

# Great *Question*



Great leaders ask great questions. During His ministry on earth, Jesus asked about three times more questions than He answered. His questions still have the power to pull us out of our comfort, out of our overconfidence, out of our settledness in our world and into greater knowledge of His Kingdom. Jesus' questions can shake us up and help to reset our lives.

## GREAT QUESTION • Luke 9:18–27 • Tim McConnell • July 21, 2019

Faith is ultimately an individual affair. What do you believe? What's your opinion? Not the person beside you. Not the religious relative you've always wanted to please. Not your community or your family or your friends. You. What do you say? That's the great question. What about you? What do you say? My family and I were away at the beach for vacation with some friends, and my youngest son Liam was loving it. He spent all day in the water and would have never left, it seemed. So you say, if you spend any more time in the ocean you'll become a fish. But that's not so. You don't become a fish. You might become a prune but you don't become a fish. The environment doesn't always make the change. We are sitting here in church this morning. You may have heard this before, but sitting in church doesn't make you a Christian. You can sit in the garage, that doesn't make you a car. You can sit in the oven, that doesn't make you a biscuit. You can sit in the ocean, that doesn't make you a fish. You can sit here in church, but until you personally answer the question, it hardly matters. Faith in Christ isn't yours until it's yours. What do you say?

So, a lot of times I and the preaching team here spend energy railing against the rampant individualism of our age. God deals with us as a community. God deals with us as a people. That's what church is about. Most of the commands and directives of scripture are meant to be lived out as a community, not as individuals. But today I want to ask you to do the opposite. Focus on yourself as an individual. In fact, forget those around you or those whose eyes are always on you. What do you say to Jesus? Because until you have an answer to that question, all this stuff we do together will sit upside down in your life. Church, the Bible, prayer, religious service, morality ... if you are pursuing these things without an answer to the question, you will pursue them upside down. These will be activities you force yourself into, to possibly gain the love, or the power, of God in your life. But these practices are not things we do to gain the power of God; we can't behave our way into God's love (if I do enough of this or that, or stay away enough from this or that, or give away enough of this or that, then I will get God's power released in my life—no). If we answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" in the way Peter did, "You are the Christ," then we know Jesus. We have a personal relationship with Jesus. That relationship touches our hearts and starts an internal change in us. Then all these practices are overflows and outpourings of the love and power of God active within us, cooperation with God in us, not our efforts to gain, but our responses to God's love and grace. "Who do you say that I am?" asks

Jesus. Not only is it a great question, it is the most important question you will ever be asked. Your answer determines your eternity.

"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.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'God's Messiah'" (Luke 9:18–20). Who do people say Jesus is? What do they do with Jesus? Nice teacher. Religious specialist. Moral inspiration. Meme generator. Jesus says, "Cut the noise, I've shown you enough of Myself for you to form an opinion—who do you say that I am?" It's interesting what people out there think about Jesus. I spend a lot of time wondering that and exploring it myself. Who do people think Jesus is? A recent poll in the United Kingdom revealed that nearly half the population did not believe Jesus was a historical figure—he's a myth, a legend. How many in Colorado Springs think that way? But there's a time to talk about Jesus and there's a time to talk to Jesus. "Who do you say I am?" Jesus asked all of them. He asked the group. Only Peter found the courage to give voice to an answer: "God's Messiah." The Christ. The Savior. The Lord. That's right.

Now Jesus is going to tell us what it means. Jesus says, yes that's right. How does He confirm it? He confirms it by telling them to be silent about it in verse 21. We'll come back to that. So, "Yes, I'm God's Messiah, now let me tell you what that means." "And he said, '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'" (Luke 9:22). The Son of Man—that's a messianic title. Jesus is the Son of Man, Son of God. Jesus is the one uniting God and mankind, creating communion between us and God. But the Son of Man isn't who you thought, and to be the Son of Man isn't what you thought it would be. What is it? It's this: "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." Well, that's the gospel right there. That's the story of the amazing work of redemption. That's what Jesus did to save our souls. He came, He suffered and died for our sins, taking our rejection and guilt and burden on Himself, He went down into the grave, and then He rose again to life on the third day. Who is Jesus? This is Jesus. "Who am I?" says Jesus. "This is who I am," He tells His disciples. "You don't understand it just now; you haven't seen it

all just yet, but if you want to know who I am, this is it. I am the one come to die, I am the one sent by God, because "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). I am the Son of God, Son of Man, who came to rescue you from eternal death, pay for your sin and disobedience, and bring you eternal life. That's who I am." That's what it means to call Jesus "Messiah," the Christ.

How do I follow Him if I want? "Then he said to them all: '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'" (Luke 9:23–24). "If you truly know who I am, then you know what you must do." Once you come to terms with who Jesus is, you then have to come to terms with what that means for you. It means your life belongs to Him. It means laying down your life before Him. If this is truly God, if this is truly the one true God who made all things, gave me life, then sent His Son to die for me and gain my soul, then I belong to Him. That's it. That's all. The way of Christ is not the way of self-help. Self-help is no help at all. The way of Christ is self-sacrifice. Jesus says to His disciples, "my identity as Son of Man is a Messiah who suffers and dies," and they can't have had the foggiest idea what He is talking about. Then He tells them to take up their cross and lose their lives. Take up your cross daily. A cross was something you took up once. If you took up a cross, you were carrying it to your execution site. It was a one-way ticket. But Jesus says here, every day, on a daily basis, as a daily pattern, take up your cross. "Follow me. I died and yet I live. Die to yourself every day, each day. Why? Because it is in dying to yourself that you live to Me and find your true, eternal life." The way of Jesus is the way of self-sacrifice. My life in His hands. Then, only then, do I live to him and find my own true life. This is not what we are taught. We are taught self-agency, self-actualization. Jesus says the real you, the true you, your full potential is found with your life in His hands, not your own.

So to summarize, "Who am I?" Jesus says, "I am the Messiah. I am the Christ. But not as you thought. The Son of Man. I am that. And I am the one who suffers, who takes guilt not his own, who takes punishment not his own, who pays a penalty not his own, who dies a death not his own, all to set you free. I am the one who rises from the dead. I am the one who gives life, not takes life." "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?" (Luke 9:25). What good is it for you to get everything you want and lose your true self. "I am the one who hands

you your true life." And what else? "I am the one coming again to judge and rule over all things (in verse 26)." Jesus is coming again in glory. "Who am I? I am the Lord and my kingdom is coming." Jesus shows us very clearly just who He is.

Last verse in the passage, look at verses 26–27: "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:26–27). Now that's a mysterious verse, hard to understand. Some think He was talking about the Kingdom we catch glimpses of in life, when we see things as God sees them and wants them. Some think He was talking about the crucifixion and resurrection He has just mentioned, or the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost shortly thereafter when Kingdom power poured out. Or maybe He was talking about the transfiguration—the next thing that happens is Peter, James and John are pulled aside to see Jesus in manifest, divine glory. Who knows? But we know this. Jesus is the Christ, He is the Savior who died and rose again, and He is the Lord whose Kingdom is on the way. "Who am I? That's who I am," says Jesus. What do you say? Faith in Christ isn't yours until it's yours.

People say all kinds of things about who Jesus was. I still come down with the Oxford professor C. S. Lewis who said there are really only three options when dealing with Jesus. People want to accept Jesus as a good moral teacher and no more, but listen to what Jesus said about Himself. Would a good teacher claim to be what Jesus claims to be? Would a good teacher demand life-devotion and a daily cross? Lewis said, really, at the base of it Jesus was either a liar, or a lunatic, or the Lord. Here's how he put it: "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 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." What do you say? "Who do you say that I am?" Great question. Peter said he was God's Messiah.

Now go back to verse 21. Jesus verifies Peter's claim in an odd way: "Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone" (Luke 9:21). We read that and think, "Oh good. I'm off the hook! I really didn't want to say anything anyway." That's not what Jesus meant. They were not to share it ... yet. It wasn't time to share it yet. For one thing, most of it hadn't happened yet. Jesus hadn't yet died, and been buried and rose again. Jesus hadn't yet

gone up to heaven and poured out His Holy Spirit on them. They had no gospel to share and no power by which to share it. But now, Jesus has told all of us, we are to share it. We are to put it to our lips. We are to say it out loud. Who is Jesus? What do you say?

I close with three questions. What do you say to God, to yourself and to others? What do you say to God? We have to answer the question God has posed. Who am I? Who do you say that I am? What do you say to Jesus? For each of us the time comes when it stops being about the faith of others and we must, each of us, stand on the courage of our own convictions. You kids in the room, teenagers, youth, maybe you are at that point today. You know, this isn't about what Mom believes. This isn't about what Dad taught. What do you believe? What do you say to Jesus? It's not about what your parents believe, or what your wife believes, or what your grandmother always taught you, friends. You. Faith in Christ isn't yours until it's yours. Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" Well, answer. You answer. "Jesus, I think you are \_\_\_\_." What do you say to God?

What do you say to yourself? If Jesus is the Lord, that means your life is His. Do you live that way? Who do you say Jesus is to yourself? Finally, what do you say to others? The world doesn't know Jesus. If you, by His grace, have come to know Him, what kind of love keeps Jesus a secret? What kind of love leaves others in confusion about who He is? What do you say to God, to self, to others? When is the last time the name "Jesus" passed your lips somewhere other than church? We are called to make an answer, and to help others to do the same.

I can't tell you how many times I've had the conversation, "Pastor Tim, I sat in church for 10 years, 20 years, 40 years and it wasn't until this week I finally saw it. I finally saw who Jesus is. I finally found and began a personal relationship with Him." Faith in Christ isn't yours until it's yours. Maybe you have been sitting in church for years, and maybe that's where you need to be today—you're on a journey and you're exploring and you're not ready to make your answer. I want to affirm that. You're in the right place and you're on the right journey. Stick with it! But maybe today is the day for you to respond, not just to a great question—to the greatest question, the most important question you will ever be asked, the question to determine your destiny. "Who do you say I am?" What do you say?

## STUDY GUIDE

### GREAT QUESTION • "What Do You Say?"

Luke 9:18–27

#### **UP:** Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Luke 9:18–27.

- 1) Reread verses 18–19. This is what the people at that time thought about Jesus. What does our society say about Jesus? How is Jesus talked about in the media, public spaces, etc.?
- 2) How does this align with, or run contrary to, your understanding of who Jesus is?
- 3) Reread verses 20–22. The term Messiah means "anointed one" or God's chosen one. For the Jews, this term referred to a royal figure who would play a crucial role in the final days. If you were one of the disciples listening to Jesus respond to Peter, what would be going through your mind?
- 4) Reread verses 23–24. What does it mean to "take up one's cross daily?"
- 5) These verses are a somewhat confusing twist on common logic. How does losing one's life for Jesus ultimately result in "saving it?"
- 6) How does this passage challenge you to grow in your knowledge of Christ's Kingdom?

#### **OUT:** Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Reread verse 20. Who do you say Jesus is? If you agree with Peter that Jesus is God's anointed one, how should this influence the way you interact with the people around you, your co-workers, neighbors, family, etc.?

#### **IN:** Connect with Each Other

Summer is already starting to wind down as the school year starts up in just a few weeks. Take a few minutes to pray for families in our church who are gearing up for what is often a stressful season. Pray that they would be encouraged and know God's peace in these months.