

The Christ of God

Luke 9:18-20

Jesus is no mere man. Jesus possesses, by this incredible miracle, he possesses two natures. Both natures are perfect in union, in perfect harmony with one another, in one Person. The incomprehensible mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God comes into reality. So the problem with popular opinion about Jesus, whether it's among the crowds back then or among the crowds of our own day; the problem with all their opinion about Jesus is that their estimation is way too low. They try to esteem him by calling him a prophet, but in fact, they're insulting him. They see him and esteem as nothing more than a man, a great man, maybe, an elevated man perhaps, but still nothing more than a man.

For the Muslims today, Jesus is a prophet; he's a great prophet. Yet he's inferior to the prophet Mohammed because Mohammed gave them the final revelation. Among the Eastern religions today, Jesus is an enlightened man, perhaps like the

Buddha. Or he's numbered among the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses, elevated to that status. To the Jews today, Jesus is not the Messiah. They may not know who he is, really, but they are rather insistent that they know for certain who he is not.

Jesus, say the Jews, is not the Messiah. That's been their historic position on Jesus going all the way back to the first century, to the pages of Scripture itself. And listen that opinion is not only wrong, it's deadly because faced with an either or decision that Luke is drawing us to that verdict, and faced with that either or decision: Jesus is either the Christ of God, or as the Jews thought, he's an agent of the devil. The Jews rejected the former. They opted for the latter, and they crucified him as a liar and a blasphemer, as a threat. That's why you cannot remain neutral on this question. That's what Luke has been driving at all along. He's been driving us toward a verdict, and we must choose between popular opinion, which is to esteem him, as high as they try to go, it's to esteem him far too lowly.

We must choose between that popular opinion and a believing conviction which identifies him accurately for who he

really is. If we survey Luke's Gospel, Luke has been driving us to that believing verdict based on the evidence. There's one and only one correct view of who Jesus really is. Already in Luke's Gospel, if you'd like to scroll through with me, you can do that, going back to Luke 4. Already in his Gospel, Luke 4:18-19, Jesus was there preaching in his home town of Nazareth, and he read to them from Isaiah's prophecy. He's there as the visiting rabbi, the visiting preacher, and he's handed the scroll of Isaiah's prophecy, and he read to them. He found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me." Anointed, that's connected to the word Christ; keep that in mind. "He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty of those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." After reading that portion, Jesus rolled up the scroll; he gave it back to the attendant. He sat down, and he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Audacious claim, wouldn't you say? "That Bible passage is about me," he said.

Never was there someone more meek and mild than Jesus, and yet never was there someone who was so clearly and appropriately self-centered. He calls us to worship him. It's a messianic claim he just made. He's telling them that he, himself, had fulfilled the words of the servant of the Lord. People could clearly see at that time that this was no mere man. They, actually it says right there, "They spoke well of him, marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. They said, "Is this not Joseph's son?" I mean, Certainly, there must be something more than carpentry that explains this guy.

Later in the same chapter, verse 46, Luke 4:46, Jesus cast out a demon there. He demonstrates authority, power over malevolent forces in the spiritual realm, and people understood perfectly that this is no mere man. They're all amazed, and they say to one another, "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, they come out."

Scroll ahead, if you'd like to, to Luke 8:25. Luke 8:25, remember, this is the storm on the sea. Jesus is sleeping. The disciples wake him up because they're terrified. And here they witness the most incredible thing: power over impersonal,

destructive forces of nature. It says there, Luke 8:25, "He rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was calm." Jesus spoke to the wind, here. I mean, he's speaking to the air, to the moving molecules. He's, he's commanding the energy of the waves. He's controverting natural laws of physics by his spoken word. The disciples asked the question, verse 25, who then is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?

The real stumbling block for the Jews, though, came when he had the audacity to take upon himself what is widely recognized, rightly recognized, as the prerogative of God. Twice so far in Luke's Gospel the disciples have been present when Jesus told someone, "Your sins are forgiven." That's something God can do. And either Jesus has just blasphemed, or he has the right to say such a thing. Which is it? Jesus told a paralytic, Luke 5:20, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." And the Pharisees are there hearing this, watching him perform the healing, but hearing this they immediately raise the question about identity: "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Here we see that the Pharisees are theologically accurate but

confessionally, they just committed blasphemy against God and his Christ.

Later in Luke 7, end of Luke 7, Jesus there told a notoriously sinful woman, one who had though, she believed; she'd come to faith in Christ, she worshiped at his feet and she, he turned to her and said, "Your sins are forgiven," and those who heard him then began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Again, they understood the theology. They could even understand maybe something about who he is. This is no mere man; this is something else. You know what their sin is, though? They stayed sitting in their seats. They didn't join this forgiven woman, falling before Jesus' feet and worshiping him.

I hear this a lot today, oh, I just remain agnostic about those issues. I don't want to talk about religion or politics or anything like that. So I just kind of, I just kinda stay on the sidelines. You know what Jesus says? You're sinning. You either get on your feet and worship me as one of my followers, or you might as well start grabbing the hammer and the nails and crucify me. Because there are only two options. If you stay on

the sidelines, you're staying on the sidelines and watching a crucifixion. Jesus does not leave us in a state of indifference. He does not leave us in a state of agnosticism on this issue. He doesn't allow it.

Three popular opinions in verse 19. They're totally insufficient to explain Jesus. Yes, considering Jesus as another prophet or even a great prophet, as one commentator said, "These opinions indicate his pre-eminence in the popular mind. These opinions enshrine him among the stellar figures in Israel's long and illustrious history." But listen, that is not good enough. While God did amazing things through the preaching of John the Baptist, he performed powerful works through Elijah and Moses, but none of them, not John, not Elijah, not Moses, nor any of the ancient prophets, none of them ever claimed to forgive sins. The strictly human answer to the question of Jesus' identity is utterly insufficient, but even further that, it's an insult to Jesus' identity. James Edwards said this, "To designate Jesus as a new Moses or Elijah, or as we often hear today, the greatest teacher or moral example who ever lived, is ultimately to deny his uniqueness, for it simply identifies him as the re-emergence or greater example of an earlier prototype." End quote.

That's exactly right. Jesus is something new. That's why he was miraculously conceived in the womb of Mary. New humanity. And those who are joined to Christ by faith, in union with him, they are part of a new race of humanity. In all the racial conversation, you hear, this race, versus, that race, versus that race or that race and I just say, no, look there's a human race; there's one race. But if I want to be really accurate, that's actually not true. There are actually two races. There's the race of the human unredeemed who remain in Adam and then there's the race of the redeemed who are in Christ. I'm always reminded, as I think about this, of the words of the inimitable C.S. Lewis, who says, "We must never commit the foolish sin of saying, 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.'"

As Lewis so famously said, "That is the one thing we must not say. A man that was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He'd either be a lunatic on a level of the man who says he's a poached egg or else he'd be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God, or else a madman, or



something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can, call, fall at his feet and call him, Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." End quote.

Jesus has helped his disciples clear away the insufficiency, and really the insult, of popular opinion. And now, having set the scene, Jesus elicits the good confession. That is to say, he draws forth or draws out the good confession. Look at verse 20, "Jesus said to them, but 'Who do you say that I am?'" It's a little difficult to notice it in the English text, but in the original, Jesus has made an emphatic distinction. He's made a distinction, here, between the crowds in verse 19 and then his disciples in verse 20. When he asks them the question, he says, but you, "Who do *you* say that I am?" It's emphatic, there, in the language. The unenlightened masses were lost in the confusion of speculation, going back and forth in debates about public, human opinion. But these illuminated disciples, graced by God, they see clearly, and they are about to make the good confession.

Peter answered the question. Jesus addressed the question to them all, but Peter steps in, as he always does; he stepped and he answers, end of verse 20, and he answered simply. He answered straightforwardly. This is Peter at his best. He just answers this, "The Christ of God." "The Christ of God." Bingo. That is exactly the right answer. And not only that, folks, but that is the only sufficient answer to the question Jesus asked: "Who do you say that I am?" Jesus is the Christ of God, full stop! The Christ, that's his anointing, it's his commission, it's his role, it's his power, it's the nature of his ministry. "Of God", it's his origin, it's his source, it explains all his power, his authority, his absoluteness.

That answer, short as it is, is the exclusive and authoritative key to eternal salvation. It speaks of the exclusivity of salvation in Christ and in Christ alone, and the absolute authority of God and God alone, as revealed in his perfectly sufficient word, and in his beloved son. Once he revealed his son, the Apostles explained his son, God stops revealing. That's it. Look at Christ. The word, Christ, many people today think of that as Jesus' last name. It's actually a title. It's a designation, not a name. Although if we think of

somebody's name as that which characterizes that person, it's really not wrong to keep the two, Jesus and Christ, very closely connected. It's inaccurate, but it's not entirely wrong to see Christ, as his last name. It is who he is. You can see through the rest of the New Testament, the writings of Paul, Peter, they keep those names closely connected together, Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus.

But Christ really is, technically speaking, it's a title. It's the Greek word *christos*, which translates the Hebrew word *mashiach* from a verb *mashach*, which means, to anoint with oil, literally, to pour oil over somebody's head and let it drip down. You can think, the Israelites, by commandment of God through the Law and by the Prophets, they would anoint with oil those who were set apart by God for special offices; prophets, priests, kings.

Jesus is the prophet, as Moses predicted, Deuteronomy 18:15. He's the one God promised, Deuteronomy 18:18. He's also the fulfillment of an eternal priesthood which is greater than the priesthood of Aaron, of Israel. God promised, Psalm 110 verse 4, speaking about Christ and by the way, Psalm 110, this

section of Psalm 110 is the most quoted Old Testament verse in the New Testament. Jesus himself quotes it, pointing to himself. It says there, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Verse 1 says, "The Lord said to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'"

The writer of the Hebrews shows that Jesus fulfilled that promise. Hebrews 5, Hebrews 6, Hebrews 7, he's our great High Priest, who has an eternal priesthood, who never has to offer, first, sacrifices for his own sins and then sacrifices for everybody else. He has no sin, so when he offers, he offers himself, once for all, a perfect substitute, a perfect sacrifice for sins of all who believe, for all time. That's why he's the great High Priest.

But the Christ, more specifically, more particularly and technically, speaks to the office of king. Jesus is the King of God's kingdom. He is the promised Son of David, king of Israel, who is going to rule an everlasting kingdom. When he comes, he will establish a government on this earth, the kind of government that you and I have always hoped for, one that's characterized by truth and righteousness, rather than lies and

compromise. A government that brings a profound and everlasting peace that has no end. Why is the nature of the kingdom thus? It's because of who he is. It's because of who he represents. As Isaiah said, "His name shall be called 'Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'" He bears the burden of ruling, the governments on his shoulders, and as the Christ, God's chosen King, God's chosen ruler, he rules here on earth below to execute the will of God in heaven above.

He fulfills the perfect will of God because he is loyal to God due to a special relationship with God as his Father. Not only is Jesus the son of David, but as the angel said to Mary, Jesus is also "Son of the Most High." The Holy Spirit of God caused his conception apart from the normal union of a man and a woman, which means, as I said, Jesus is the originator of a new humanity. As the Son of God, he is holy, he possesses a divine nature, he's completely separate from sin, perfectly righteous. As the Son of God, he's the only one who can represent God to humanity. But also as the Son of Man, Jesus is the only one who can represent humanity, a new humanity, before God. It's this God-man who is the only hope, he is the only one who can save his people from their sins by dying for their sins. The only

king that I know who died for his people before he ruled his people; died for their sins to reconcile them to God, making them join profound union in the kingdom itself.

Listen, that's the joyful good news that the angels proclaimed from heaven when Jesus was born. Luke 2:11: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior," who is who, "Christ the Lord." So when Peter confessed, "You are the Christ of God," he may have confessed there more than he understood at the time. But he continued to learn, taught even here in this context by Jesus himself, illuminated by the Holy Spirit of God. He received divine revelation as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. He came to understand fully and completely, as John did, that Jesus was none other than the Word "who became flesh and dwelt among us." And he, like all the Apostles, have "seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the Father, full of grace and truth" or you could say the fulfillment of all grace, fulfillment of all truth. That identity, "the Christ of God," says it all.

Listen, if you get the answer to the question right, if you submit to this Christ of God, who is your sovereign King, God will lead you into all truth. You enter into a saving

relationship with God through Jesus Christ. He demands your allegiance, first, by calling you to trust him as Savior. And the first step of following him as Lord is to see him as your Savior. That's what Jesus meant in verse 22, when he predicted his death for sins, his resurrection from the dead. It's for the salvation of all who put their trust in him.

As we kept reading, you can see the path of Christian discipleship is paved with suffering and sacrifice. Jesus said, Luke 9:23, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily," it's not giving up chocolate for the month that's your cross. No, taking up your cross, it's a torture implement. It's a way of executing criminals. Will you identify yourself with he who is called the greatest criminal in the world? Will you identify yourself to such a degree that you'll die with him, not just die ultimately, but will you die daily to self? "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

Who do you say that Jesus is? Will you turn away from popular opinion? Will you face and embrace the rejection of the world to embrace Jesus Christ? There's one popular voice out there expressing an abhorrent anti-Christ sentiment. He said this about Jesus, quote, "Jesus was a loser, a failed carpenter. He was a savior because he was crucified. I like people that weren't crucified." End quote. Paul helps us understand that kind of blasphemy. Paul said, 1 Corinthians 1:23, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles; but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Beloved, if you get the question right, if you rightly, correctly identify Jesus as the Christ of God, if you see him, the Lord Jesus, as the Christ of God, you see his power and you see his wisdom, guess what? You're among the called. You're in good company with Jesus Christ. You're counted among those whom Jesus prays for, as he did his own disciples, here in this setting, in the context of prayer. And you will embrace him as the Christ of God, believing in him for salvation and following him both into the suffering of the path of the cross, but also the glory of the cross, living forever in eternal life.