

## Confusion, Confession, Commitment

Luke 9:18-27

D.L. Moody shared a story about a man who came to his meetings. When the man was asked to trust Christ, he hesitated because he was afraid his friends would mock him. For weeks he came to the meetings without getting saved. Then he got ill and asked Moody to come and pray for him. Though the doctors didn't expect him to live, he did.

When the man got well, Moody confronted him about his need for Christ. The man said that he had promised God that if he got better, he would, but then told Moody he was going to wait. He said that if he lost his soul, he would have no one to blame but himself. A week later the man's wife called Moody he had a relapse. He told Moody that he had prayed but it seemed like his prayers went no higher than his head. In an almost inaudible voice, he whispered, 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved.' Then he died.

Every day we wake up to a myriad of questions, questions of all kinds.

Should I get up or hit the snooze?

What should I have for breakfast?

Should I put jelly on my toast?

What should I wear?

Does it match?

Should I go to church or stay home?

What will we have for dinner?

Should I study for that test tomorrow?

And the questions continue throughout the day.

Tomorrow you will wake up and be faced with more questions.

Some days the questions are of greater significance.

Should I go to college and if so, where and what should I major in?

What career do I want to pursue?

Should I get married and if so, who?

Where should I live?

Am I ready to retire?

Life is filled with questions, lots of questions.

Sometimes we think if we have to tackle one more question our head will explode and then we realize that some questions are more important than others, but none so significant as the question that is posed in our passage today. How we answer many of the questions we face each day may fill our belly for a couple hours, may determine how well we do on a test or how we will fare in a class, and may even have a lifelong impact, but they all pale in comparison to this one question, the answer to which will determine our eternal destiny.

It is not who am I?

It is not where did I come from?

It is not what am I here for?

Am I the captain of my destiny?

Is there life on other planets?

Should I have the waffles or the pancakes?

At times other people may help answer some of our questions for us. I may ask Robyn if a certain tie goes with a particular shirt and she may tell me. I may ask her what she is fixing for dinner and she may tell me. Now she may fix a new recipe and ask me a question about it. (Is that a loaded question or what?) So I will tell her that's a once a year recipe and she gets my drift.

Parents may tell their kids it's time to get up or how long to study for a test. Your parents may even tell you where you will go to college and your spouse may have been the one to inform you that you were going to get married, but no one can answer life's most important question for you, but you.

Let's consider the impact of this very important question from Luke 9:18-27.

Jesus asks a question

Jesus affirms His identity

Jesus articulates the cost

I. JESUS ASKS A QUESTION – v. 18-20

A. There Is Confusion By The People About Jesus  
– v. 18-19

People in Baltimore were asked about Jesus. Watch this video clip and listen to their responses.

[video]

Ask anyone to answer the question about who Jesus is and those are the typical answers. Every religion has its view of Jesus.

He was a great man and a great teacher.

He was a prophet, a wise man, an enlightened man.

He was mystical.

He had high ideals, someone to emulate.

He did some impressive benevolent acts.

He is the embodiment of good, but was not a real person.

He was divine, but inferior to the Father.

He was God's first creation.

He was Michael the Archangel.

The response of the people in our passage is the same response that Herod had heard about Jesus. He was John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the other prophets from long ago who had come back to life. To many people, Jesus is anything and everything they want Him to be or nothing at all. Throughout history there has always been confusion about Him and the unfortunate thing is that there will always be confusion about Him. Either they truly don't know, they don't care to know or they know and choose to ignore. They want Him to be anything but the person He is because then His teachings have no direct bearing on how they live. If He is just another religious guy teaching morality and being kind to others then you can take or leave what He had to say. He has no bearing on your eternal destiny. If they can somehow convince themselves that He was just an ordinary man who lived a good life and then died, but is still dead then He couldn't possibly be the Savior or be God. Obedience is optional or better yet, from their perspective, you can follow whatever path you want. Jesus just becomes another flavor of the day

in respect to religious gurus. Use it for whatever benefit you can glean from it and then move on to something else.

Or you can be like the Pharisees and just choose to ignore Him. After all, when they considered His pedigree, He couldn't have been the Messiah. It didn't matter that He fulfilled the Old Testament promises. He was nothing like the Messiah they were looking for, someone to deliver them from Roman oppression.

Or you could be like the crowds who chose only to believe in Him for what He could do for them in a tangible way. So long as He took care of their felt needs and performed miracles on their behalf making the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear and the dead to live, they would follow Him.

Or you could be like the woman at the well who truly did not know who Jesus was. It wasn't that people like this ignored who He was, they were just ignorant of Him – they truly didn't know all of which leads to confusion. Confusion was the response of many people, but notice as well that while there was confusion, the disciples gave an accurate confession about Him.

B. There Is A Confession By The Disciples About Jesus – v. 20

Jesus was not asking His disciples this question because He did not know who He was. He was not experiencing amnesia. He was not experiencing an identity crisis.

Psychologist Erik Erikson describes an identity crisis as an intense period of analysis and exploration where an individual uses a variety of things to look at himself to discover who he is. He says that the struggle exists between feelings of identity versus role confusion.

Jesus was not having an identity crisis of epic proportion in which He was asking for the help of

the disciples to figure out who He was or what He was supposed to do with His life.

Jesus knew exactly who He was.

He understood who He was at age 12 when He stayed in the Temple talking with the religious leaders and then announcing to His parents that He must be about His Father's business.

He understood who He was when the Spirit led Him into the desert to be tempted during that 40 day period of fasting at the beginning of His ministry.

He didn't need John the Baptist to announce that He was the Lamb of God who takes sin away.

And when God the Father spoke from heaven at His baptism, that wasn't a clarifying moment where suddenly everything became crystal clear.

In Luke 19:10 He understood who He was and His purpose when He proclaimed that He had come to seek and save the lost.

His identity was clear when He made His "I am" statements.

I am the bread of life.

I am the light of the world.

I am the good shepherd.

I am the door.

I am the vine.

I am the resurrection and the life.

I am the way, the truth, and the life.

He didn't need the disciples to remind Him of His identity. Jesus knew who He was. He wanted to find out if the disciples knew who He was or if they were just like the crowd. Did they follow the popular opinion of others or did they have their own convictions about Him?

The question Jesus asks here is the quintessential question of all ages. It is a question for the disciples. It is a question for us.

"But what about you? Who do you say I am?"

While the question was addressed to the group and Peter responds on behalf of the group, it is a question that you must decide for yourself. It is a

question that only you can answer.

Who is Jesus to you?

Our eternal destiny hinges on our answer.

Our eternal destiny hangs in the balance, but let's be clear. It isn't just enough to know His identity. The question demands a response.

And when Jesus asks the question of the disciples the word "you" in this sentence is emphatic. He didn't want to hear their opinions about Him. He was asking a direct question about what convictions they held about Him. We could read into the question the idea that after everything they had experienced with Jesus – His teachings, His miracles – what conclusion had they come to about Him.

There will be many at the judgment who will claim to have known the identity of Jesus, but who will be denied entrance into God's presence because they only had an intellectual knowledge of Him. We must come to the same conclusion as the disciples.

There are those who know the right things to say, they can give the right answers when asked, but they have no conviction about it.

Matthew 16:16 gives a greater description of Peter's response. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It is a full confession about Jesus. While they may not have fully comprehended the implications of all that meant, they were on the right track about Jesus. When many of Jesus' other followers began to leave Him, He asked the 12 if they would leave too. The response is significant. They indicated they had no other place to go where they could find words of eternal life.

What Peter declared to Jesus spoke of His purpose. It spoke of His person.

It spoke of His position.

About His purpose, He is the Christ. It is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word Messiah, a word we

understand to mean the anointed one. It is not a title, but speaks of who He is as well as what He does. It refers to His character and His relationship with those who are believers. As the Messiah, He fulfills all the promises of God revealed in the Old Testament. The Old Testament made abundantly clear that the Messiah was more than human, He is God.

Isaiah 9:6 “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Jeremiah 23:5-6 “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land... This is the name by which He will be called; The Lord Our Righteousness.’”

Micah 5:2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

The popular opinion of His day as it is in ours made Jesus out to be only a man, but Peter’s confession not only acknowledged His purpose, it also declared His person, that He is deity. As the Messiah, He would be the One to redeem mankind from the slave market of sin and provide the means whereby man can be reconciled to God through His shed blood on the cross. Peter attests to the fact of Jesus’ person, not only was He deity, but that He is also the Savior. By the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, John would write about a meeting between Jesus and a Pharisee named Nicodemus and exclaim that to be born again one must know that God loved the world and gave His One and only Son so that those who believe on Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Jesus is that Son, the Messiah.

Though Jesus had not yet died on the cross, Peter’s confession acknowledges Him as Savior.

We must all answer the question about Jesus – who is He? There is only one right answer. For us to be saved we must also come to the same conclusion and confess Him as Savior. It must be a response of the heart.

Romans 10:9-10 “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

Who do you say Jesus is?

We sing about it, but do we mean it? Is He our Savior?

I confess You as my Savior;  
Jesus, You’re all that I need.  
Holy One, chosen One, Lamb of God,  
I believe.

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If you believe that Jesus is who He claims to be, do those around you know it or do you try to blend in? At Prayer meeting Wednesday I taught the folks a new song. (#728 – *AM I A Soldier Of The Cross?*)

Am I a soldier of the cross,  
A foll’wer of the Lamb?  
And shall I fear to own His cause  
Or blush to speak His name?

Who is Jesus to you? Is there any confusion in your mind or are you convinced of His identity?

Jesus asks a question.  
Jesus affirms His identity.

## II. JESUS AFFIRMS HIS IDENTITY – v. 22

Now let’s go back to verses 1 and 2 and refresh ourselves. In those verses Jesus instructed the Disciples to go into the surrounding towns and villages for the purpose of healing people of their

infirmities and teaching them the good news about the Kingdom of God. They were to do so in the power and authority of Jesus. They could do their task no other way.

Yet here we are in our passage and Jesus tells them to remain quiet. As their collective representative Peter had just confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, confirming at least to some degree they understood who He was. Now He wanted them to not say anything. He would tell others the same thing. When Jairus's daughter was raised from the dead, Jesus told them not to say a word to anyone about what happened.

So why would He tell them to be silent? It seems that this truth about Him would have been the ideal marketing campaign to get the word out that the Messiah was here. The response of Jesus gives us some clues about the reason behind Jesus' no disclosure stance.

At different times in His ministry, Jesus was met by those who would make Him into a revolutionary. They wanted to make Him King. They were not concerned with their spiritual well-being. They were concerned about their physical oppression and thought that Jesus, if He was the Messiah, would deliver them from this oppression. So it must have been very puzzling to the disciples to listen to Him talk about the suffering and rejection He would have to endure at the hands of those who should have welcomed Him. It probably made no sense to them that the religious leaders who taught about the coming Messiah would respond so negatively to Him. It was probably shocking to hear Him say that the religious leaders would put Him to death.

But what Jesus says is not only an affirmation to the disciples that He is in fact who they believe Him to be, He also speaks about His impending death. The Jews saw Him merely as a healer and teacher in the hopes that He would be a political deliverer. Jesus did not want them to instigate a rebellion against

Rome if word spread. Remember that at one point they wanted to force Jesus to be king in order to cast off Roman tyranny.

Jesus is now months away from the crucifixion and He begins to openly talk about His death. An affirmation of their confession came with the reality that as Messiah it meant His death and while He also spoke of His resurrection, they would not fully grasp it until it actually happened.

Jesus needed to ask a question to see what they believed about Him and He affirmed their answer by disclosing to them as the Messiah He would suffer and die.

He asked a question.

He affirmed His identity.

Now Jesus articulates the cost.

### III. JESUS ARTICULATES THE COST – v. 23-27

When we consider making a purchase, we think about what it will cost. Sometimes we make sacrifices by giving up some things so that we can purchase the thing we want.

O. Henry's short story *The Gifts of the Magi*, focuses on the sacrificial love a young, but poor couple have for each other. Their two greatest treasures were her beautiful, knee length hair and his gold watch which had belonged to both his father and grandfather.

On Christmas eve Della has only \$1.87 in her pocket with which to buy a gift for Jim. She makes the decision to sacrifice her beautiful hair selling it to a hairdresser for \$20. With money in hand she purchases a platinum watch fob for \$21. She races home to prepare a modest dinner of pork chops. Unusually late, Jim opens the door at 7:00 and stops in his tracks at the sight of his wife who has had her hair cut. She gives him his gift and explains that she did it to purchase the watch fob for his gold

watch. Jim gives Della her gift, which was an assortment of beautiful hair combs explaining that he had sold his watch in order to make the purchase. Both gifts are now totally useless; however, they realize just how much they are willing to sacrifice because of their love for the other.

Jesus has just informed His disciples about the suffering and death that awaited Him and then articulates what cost would be involved for those who truly understand who He is and what it means to fully follow Him. There is more than just confession, a commitment is required, a commitment that comes with a cost, some sacrifices.

Are you committed to being a learner, someone who is open and teachable, willing to change in character in order to become like the Master?

Are you committed to putting Christ first in all areas of your life?

Are you committed to a life of purity taking whatever steps necessary to separate yourself from sin?

Are you committed to having a regular quiet time with the Lord to read, study, and pray?

Are you committed to faithfully apply the Word of God as you hear it taught?

Are you committed to sharing your faith?

Are you committed to faithfully attend church so that you can mature in your faith and where you can contribute to the body of Christ through the exercise of your spiritual gift?

Are you committed to regular fellowship with other believers, pursuing love and unity in the body?

Are you committed to the exercise of servanthood?

Are you committed to honoring God with your money?

Are you committed to yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit that He might develop His fruit, His character in you?

They all require sacrifice, sacrifice that is necessary to follow Christ wholeheartedly.

Mark's account indicates that Jesus turned to the crowd and gave this challenge to committed

discipleship, telling them that if they would follow Him it would require a cost. The disciples had just confessed who Jesus was and Jesus gave them another opportunity to make a choice. "If anyone would come after Me..." gives them the choice to reject Him or fully commit to Him, but if they chose to follow Him they must understand that it comes with a steep price, there is a cost. They must be willing to deny themselves and they must be willing to take up their cross. That is the measure of true discipleship.

To take up one's cross means that we too are willing to be despised and rejected for that is the essence of the cross. Carrying a cross meant only one thing – death. There was no other association with the word or its symbol. It meant humiliation, conviction, rejection, death. It was never the center of someone's home or a decoration or the topic of casual conversation. People knew the horror of the cross and Rome used it to instill fear on those who would otherwise seek to rebel.

That we are to take up our cross means a willingness to die to our own desires and will in order to follow Christ. A friend of mine one day announced to his family that he was going to start wearing a cross, something that he had never done before. It wasn't because everyone else was doing it or by it he might experience some ethereal, mystical oneness with Christ. It didn't make him suddenly more spiritual. He explained his decision as being twofold. It was first reminder of the great sacrifice Christ had made for Him so that through His death, burial, and resurrection, he could have eternal life. Second, it was a reminder to him of the sacrifice and commitment that he wanted to make for Christ, realizing that it had to be a daily commitment. There is a cost to follow Him.

What this implies is more than just an attitude of the heart where we accept Christ as Savior, there is also a desire of the will. It's a daily, conscious choice. Philippians 1:21

Philippians 3:7-14

John the Baptist explained “He must increase, I must decrease.” (John 3:30)

Listen to an excerpt from someone who knew what it was to be fully committed to following Christ. In his masterful work *The Cost of Discipleship* Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes: “Self-denial is never just a series of isolated acts of mortification or asceticism. To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only Him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us. Once more, all that self-denial can say is: ‘He leads the way, keep close to Him...’

Only when we have become completely oblivious of self are we ready to bear the cross for His sake. If in the end we know only Him, if we have ceased to notice the pain of our own cross, we are indeed looking only unto Him...

To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ...If our Christianity has ceased to be serious about discipleship, if we have watered down the gospel into emotional uplift which makes no costly demands and which fails to distinguish between natural and Christian existence, then we cannot help regarding the cross as an ordinary everyday calamity, as one of the trials and tribulations of life. We have then forgotten that the cross means rejection and shame as well as suffering...

The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death.” (pg. 97, 98, 99)

I close with the words from a Puritan prayer and may these words challenge us to consider whether

or not we are willing to consider the cost to follow Christ.

“Deepen in me a sense of my holy relationship to Thee,

as spiritual Bridegroom,  
as Jehovah’s Fellow,  
as sinners’ Friend,

I think of Thy glory and my vileness,  
Thy majesty and my meanness,  
Thy beauty and my deformity,  
Thy purity and my filth,  
Thy righteousness and my iniquity.

Thou hast loved me everlastingly, unchangeably,  
may I love Thee as I am loved;

Thou hast given Thyself for me,  
may I give myself to Thee;

Thou has died for me,  
may I live for Thee,  
in every moment of my time,  
in every moment of my mind,  
in every pulse of my heart.

May I never dally with the world and its allurements,  
but walk by Thy side,  
listen to Thy voice,  
be clothed with Thy graces,  
and adorned with Thy righteousness.”  
(The Valley of the Vision, pg. 32-33)

Who is Jesus to you today?

Is there still a part of your life that needs to die in order for you to fully follow Christ?

Count the cost. Jesus says there is nothing in this world that is worth holding onto that would cause you to forfeit your soul.