

Luke 30 – The Identity of Jesus

Everyone seems to have an opinion about who Jesus was. Some say that He was just a good teacher who was misunderstood. Some say He was merely a “community organizer.” Some say He never intended to start a church or a new movement, just that He wanted to reform the Jewish faith. Others say that Jesus was a rebel who deserved to be put to death by the Romans. Still others believe what Jesus said about Himself. There may be some listening to my voice this morning who are asking, “Why does it matter what I think about Jesus?” Friend, if we were talking about anyone else who has ever lived, I could agree with you. Two people can disagree about Napoleon Bonaparte or Julius Caesar, and it makes no difference. You and I can even disagree on who should be the next president, or who has been the best president ever. But what you think about Jesus is the most important decision you could make.

Jesus asked His disciples about who men thought He was in Luke 9. He was not asking about public opinion, since that was of little consequence to Jesus. More than anything He was asking His disciples who they believed that He was. Luke 9:18-21 says “And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am? They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God. And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing.” First notice that Jesus was alone praying. Even though Jesus is God, as a human being, He thrived on the relationship between He and His Father. Many times throughout the Gospels we find Jesus praying. One prayer in particular, found in John 17 gives us a glimpse into the relationship between Jesus and God.

He says in verse 2 of John 17 that God is the One who gave Him His power. Now, of course, Jesus as God has all the power of God, but He laid it aside while He was in human form on the earth. Philippians 2:5-8 says “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” That Jesus has all the power of God is in no dispute. Colossians 1:16 says “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.” But while Jesus walked this earth, He allowed Himself to derive His power from God alone.

Jesus ends His prayer and asks the disciples an interesting question. He asks: “Whom say the people that I am?” Remember that the disciples had been sent out all over the countryside preaching the kingdom, and they had no doubt heard from others what the general consensus was about Jesus. There was no form of media back in this day, and so one had to get news by way of mouth and house to house. Jesus wanted to know from these disciples what they had been hearing about Him. Jesus had been sent to fulfill the mission of God. It was important that people believe certain specific things about Him, and so He wanted to know that people were believing the right things about Him. The disciples give Him several answers that they found.

One of the answers they provide Jesus is that He was John the Baptist. John the Baptist had been killed by King Herod already, and some said that John had risen from the dead and was preaching in the countryside. For sure, Jesus and John’s message were very similar. They both preached the gospel of the kingdom. They both preached that the kingdom was coming soon. Many scholars believe that both John and Jesus were part of a community called the Essenes, and so would have had similar lifestyles. But for them to believe that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead is ludicrous. For one reason, Jesus and John had been contemporaries. Luke 3 tells us that John baptized Jesus. Luke 7 tells us that while John was in prison, he sent a message to Jesus. Furthermore, Luke 1 tells us that Jesus was John’s cousin.

The second reason it was ridiculous for people to assume that Jesus was really John the Baptist is that John had pointed to Jesus in His ministry. He had said in John 1:29: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin

of the world.” He said in John 3:30: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” John constantly pointed to Jesus and tried to take the focus off of Himself. To assume that they were one and the same was evidence that they hadn’t really been listening to John’s message. The third reason that this is was a absurd assumption is that if someone ever died and came back to life, they always came back as themselves, not as someone else. When Jesus raised Lazarus in John 11, he arose as Lazarus. He looked, felt, and sounded like Lazarus to the point where the Jewish authorities sought to put him to death because he was such a convincing piece of evidence for the power of Jesus. If it were true that when you came back to life you looked like someone else, the Pharisees could have claimed that Jesus had pulled a hoax on the people, making someone else dress up in grave clothes.

Also, the Bible teaches that when we are resurrected, we are given new, glorified bodies that are unlike the bodies we have on the earth. 1 Corinthians 15:53-54 says “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” 2 Corinthians 5:2 says “For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.” Jesus, after He died on the cross, appeared to His disciples and they knew who He was. On a few occasions, it took a little while for them to recognize Him, because God had held their eyes from seeing who He really was. But they knew that He looked like Jesus, not someone else.

Others said that Jesus was really Elias, which was the Old Testament form of the name Elijah. Elijah was the quintessential prophet of Old Testament times. He was the prophet of fire and passion, and many people mistook any passionate man as a resurrection of Elijah the prophet. This would be harder to prove, since Elijah lived several hundred years before Jesus. Why did people think that Jesus was Elijah, and not some other Old Testament prophet? The last prophet to prophecy in the Old Testament was Malachi. Though his book appears last in our Old Testament, it wasn’t the last in the Jewish Bible. But Malachi was recognized as the last prophet before the four hundred years known as “the Silent Years.” The very last verses of Malachi say this: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

God promised that Elijah would come back to the earth before the Day of the Lord. That phrase “the day of the Lord” means many different things, but it includes the idea that the Messiah was coming someday. Before that happened, said Malachi, Elijah the old prophet would come. Most people didn’t understand it, but expected it anyway. Matthew 17:10-13 gives us a clue of both what people in Jesus’ day thought and what the answer is. It says: “And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.”

John the Baptist, who dressed, lived, and spoke like Elijah was the fulfillment of this prophecy. He was Elijah come in the flesh. Many did not understand this and thought that perhaps Jesus was Elijah. Finally, many people thought that Jesus was “one of the old prophets.” The people don’t know which of the old prophets, but they believe that Jesus is one of them. Perhaps they thought He was Isaiah, with his fiery message to the Gentile nations. Perhaps He was Ezekiel, with the promise that the dry bones of Israel would rise and walk again. Perhaps they thought He was the prophet Nathan, there to rebuke the king and guide the kingdom of Israel back to its moral bearings. For whatever reason, the people could not take Jesus at face value, but tried their best to put Him in one of the categories they’d already set up.

Once Jesus found out who the population in general thought He was, He asked the disciples who they thought He was. Peter, the spokesperson, speaks up, and Luke 9:20 gives us his answer: “The Christ of God.” People hear the name “Jesus Christ” and they assume that Christ was Jesus’ last name. This is not the idea. The word “Christ” means “Promised One,” and is a synonym for “Messiah.” The Messiah was the One that God had

promised throughout human history. Let me review briefly what the Bible had to say about this “Promised One.”

In Genesis 3, we read about how Adam and Eve sinned, plunging the entire human race into enmity with God. God judges them and metes out the punishment, but He offers them hope in Genesis 3:15, which says: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” This is an allusion to God sending a human who would crush the power of Satan, though He Himself would be bruised. This would then redeem mankind from the sin curse they had been placed under by their own sinful actions there in the garden.

God promised at the end of Genesis through Jacob that He would send His Promised One through the tribe of Judah. He says in Genesis 49:10 “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” That word “Shiloh” is the word “peaceful” and refers to the One who would both bring peace to God’s people and bring peace between God and man. This prophecy was made around the year 2000 BC, and built on what the people of the day already knew about what God was doing. It was evident that they knew something about the Messiah because Job said this in Job 19:25 “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.” Scholars believe that Job was written before Moses ever came on the scene.

Moses wrote about Jesus as well in Deuteronomy 18:15, where it says: “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.” Though they didn’t know much about who the Messiah would be, they knew He would be a prophet from Israel who would teach them about God. The prophecy continued further in the book of Isaiah, who prophesied the most about Jesus. Let us take a few minutes to look at the book of Isaiah and all that he and the other prophets said about Jesus.

Isaiah 7:14 says “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” That verse says that the Messiah, called Immanuel, would be born of a virgin. This, of course, came true in Matthew 1, when Jesus was born. Isaiah 11:1-2 says “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.” God says that the Promised One would come, not only from the tribe of Judah, but specifically from David’s line. He says in Micah 5:2 where He would be born: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”

All of these verses talk about the Promised Messiah and what the people could expect. These things were understood, because when Matthew says that wise men came, the people expected that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Throughout Jesus’ life, the people reminded Him of the messianic expectations that were there, from what God had said. Peter and the disciples simply made the next logical step: Jesus was the One who fulfilled all of these prophecies and was the Promised One. He was the Christ, the one that they had been waiting for since the first man.

But there were other expectations that were wrapped up in the Messiah. Everyone expected that He would come to free them from their oppressors. They wanted the Roman rule over Israel to cease so that they could worship God without fear and obey His laws. They were hoping for all the good things about the Messiah, but weren’t ready for what God had promised the Messiah would really do. You see, God had given more prophecies about the Messiah besides the ones that said things like: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice

from henceforth even for ever.” God had also talked about the fact that the Messiah would have to die. Jesus addresses these prophecies in the next few verses.

Luke 9:21-22 says “And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.” Jesus, upon hearing that the disciples have the right idea of Jesus, tells them not to tell anyone. This is most likely for three reasons. The first reason is that this was not the message right now. Remember, Jesus had sent his Twelve around the countryside to preach the news of the kingdom, which was the offer of the kingdom now. There were spiritual requirements for this kingdom, and the people had to meet them before it would come. To announce that Jesus was the Messiah would cause people to want the kingdom without meeting the requirements, which is human nature.

The second reason is that these disciples were not yet empowered with God’s power. Jesus did eventually want the disciples to tell others about Him, but not yet. He will later say in Acts 1:8: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” The implication is that the disciples would not be effective in their message until God sent His Holy Spirit, and this wouldn’t happen until Jesus was gone, according to John 16:7.

The final reason that Jesus did not want the disciples to tell anyone that He was the Messiah at this point was it was the Plan of God for Jesus to go to the cross and suffer. The rest of Isaiah’s prophecy gives a different viewpoint of the Messiah. It says in Isaiah 53:3-5 “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” This is a prophecy that Jesus would die on the cross, but more importantly, it was that the Messiah would die on the cross for sins. It says, “He was bruised for our iniquities.”

Isaiah was not the only one to prophecy about Jesus’ death. Psalm 22:16 says “For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.” Zechariah 12:10 says “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.” Zechariah 13:6 says “And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.” These Scriptures, written hundreds of years before Jesus was born, were the markers God was using to authenticate the fact that Jesus was who He said He was.

It was in the Plan of God for Jesus to be crucified. This is exactly what Peter said after Jesus had risen and was ascended in Act 2:23, where it says, “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” Later in this same book, Jesus says that His death was pre-ordained. He says in Luke 22:22: “The Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!” Without the death on the cross, Jesus’ coming to earth would have been futile. God could have sent many good teachers, but only one perfect, sinless Son of God. If the disciples would have proclaimed Jesus Messiah, potentially He would never have died at the hands of the Jews and Romans. Jesus mentions this in verse 22.

You see, what you believe about Jesus is very important. God says in John 3:36 “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” God says that in life there are only two options. You can either believe in Jesus or not. If you choose to believe

Jesus died for you, what will happen? That verse says that you will see life. Not just life, but everlasting life. Therefore, it is imperative that you believe in Jesus. What must you believe about Him? Is it sufficient to believe that he existed? No, Jesus was a historical figure. Lots of people, including the ones who killed Him, believed that Jesus existed. Must you believe that Jesus was a good man? Well, Jesus was a good man, but again, many believed that about Him. They believed that Jesus was good, but that wasn't good enough.

Here is what God says in 1 John 4:15: "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." First, you must believe that Jesus was no mere human, but the very Son of God. Only God in human flesh could pay for your sins, since your sins are an eternal offense to God. Only God in human flesh could be sinless enough to be able to pay your debt. A mere sinless human could only pay for his own sins. Only God could live a perfect life on the Earth so that He could pay the price you and I deserve. Believing that Jesus is the Son of God is essential to salvation. Acts 8:36-37 tells the story of a new convert. It says: "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Believing that Jesus is God is essential.

Second, you must believe that in dying, Jesus took your sin upon Him. Romans 10:9-10 says "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Jesus died on the cross and rose again three days later. When He died, He died for your sins. 1 Peter 3:18 says "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." Jesus, being innocent, died for you, who were guilty.

These are the essentials of the Christian faith. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 says "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." These are what must one believe in order to be a Christian, and in order to enjoy everlasting life in heaven.

"But," you may ask, "what if I just don't believe anything? What if I just remain neutral?" Friend, the Bible does not allow for any third option. The only two are believing or not believing. If I offered you a gift, you would have two choices: receive it or reject it. If you remain neutral, you have in essence rejected it. Here is what the Bible says regarding this: John 3:18 says: "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." With God, it is either believing or not believing. If you have never trusted Christ as Saviour, then you are, in the words of the Bible, "condemned already." There is no third option.

There is no third option after you die, either. Here is what Romans 6:23 says: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." There are two options there: eternal death and eternal life. What will it be for you this morning? Friend, if you want eternal life, then you must trust Jesus as your personal Saviour. Believe that He died for your sins. If you will transfer your trust from yourself to Him, He will save you and you will be assured a home in heaven. If you will do nothing, then the only expectation you can have is eternal punishment in the lake of fire. The choice is yours.

If you trust Jesus as Saviour, there are other things you ought to know about the Christian life, and Jesus explains these things in the next few verses here in Luke 9. He says in Luke 9:23-26: "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be

ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.”

Jesus says that before you become a Christian, you must understand that God has expectations for you. He does not intend for you to become a Christian simply to go to heaven when you die. God’s intent is for you to be someone who follows Him. Following him does not make you a Christian, but a Christian is known for following Jesus. Ephesians 2:8-9 says “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” Good works do not save you, but the next verse says this: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” God created you in Christ Jesus in order to do good works.

Jesus says in this passage that someone who believe in Him will be willing to take up their cross and follow Him. They will be willing to give up their lives for Jesus. That does not mean that you must die for Him, but that He must have every part of your life now. Jesus doesn’t want you to die for Him as much as He wants you to live for Him. You ought to be a testimony to what He has done in your life. You ought to tell others of how He saved you, if you are a born-again Christian. If you are not, will you trust Jesus as your Saviour this morning? If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact us. You can do so in the following ways:

You can stop by our church building, which is located at 909 W. 8th St., by the softball diamonds. You can call us at 732-3321. You can E-mail us at church@fbcpr.org. That’s CHURCH at F B C P R dot O R G. Or you can log on to our website, which is www.fbcpr.org. If you would like to have a copy of this broadcast, either in audio or transcript form, you can find it on our website tomorrow. If you enjoy this program, let us know by contacting our church. Please join us this morning at 10:30 for our worship service. Please join us again next week for the Way of Truth Radio Broadcast, brought to you by the First Baptist Church of Park Rapids, MN.