**The Christ of God**

Luke 9:18-27
Key Verse 9:20 – *““But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “The Christ of God.””*

In today’s passage, Peter makes a confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ of God; the long-awaited Messiah sent by God to save His people. Until now, Jesus’ ministry focused on serving people through preaching the kingdom of God and healing all kinds of illnesses and disabilities. However, Peter’s confession marked the turning point in this ministry as Jesus began to focus more on raising His disciples into apostles for the Gospel. By revealing to them His future suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus began to teach his disciples the true meaning of discipleship; to deny one’s self, take up your cross and follow Him. As we delve further into Peter’s confession, we come to know who Jesus really is. I pray that through this passage, we may each come to know Jesus as Christ and boldly confess Him as our one and only Saviour.

**Part 1: “Who Do You Say I Am?”**

May we read verses 18 and 19 together; **“Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.””** At this point in time, Jesus’ ministry was at its greatest popularity. Last week, we saw how the disciples received the authority and power from Jesus to drive out evil spirits, heal the sick and proclaim the kingdom of God. In doing so, Jesus’ name spread throughout all the villages and was on the tip of everyone’s tongue. Even Herod the Tetrarch heard of this news all the way from Jerusalem and wanted to see Him. But what truly established Jesus’ popularity was feeding five thousand people with fives loaves of bread and two small fish, causing the crowd to rejoice and desire to make Him king by force (John 6:15). Some thought He was John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others thought Jesus was one of the Old Testament prophets brought back to life. Though opinion was divided, the general consensus was that Jesus was a great **man** of God.

It is not that different from how Jesus is viewed today. Islam recognizes Jesus as one of the great prophets. Buddhists see Jesus as being very similar to Buddha. Even a lot of atheists see Him as a great teacher and humanitarian whose humility and compassion for His enemies should be emulated. In the end, although they accept Jesus’ importance to human history, they view Jesus as one great man amongst many others. Nowadays when we think of great people, the people who come to mind are celebrities, artists, athletes, the extremely wealthy and a whole list of others. But Jesus is no mere man. He is the one and only Son of God and throughout the remainder of this passage, He helps His disciples come to know this as well.

Jesus asks His disciples in verse 20, **“Who do you say I am?”** This question is a much more difficult one to answer. To answer the first one, they could objectively state the opinions of other people but to answer the second question required what the disciples knew, thought and personally felt about Jesus. Anyone who has ever asked or been asked “Who am I to you?” or “How do you really feel about me?” knows how hard it is to respond to such a question. It is a challenge to even putting together one complete sentence because we want to say the right thing and not be misunderstood. However, in this passage Peter swiftly responds by calling Jesus, “The Christ of God.” Peter boldly declares that Jesus is God’s Messiah. It almost sounds as if he said the first thing that came to his mind without much deliberation with himself, let alone the rest of the disciples. So how might Peter have come to such an amazing conclusion? It was because of seeing all the things Jesus had done.

The Christ of God is the promised Saviour who was to come into this world and restore God’s broken relationship with mankind. The Christ is the Messiah who was sent to save His people, restore them completely and lead them back to God. Jesus performed many signs that were associated with the coming Messiah. Isaiah 35:5-6 summarizes them as so: **“Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.”** Peter was firsthand witness to them all. When Peter was first called by Jesus, he experienced a miraculous catch of fish that illustrated how Jesus wanted him to be a fisher of men. Jesus even healed his mother-in-law who was on the very brink of death. But what probably stuck with Peter the most was the manner in which Jesus lived, in full obedience and trust in God. No man had ever prayed so faithfully and preached God’s word which such authenticity. No man had ever healed so many from all kinds of ailments both physical and spiritual. And no man had ever revealed God’s divine love for His people as perfectly as Jesus did by serving all those around Him. Jesus fulfilled everything the Scriptures said the Messiah would be. The more Peter came to know Jesus, the more he could only come to one conclusion; that Jesus is the Christ. His confession was not simply stating a fact, but a deeply personal confession of his faith and love for Jesus.

At some point in our lives, Jesus will ask each and every one of us “Who do you say I am?” The answer you give to that question may very well be the most important answer you will ever give in your life, for the results of that answer will last throughout eternity. As said before, this question is one that requires much thought and can only come from you. My hope is that in thinking of all the wonderful things God has already done in your life and the amazing ways He continues to work in it, you may confess Him as Christ. As Romans 10:9-10 clearly state, **“If you declare 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 profess your faith and are saved.”** May the Lord help each of us to confess “Jesus is the Christ of God!”

With this confession in mind, Jesus reveals to His disciples the true nature His mission and what He would have to go through to complete it for the very first time; **““The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.””**

At this, the disciples must have been incredibly shocked. If Jesus was truly the Messiah, then wasn’t He supposed to come as a mighty warrior who would defeat the Romans, restore Israel to its former glory and establish a kingdom that would never end? Most people of that time expected as such. They were under such great oppression and desperately wanted that kind of a messiah, hence they tried to make Jesus their king by force after he fed the five thousand. However, Jesus came into this world not as a conquering king but as a suffering servant. Jesus’ words to His disciples echo those written in Isaiah 53 – **“Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4-5)**. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus freed us from the power of sin and death, breaking the very the chains that kept us from coming back to God. Through His wounds, we receive the grace of forgiveness that heals all the spiritual wounds we bear in our hearts. And it is by that same grace that Jesus invites each and every one of us to follow Him as His disciples.

**Part 2 – The Way of Discipleship**

Jesus proceeds to tell of His disciples in verses 23 and 24, **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”**

Let us look at verse 23 – “**“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”** When we think of become Jesus’ disciples, we often this very romantic notion that it makes us immune to the struggles and rigours of life. However, becoming a disciple is not easy. If anything, when you follow Jesus you find yourself incurring even more hardships and frankly speaking, it is quite undesirable. Even figuring out how to interpret and summarize this verse has been a struggle for me all week along.

I believe the simplest explanation of verse 23 is “Put Jesus First.” Our natural tendency is that we do everything in our power to put ourselves first. We only seek our own pleasures, work towards our own achievements and follow our own ideas. We do not care about what Jesus desires of us and are completely indifferent to the needs of others around us. But when we put Jesus first, we seek to do the things that please God and the very things He made us for. As Ephesians 2:10 states – **“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”** When we put Jesus first, we want to reflect Him in our lives in whatever we do. Through sharing the Gospel and Jesus’ life-giving words, we may help others come to know and accept Christ in their hearts. In sacrificially loving others through even the most ordinary of ways, we demonstrate a fraction of the immeasurable love Christ already lavishes upon us. Through denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily and follow Jesus, we become like Jesus which is the ultimate goal of discipleship.

Verse 24 looks like a paradox but when one truly lives according to it, they may experience a great spiritual truth in Jesus. Instead of thinking about and regretting all the things we gave up to follow Jesus in this life, our eyes are focused solely on the wondrous gift of eternal life graciously offered by Him. Instead of looking back at our past in disappointment, we look forward to the both the present and the future as we are now filled with true joy that can only come through Christ. The life Jesus offers is the only one worth having for it the only one you can keep and can only be gained when you follow Jesus with all your heart, mind and soul.

Finally, a summary of verses 25-27 reveals how when one truly values following Christ as being worth more than anything else in this world, they can truly experience the kingdom of God in all its heavenly glory. We are able to overcome any kind of shame or fear for our confidence and strength comes from Him. But for us to experience the fullness of God, we need to confess Christ as Lord first. By its very definition, it is impossible to become Jesus’ disciple without confessing Christ as Lord. It is impossible to follow Him without accepting Him and desiring to truly know Him. Thus, I pray we may each confess Jesus as the Christ not just through our words but in all that we do as we strive to be His disciples and follow in His footsteps.