



-- Read Luke 9:18-27

-- Pray

Most of what we have been reading in the past few chapters of Luke's Gospel—indeed, most of what we have read and examined in all of the book of Luke up unto this point—all aims at and leads up to our verses for this morning. In particular, chapter eight begins with Jesus asking the question, “Are you listening?” and then, through the events that the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record in just the order he recorded them, chapters eight and nine go on to reveal to us who Christ is. And so the question remains, “Have you been listening?”

First, in verses 22-25, we discovered that Jesus Christ has complete command over all things natural—that is over the entire universe. In the next section of chapter 8, verses 26-38, we became witnesses of our Lord's absolute authority over all things supernatural. And in verses 40-56, we saw that Jesus Christ has the ability not only to heal, but He has perfect power to rescue us from all perils, even the grave. Finally, over the past two weeks, we have learned that Jesus Christ is God's permanent provision for all that we need most. In other words, the first 17 verses of chapter nine emphasize strongly that for all that God asks, He gives all that Christ is, and that's more than enough.

Throughout these revelations about Jesus Christ, one critically important question is posed on two different occasions by two vastly different sources. The

first comes in 8:25 when, after watching Jesus speak perfect peace to a raging storm at sea, the disciples marvel “*Who is this man, that even the winds and waves obey him?*” The second comes in 9:9 when, after receiving news of the disciples’ powerful preaching about Jesus, a perplexed Herod asks, “*Who...is this I hear such things about?*” Together, both inquiries pose the question, “Who is this Jesus?”

This was the paramount question of the day. It was the question that perplexed the minds of the religious and government rulers who felt their dominion suddenly slipping away. It was the question on the lips of enormous crowds that recklessly flocked to desolate places simply to catch a glimpse of this Man who possessed such tremendous power and who spoke with such impeccable wisdom. It was the question that occupied the days and the nights and the duties of the disciples.

And—please hear this—it remains the quintessential question of our time as well. Indeed, until Christ returns and removes all speculation, it will always remain the most important of all important questions. It will forever be both the cornerstone of salvation and the rock that makes men fall. It is the key question life, and it asked most powerfully by Jesus Christ Himself in verse 20, where He asks, “*But what about you? Who do you say I am?*”

In posing this—the ultimate question of life—our Lord presents us with a choice: Will we choose the crowd, or will we choose the cross? And that question leads us to our Big Idea for this morning, which is this: Authentic Christian living always chooses the cross over the crowd.

With that choice in mind, please look with me now at verse 18, where it seems that Jesus and His disciples have finally found some solace from the crowds. And in this private moment, Jesus takes the initiative to bring all that He had been revealing to a head with a couple of questions directed at His disciples. The first is found at the end of verse 18, where He asks them, “*Who do the crowds say I am?*” And so the choice commences. What would the disciples say? Would they choose the crowd?

Clearly, they seem quite fascinated by this question. Notice who replies in verse 19: It says, “They replied.” “*They* replied.” Thus, it appears that most, if not all, of the disciples had something to say in response to this question. In fact, it

seems as though a rather robust discussion was about to erupt because of it. Can't you just hear their conversation that is summarized in verse 19?

One disciple would begin, "Oh boy, is it ever interesting, Lord! Some believe that you are John the Baptist...like his spirit entered into you when he died or something like that!" And then another would pick up the conversation, exclaiming, "Yeah, and others are quoting the prophet Malachi and saying that you are Elijah, and that you have returned to announce the great and dreadful day of the Lord!" Still a third disciple would chime in, insisting, "Many people are also asserting that you are one of the great prophets of old, such as Jeremiah or even Moses, and that you have come back to life!" And on the conversation would go, filled with excitement and wonder, flooded with fascinating speculations and arguments.

But we see right away that Jesus is not very interested in their conjecture. Rather, what He really cares about is their convictions. He didn't really want to hear their guesses; He wanted to hear the Gospel. Thus, he squelches their speculations by asking the quintessential question at hand. In verse 20, He looks directly at them and inquires, "*But what about you? Who do you say I am?*"

It seems from the text that, at this very point, the mood of the conversation radically changes. In fact, it seems as though the room became instantly silent. Gone were the vibrantly voiced speculations, and in their place came a grueling gut check. Whereas the previous question was interesting, this one was intense. Whereas the first question was provocative, this question was personal...very personal. And, whereas *many* of the disciples gave a response to the first inquiry, notice how many respond to this much more piercing question... One... Only one. It was Peter—the impetuous disciple, who never failed to wear his emotions on His sleeve. Peter alone gave a response to this critical question.

The situation is not much different today, is it? That is, even today people are all too pleased to entertain speculations about who Jesus Christ is. For example, the History Channel often gets big ratings when it unveils some complete nonsense about what they call "the Historical Jesus." Similarly, you will recall that *National Geographic* dominated the newsstands when it fabricated a controversy through an eg mistranslation of the Gospel of Judas. And *The DaVinci Code* became a

phenomenal bestseller largely because of its outrageously false assertions about our Lord.

The world, you see, is all too happy with mere conjecture about Christ. It will gladly speculate and postulate about Jesus—that is, so long as that speculation avoids and concrete convictions about Christ. In the same way, many of us are satisfied to listen to the preacher and even to sit through Sunday school. Yet, when it comes to giving Jesus complete lordship over our lives, we secretly sit among the speculators, and we cower from true conviction beneath the cover of conjecture.

But not Peter. No, Peter had listened to our Lord's wisdom... he had remembered His miracles... and because he had pondered Jesus' power, He was, therefore, ready and able to respond. In verse 20, we hear Peter's confession of faith, and in it we witness the culmination of the first eight-and-a-half chapters of Luke's narrative. In reply to this enduring inquiry of Christ, in which our Lord asks, "*But what about you, who do you say that I am,*" Peter declares, "*The Christ of God.*"

Peter recognized who Jesus really was, and he declared it with confidence. Yet, although Peter knew who Christ was, he did not yet understand all that Christ had come to do, nor did he understand all that Christ would ask of His disciples. We must recall, at this point, that Peter, like most every Jewish boy, had grown up amid the belief that the Messiah would be a conquering king who would lead Israel military and political dominion. Thus, his heart may very well have been blazing with a conqueror's excitement when He made his declaration.

Therefore, in verse 22, we hear the first of three Passion predictions that are recorded in Luke's Gospel. In light of Peter's true declaration about the identity of Jesus, and in light of the general misunderstanding among the Jews as to what the Messiah would be, Jesus was now ready to teach His disciples that, as God's Anointed One, He had come to die upon a cross. He was ready to take their thoughts about Himself and about God's purposes and turn them upside down. And, as we will discover as we progress through Luke's Gospel, that is exactly what He sets forth to do.

Through Peter's declaration, the disciples had discovered who Jesus was. Now, Jesus sets forth to reveal to them what that discovery really means. They had seen His power, now He would begin to describe to them His Passion. And as He does, He presents to them a choice, and the choice He set before His disciples on that day remains the very same choice that is set before you and me on this very day. And that indispensable decision is this: Will we choose the crowd or the cross?

-- Video – The Crowd or the Cross

This indispensable decision is written all throughout our text for today, isn't it? It begins with the two key questions of Christ in verses 18-20, in which Jesus first inquires about what the crowds are saying about Him, and then He makes the matter as personal as possible. Why? Because when the crowd gives conjecture, Jesus demands conviction. When the world says, "Deflect the issue," the cross says, "Decide." Whereas the crowd says "Change the subject," the cross says "Change the sinner."

What about us, then? What will we do? Will we entertain the speculations of the crowd or will we enter into the special invitation of the cross?

This key question continues in verse 22, where Jesus says, "*The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*" You see, whereas the crowd was expecting a mighty man of the military, God sent a Suffering Servant, and whereas it imagined the Messiah would be a royal "wrecking ball" of sorts, God sent His Son as a Sacrificial Lamb, born in a manger and hung on a tree. Thus, though the crowd was pining for personal glory, God sent them perfect grace... though it aspired for money and fame, Christ offered mercy and forgiveness... and though the crowd wanted the grandeur of a conquering king, the cross revealed the glory of a crucified Christ.

So, then, the question once again comes around to us. What shall we choose? Will we chase a conqueror's glory that will never endure, or embrace a Savior's mercy that the cross of Christ made sure? What will it be... the crowd or the cross?

Yet, this crucial question carries on in our text. In verses 23-25, Jesus said to all His disciples: *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”* Whereas the crowd says “Take it easy,” Jesus says, “Take up your cross.” When the crowd shouts “Live it up!” the cross retorts, “Live it out.” Although the crowd may tell us to “Supply yourself and serve yourself,” the cross tells us to “Deny yourself and serve your Savior.” And when the crowd cries “Save yourself,” the cross replies “Lose your life for the sake of Him who gave His life for you.”

And so the choice is clear. There is the road of self, and there is the road of service. Will we choose the life of the crowd that leads to death, or the death of Christ that leads to life? So which will it be for you and me? Are we willing to forsake the apparent comfort of the crowds and embrace the call of Christ that we see in the cross?

Yet our question continues. In verse 26, Jesus says, *“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”* Here we see that, while the crowd says “Keep your Jesus to yourself, the cross compels us to testify to His great name and the matchless gift of His grace.” Whereas the crowd says “Be respected by the crowd,” the cross says, “Be rejected for the sake of Christ.” Whereas the crowd says, “Don’t take a chance,” the cross says, “Don’t be ashamed.” Therefore, will you and I choose the fame of this world or the shame of the cross?

The crowd or the cross... Which one will we choose this morning? To which path will we devote our time, our talents, our treasures, and testimony? Which one will shape the course of our lives? In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus warns, *“Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”* Will we enter through the narrow gate that continues to the cross, or through the wide gate that calls to the crowds? Are we ready to acknowledge that authentic Christian living always chooses the cross over the crowd?

Let us close, then, with one final question of application. Please consider this question as carefully as the Spirit allows this morning. Here it is: In the truest part of your heart of hearts—in the deepest recesses of your spirit—who do *you* say Jesus Christ is? Please know this: No matter what you may do or where you may go, I can guarantee you that you will never, ever, in all your life, be asked a more important question than this: Who do *you* say Jesus Christ is?

Has this question captivated your heart this morning? I earnestly hope and pray that it has, because far too many of us are far too happy to merely hear what other people believe about Jesus. Many will gladly come and listen to the lessons and even ponder the preaching, and then go home largely unaffected. But, that misses the point entirely, doesn't it? I earnestly pray that all of us realize this morning that this type of religion is not at all what Christ desires of us.

Please hear this: As Jesus comes to each and every one of us here today, He is not asking, "Can you tell me what *others* have said and written or said about me?" On the contrary, He comes asking, "Who do *you* say that I am?" In the same way, the Apostle Paul did not say, "I know *what* I have believed." Rather, he declares, "I know *whom* I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." (2 Timothy 1:12). Authentic Christian living, you see, does not mean simply making a *profession*; it means knowing a *Person*. // It does not involve merely reciting a *creed*; it involves taking up a *cross*.

In other words, true Christian belief cannot exist somewhere out there. To be authentic, it must be alive in here... in our hearts. It cannot be a mere religious exercise; it must be a real relationship with the living Lord. It is a continuous, conscious connection with Jesus Christ, who gave His life on the cross so that we might live. He must be the core reality of our lives.

All that we have studied in the Gospel of Luke has pointed forward to Peter's confession of Christ and His revelation of the cross that we have examined this morning. With that in mind, let me ask you: Does your whole life point to it as well? The choice is down to you today, and there remain just two options. What will it be? What will you choose? Will you live for the crowd, or will you live for the cross?

