

Who is Jesus to You?

Luke 9:18-22

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Stephen Davey

For Jesus' twelve disciples, it was easier to say the right theological truths about Jesus with their mouths than it was for them to believe them in their hearts and lives. After being equipped by God to minister on earth, and after declaring profound theological truths about Jesus, Peter and the disciples will be put to the test by Jesus, who wants to know if their heart-living matches their head-knowledge. Jesus is asking us the same question today.

I have in my library a book entitled "The 100," in which the author asks the question, "Who are the 100 most influential people in history?" He also asks the question, "Who has made the biggest impact on your own life today?"

His book goes on to basically give an answer to those questions. He ranks 100 people in world history by order of importance—as far as he's concerned—to human history, to civilization, to progress, to personal impact, to society at large. He then added brief biographies for each of the 100.

One review of his book gushed with praise that this author had written the playoffs of human greatness.

Kevin Miller, from the sermon, "How to Learn What You Need to Know About God"; source: Michael Hart, (Citadel, 2000)

Ranked high on the list at number 11 was Louis Pasteur, who helped usher us into the realm of modern medicine. Among other discoveries, he figured out a way to keep milk from developing harmful microbes so quickly, so milk could last longer, a process that was later named after Pasteur—we call it pasteurization.

Other inventors are listed like the Wright Brothers for the invention of the airplane—they're 28—Henry Ford followed way behind at 91, which he probably wouldn't have appreciated, nor would Leonardo Da Vince, who came in last.

I thought it was ironic that Moses, who delivered God's eyewitness account of creation, came in at 15, while Charles Darwin, who denied creation, was at his heels at 16. Good for Moses!

Martin Luther the reformer made the list at 24 and George Washington was 25.

Of course, I bought the book for one reason: I wanted to know where this author, and all his advisors and all his readers, would find Jesus. Where was He ranked in this list of 100?

I was glad to find that Jesus had made it on the list—in fact, He was in the top ten. But He wasn't first. The top ranking went to the prophet Muhammed, two went to Isaac Newton; four was Buddha, and right in between Newton and Buddha—at three—was Jesus.



Why does it matter that the earth elevates Jesus' personality and teaching, but reject His deity? How does that make it easier for the world to dismiss Jesus' divine nature and salvation mission?

In his brief bio, this author wrote—and I quote: “Jesus had an extraordinarily impressive personality.”

Michael H. Hart, *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential People in History* (Citadel Press, 1992), p. 19

Besides that, Jesus delivered the golden rule and the command to love everybody and then He died.

Never mind the resurrection; never mind the fact that out of all the 100 listed, His tomb is the only one that's empty.

But the truth is, His world—and ours—are willing to put Him on a list. He was a person of influence, so long as He never influences them. Let's just keep Him safely at a distance, over there next to Buddha.

But where somebody puts Jesus on their list isn't going to hurt His feelings. He's not thinking, “I can't believe that author didn't put me one.”

Let me tell you, wherever the world ranks Jesus isn't really all that important to your life, but here's where it gets critically important: Who is Jesus to you?

That answer will impact every aspect of your life and the life to come.

Who is He to you—really? Somebody who gets a brief prayer before a meal? A casual acquaintance reserved for Sundays? A nice man who delivered the golden rule? **Who is He to you?**

In the Gospel by Luke, in chapter 9, you have this fascinating conversation where Jesus puts this question before His disciples—and we pick up where we left off, at **verse 18**:

Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?”

Luke 9:18

Remember, the disciples have only recently returned from an impact trip abroad; they were sent out in pairs,

empowered by the Lord, to preach and heal and deliver the King's message that the Kingdom of God is just around the corner.

The disciples had been surrounded by people; they had heard all the speculations that were out there on the street.

Adapted from Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1* (Baker Academic, 1994), p. 840

And keep in mind, they themselves weren't fully aware of who Jesus was at this point; they are growing in their understanding in many ways, like you and I are getting to know Him better through His Word.

So, Jesus now asked them, "Who do all those people out there think I am?"

Verse 19:

And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen."

Luke 9:19

Matthew's Gospel account informs us that they also added Jeremiah the prophet to their short list.

Don't overlook the fact that the popular opinion on the street gives Jesus a high ranking—He's up there with **John the Baptist!** People were speculating that Jesus was the recently executed and now resurrected John the Baptizer, He's possibly coming back to take revenge on Herod and his wife for executing him.

Maybe John is back, and Jesus is going to let him have it.

But then others were saying He was **Elijah**, that great Jewish prophet who was expected by the nation Israel to be the forerunner of the Messiah.

Then again, some people were convinced that Jesus was **Jeremiah**, back from the dead.

The Jews of this day believed a legend that Jeremiah had hidden the Ark of the Covenant—that golden box from inside the Holy of Holies, representing the glory of God—in a secret cave somewhere near Jerusalem and that the cave would be discovered when Jeremiah rose from the dead. Jeremiah was going to revive the glory of David and King Solomon again.

Adapted from John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospels: Matthew* (Loizeaux Brothers, 1999), p. 347

Again, this is all ranking Jesus high on the list.

But isn't it interesting that they all had their own opinion? The crowd had their assumptions and conjectures and ideas and opinions about Jesus and all of them were absolutely wrong.

Nothing has changed to this day.

John Ryle wrote more than 125 years ago: "the world will speculate and talk and reason and invent theories to account for Christ. They satisfy themselves with all the gossip. Year rolls on after year and finds them in the same state—talking, criticizing, speculating, but never going any further; they hover like a

moth around Christianity, but they never settle down like a honey bee on its treasures.”

Adapted from J.C. Pyle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Luke* (Evangelical Press, or. 1879; reprint, 1985), p. 147

Why not? They're not truly interested in who Jesus is.

Would you notice here that Jesus doesn't spend one moment correcting any of these false speculations; He ignores all the opinions out there on the street.

But now Jesus changes the question into something intensely and unavoidably personal.

In verse 20:

Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Luke 9:20a

The word for **you** here is plural, meaning Jesus is asking all twelve of His disciples: “I know what the crowd is saying about me, but what do you men have to say?”

Let me tell you, the most important thing in life will never be what the crowd is saying about Jesus, it will be what *you* say about Jesus.

That answer will *direct every aspect of your life*, and at the end of your life it will determine your eternal life.

Well, Peter gets it right here, verse 20b:

And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”

Luke 9:20b

Peter's the spokesman again: “You are the Christ of God.”

What does that title mean?

The term “Christ” comes from the Greek noun *Christos*, which means, “anointed;” *Christos* translates the Hebrew word, *mashiach* (*musheek*), which we transliterate into Messiah.

Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 229

Both Christ and Messiah mean, literally, anointed one.

Fritz Rienecker/Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 165

So, Peter is effectively saying here, “Lord, people are saying a lot of things about you—good things and bad things; some people are ranking you pretty high on the list, and certainly with some you are in the gutter, but we don't believe any of those opinions; they're *all* wrong.”

We know ***You are the anointed Messiah from God Himself.***

Matthew's Gospel account gives us the fuller declaration from Peter in Matthew 16:16. Peter adds:

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Matthew 16:16b

You are one in essence, in nature, equal with eternal God.

John MacArthur, *Matthew 16:23* (Moody Bible Institute, 1988), p. 22

In other words, you are more than a resurrected prophet of old, you are more

than John and Elijah and Jeremiah; you are the anointed Messiah. More than that, you are God the Son.

What an incredible declaration of faith.

Now Jesus will respond in Matthew's Gospel account that Peter is the recipient of divinely inspired insight from God the Father.

Jesus essentially says, "Peter, you have just been given by my Father the truth of who I am."

But then—and rather shockingly to them—this revelation isn't followed up with Jesus saying, "Now let's go tell the world."

Back in Luke's account in chapter 9 and verse 21:

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."

Luke 9:21-22

Luke summarizes Jesus's conversation here in one sentence, but he loads the sentence with four verbs.

- a) **Suffer** many things.
- b) **Be rejected**. That is, by the elders and chief priests and scribes; this

is a reference to Israel's Supreme Court—the Sanhedrin.

- c) **Be killed**—put to death.
- d) **Be raised**—a reference to His resurrection from the dead.

In other words, Jesus now begins to reveal to them that He will wear a crown, but it won't be a crown of gold, it will be a crown of thorns.



Put yourself in Peter's shoes: if you had just been given power from Jesus to heal the sick, why would it be hard to believe Jesus would let Himself suffer and die?

Before He raises up a Kingdom, He must be raised from the dead.

And Jesus stuns them. He effectively tells them to keep all this under their hats for now. Why?

Because any proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah would have led the Jews to plan their next revolt against Rome and expect Jesus to become their revolutionary leader.

Let's overthrow Rome and bring in the Kingdom.

They don't understand that the Messiah's first coming will not lead to a coronation, but a crucifixion.

And the disciples don't fully understand this new revelation either. And we know that because Matthew's Gospel gives us the Peter's response.

Matthew writes this in chapter 16 again:

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hinderance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Matthew 16:21-23

One English translation reads, "You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, and not from God's."

In other words, Peter went from declaring the divine attribute of Jesus to echoing the deceptive agenda of Satan. Satan doesn't want Christ to fulfill His divine purpose of dying for our sins and rising again, victoriously.

Peter is attempting to redirect Jesus, which plays into the hands of the devil!

Now get this: if you put these accounts together, **in less than six verses** Peter goes from announcing who Jesus Christ is to missing entirely what Jesus Christ has come to do.

In six verses—in a matter of moments—Peter moves from insight to indiscretion.

Listen, if it's possible for Peter to lose his spiritual footing in less than six verses, how easy is it for us to lose ours?

When I dig into this scene, two words comes to mind that explain Peter—not excuse Peter, but these two words I believe explain what moved him from insight to indiscretion: from submission to correction.

The first word is:

Estimation

In other words:

We need a sanctified estimation of the person of Christ.

Again, Matthew records in chapter 16 and verse 22, "**Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him . . .**"

He began to rebuke Jesus! What exactly did that look like?

"Lord, could I see you after the Bible Study? Now listen Lord, this idea of being rejected and killed, that will never happen to you; and just remember, I get special

revelation from the Father; trust me, He won't have anything to do with you dying."

You see, part of Peter's problem was that He forgot Who he was talking to.

Only a few verses earlier, he had declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, which means he is now correcting the Son of God.

Can you imagine getting to the point where you correct God? You might be thinking, *I would never correct God, what do you mean?*

- *Lord, I wouldn't do it that way if I were you.*
- *Lord, you're overlooking some critical details, let me just remind you...*
- *Lord, what in the world are you doing with my life?*
- *Lord, your timing is lousy (we wouldn't say it that way on the church prayer list, but we're thinking it).*
- *Lord, you need a little redirection evidently.*

If Jesus Christ were to show up and ask you, "Who do you think I am?", I trust that all of you would be able to answer with theological conviction, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Peter did! You see, it's possible to know who God **is** and still struggle with what God **does**.

And Peter can't imagine that God the Father would ever allow this to happen to His Son.

Peter and the other disciples have yet to realize what King Nebuchadnezzar (the sinful king who was humbled by God during the time of Daniel the prophet) declared 600 years earlier:

For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

Daniel 4:34b-35

In other words, this sovereign Lord doesn't owe anybody an explanation:

- He is accountable to no one.
- He answers to no one.
- His ways are just too far beyond us.

The problem is, at this particular moment, Peter is attempting to straighten the Lord out. He's treating Jesus like one of the disciples.

His estimation of Jesus is far too low.

Beloved, any estimation of Jesus that diminishes His glory and dilutes His word and abandons His authority and doubts His wisdom is aligning with the agenda of Satan, who happens to hate Jesus more than we can imagine.

Let's not take the wrong side.

Now there's another word that I believe led Peter to this indiscretion.

It's the word:

Expectation

Believers need to surrender their expectations to the purposes of Christ.

This is part of Peter's hang-up.

Peter had expectations for the future. They didn't have anything to do with Jesus dying. When the Lord begins to reveal his expectations for the future, they didn't line up with Peter's and Peter rebuked Him.

So, what you have here is a battle of expectations.

"Lord, I wasn't expecting this to happen; Lord, I expected You to do this; Lord, I expected life to turn out differently; Lord, I didn't expect you to allow that."

You know what the Christian life is? It is living, **not** according to your own expectations; it is trusting Christ as we discover His expectations for our lives.

Think about it: Peter is expecting a kingdom; Jesus is expecting rejection.

Peter is expecting Judaism reformed; Jesus is expecting the end of Judaism and the creation of the church.

Peter is expecting to see more miracles; the Lord is expecting to see the serpent crushed and death defeated.

Peter's expectations about himself were wrong: he expected to remain faithful. There was no rooster in his expectations; there was no cross, no nails, no corpse, no sealed tomb!

God forbid that would ever happen!

The problem with *our* expectations is that they are usually too self-centered and too short-sighted and too small.



How can your view of Jesus be tarnished by your view of yourself and your expectations? Describe a time when God didn't meet your expectations of Him. How did you respond?

Peter can see fish dinners by the seashore; Jesus can see the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Peter can see houses filled with disciples one day; Jesus can see heaven filled with the redeemed one day.

What do you see?

Answer His question: "Who do you say that I am?"

What is your personal estimation of Jesus Christ? From all that you're learning as you grow in Christ, what do you know about Him?

And what are your expectations from Him?

Here's the good news: even when we get it all wrong, He's patient to teach us more.

Jesus didn't kick Peter out the group. He continued to teach Peter and Peter would spend a lifetime learning what we're all in the process of learning.

Peter records this experience as he writes now as an old man in 2 Peter, "**but grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**"

Keep learning all you can about Who He is! And as you get to know Him, learn to trust Him too. You can only see so far ahead, as Peter learned, and Christ is already there.

Peter writes, "**to Him belongs the glory, both now and to the day of eternity**" (2 Peter 3:18).

Jesus knows where He's going; He's in charge of eternity, and He's taking us there with Him.

This is a *sanctified estimation* of who He is.

This is a *surrendered expectation* to what He will do.

Have you ever thought about the fact that when that day comes at the end of human history, there will be a universe wide ranking of Jesus; the redeemed and the unredeemed will declare the same truth, but for the unredeemed who are judged, it will be too late.

Paul writes to the Philippian church of this future universal declaration that comes at the end of human history as we know it. Paul writes, "**Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.**"

Not tenth place; not third place, and not just among 100 influential people that have impressed the world.

He will hold the highest ranking of everything and everyone He created.

And our praise of Him and our worship of Him will last forever and ever throughout eternal glory.

Paul wrote of Christ to the Colossian believers that Jesus is before all things for He is preeminent!

You know what that means? That means Jesus Christ is *first*.

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