it goes all the way back to the first century, to

Galilee, to Judea, even to the inner circle of Jesus' own disciples. Even they needed the instruction that Jesus gave in verse 22, like we do.

And what Jesus says in verse 22, beloved, that is the Gospel in seed form. It's the Gospel in the kernel, which is going to grow into full form and fruitful productivity by the end of the story. And we're going to see that take full bloom in the book of Acts. Even after the crucifixion, the resurrection, when Jesus encountered two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus away from Jerusalem in Luke 24, he had to go back over the true ministry of the Messiah with them as well.

He asked them, Luke 24:26, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." If they needed clarity, who were eyewitnesses, those who were there, if they needed clarity beloved, don't we? We want to make sure we're not confused, so that when we do open our mouth, Gospel truth comes pouring out, clarifying and not confusing, but clarifying for those who hear us.

First point: let's consider number one, Jesus calls for secrecy. Jesus calls for secrecy, point number one. As I said, in all three synoptic Gospels, they record Peter's good confession. They also record Jesus' call for silence, though, they call, his call for secrecy. And then they give his prediction of suffering leading to the Cross. In all three synoptic Gospels, the stricture of silence, it's strong, it's stark, it's even severe sounding.

Peter said, "You're the Christ of God," verse 20. You expect this huge celebration of joy as they run off and tell everybody that they know. Hey! We know who the Christ of God is! Look! He's right here! No. Verse 21, "He strictly charged and commanded them, 'Tell this no one.'" Surprising, to say the least. Abrupt. Sharp. Verb translated there in the ESV that he, strictly charged, it's the verb, *epitimáō*, which can carry the sense, really, of a warning, strong admonishment. This is in no way light-hearted, gentle.



It's stern, even a bit severe and then combined with the verb, *paraggelló*, the whole verb phrase has the force of a, of a strict, stern military order. It's like a command to strict radio silence, a command to complete secrecy. It's as if spilling the news about this, about who he really is, that he is really Israel's Messiah, saying anything is going to jeopardize the entire mission. So keep your mouth shut. Wow! Is that true?

Why, why such a strong, severe warning about telling anyone that he's the Christ of God? Some people believe this is a judgment against the people of Galilee. That is, because of the growing rejection and hostility that Jesus has really closed up revelation to them because they have rejected his ministry. They're misunderstanding. They're believing the Pharisees, the scribes, who are teaching them, this isn't the Christ. He's a blasphemer. So this could be judgment by consequence of rejecting the light that he'd given them. Jesus is, is effectively here that some say he's closing the shutters, he, on the light. He's dropping the veil, He's, he's taking away the lamp stand. There's, there's warrant for that view in the previous chapter.

If you go to back to Luke 8:16-18, Jesus said, "No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but," he, "puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, or is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care then," Jesus says, this is a warning. "Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."

Clearly, that is happening. Jesus has been steadily withdrawing from Galilee, as we've said, but it's not the only reason, here, to command silence. It's not I think even the fundamental reason to keep the messianic secret. I believe that this call to secrecy is better explained by a motivation in Jesus Christ of love. He's motivated, here, by love. Why? Because clarity about the truth, about his messiahship, it comes from a heart of genuine love lest anybody should be led astray.

Here's the issue: Jesus does not want people to learn the nature of his identity without understanding the nature of his true ministry, the nature of his real mission. So widespread and

so deeply embedded was a false understanding of the Messiah and his ministry among all these people. So for their sake, for the sake of God's glory, for the wise execution of God's plan for the Messiah, Jesus didn't want any kind of a false expectation, a false popular expectation, to set the agenda for him and his ministry.

The people, they expected and wanted a political, military leader. That's, to them, what they thought the Messiah was, someone who would lead them in triumph over the Romans, someone who would propel them into economic, unparalleled economic prosperity, someone who would promote their physical welfare, their economic standing and prosperity, their standing among the whole world.

After Jesus fed the 5,000, John tells us over in John 6:14-15 that after the people saw the sign Jesus had done, they were immediately excited. They started to take radical, revolutionary action. John tells us they were about to come and take him by force to make him king. They're all about revolution. Get this guy leading us; let's overthrow the Romans, get 'em out of here, and Israel's glory will be swept in.

In today's language, they wanted health, wealth, and prosperity. And there's a sense in which they weren't entirely wrong about that. The people actually had biblical warrant to believe the Messiah would bring a time of unprecedented health, wealth, and prosperity. You can read about that, I was going to read, but we don't have the time, but Isaiah 65, Isaiah 66. You can jot those down and read them later. They had warrant and reason to believe that the Messiah's coming would usher in a time of Israel's glory. We still believe that to be true.

Here's the problem, though. The people, they failed to understand, they failed to comprehend the biblical, theological understanding of what it is that leads to true health and true wealth and true prosperity. They were satisfied with health, wealth, and prosperity on just a physical, temporal level. They didn't understand the need for health in the soul, for the wealth of heaven, for the real prosperity that brings salvation before God. Frankly, when it came down to it, they really didn't desire that at all.

They loved the freedom that Jesus provided from disease and demons. They loved to eat the free food that he miraculously distributed to them. Like the woman at the well in John 4, oh, yeah, they were interested in the fountain of Living Water that Jesus could provide because they didn't want to have the trouble of having to go to the well every day. Inconvenient. Living water, you say? I'm all for it. Sign me up for more water, more food, no disease. Get the demons out of here!

Not so interested in looking deeply at self. Not so interested in humbling self, in confessing sins. Not so interested in repentance, not so interested in taking a hard look at who they really are before a holy and righteous God. Not interested in trusting Christ. Not interested in being reconciled to God, to worship him in spirit and in truth because, in, in fact, point of fact, they didn't love God. They don't really want him.

You know, that's why people don't want to go to heaven. Oh, sure, they love the streets lined with gold, the escape from their problems. Sure, they love to be free from all the trouble that their own mistakes and imperfections cause. But at the end

of the day, when they come to the end of the rainbow, and the pot of gold is not a pot of gold, but it's actually the God of heaven, you know what? They don't want him. Why?

Because the God of heaven gets really invasive, and he wants every part of you. He wants your life. He wants your soul. He wants your decisions. He wants your priorities. He demands them because he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He says, "Follow me. Anyone who would come after me," Jesus said, "let him deny himself." The end of you. "Let him take up his cross." That means, are you willing to die? Are you willing to walk with me do death, to execution? That's where I'm going. You want to come? And then this is the worst part, "and follow me." "Follow me," Jesus said. Follow what? Follow my teaching, follow my commands, follow my way, follow my, my command, this is the most difficult one, "love your enemies." Love them. The end of you. The end of your priorities. The end of what you want. It's all about what I want, Jesus says. You still want to come?

Beloved, are we so different? Have you come today because you love the living God, and you want to worship him? Have you come today because you want to bow before him? Have you come

today because you want to confess your sins, repent, go away from yourself, the flesh, serving all of your desires, to give yourself completely and wholly to the living God. Or are you here because you like Bible study? Isn't that our danger to love the truth of the Scripture, but not really be so interested in the God of Scripture. Do we love to sermonize, philosophize, talk about doctrine and truth and pride ourselves in how much we know and understand and yet we have no heart to humble ourselves, to be gracious toward one another, welcoming and inviting to people that know less, maybe, than we do?

I mentioned earlier the exporting of a false form of Christianity around the world through misguided missionaries. You know where that starts? Right here on home soil. Right here in our churches. So many churches and parachurch ministries, they're misleading people with a shallow, sub-Christian form of the Gospel, which is really no Gospel at all. And some churches, some ministries, they like to be so deep that no one really fits in their hole except them.

You go on college and university campuses everywhere, young people who are misled by older people professing but not

possessing, Christianized religious people, they're completely confused about this Jesus that they say they believe. They don't know or understand the Gospel. Sadly, that's happening on Christian colleges and universities as well. They're, they're watching, we're watching campus after campus compromise with the culture and lose the Gospel.

I'm convinced that the American form of institutionalized Christianity, modified and improved by American innovation, compromised and distorted, changed by American pragmatism and all of it propelled along by marketing prowess, this whole thing has mangled the Gospel, and to such a degree that people think you're heretical when you tell them the actual Gospel.

When you just read them out of the Bible what Jesus says, they think you're the problem. When you call them to a Gospel of self-denial, and cross-bearing, Gospel of suffering, they brand you the heretic. They brand you the trouble maker, the problem. Beloved, like the disciples who walked with Jesus, like the people of the first century Israel, we, too, we need to set aside our preconceived notions inherited through our religious



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traditions and our upbringing. We need to let Jesus set the agenda for us. Will you do that?