



10.5.25...Who Do You Say That I Am? | Luke 9:18-27

Every once in a while, a question comes along that changes everything.

Not just a question about facts or opinions, as in, “Do you like Carson Wentz for our Viking’s QB or should JJ MacCarthy come back in? Is this really just about his high ankle sprain?”

But the kind of question that touches your very identity—what you believe, how you live, and who you’re becoming.

I have had to answer questions like, “What did I want to do to support myself?”

Others of us have heard, “Will you marry me?” Or, “Should we have kids or get a dog?”

Important questions that changing the direction we head in life, shaping us and forming us at our core.

Jesus asked one of those kinds of questions.

Today we begin a new sermon series entitled, Questions Jesus Asked written by Magrey Devega, grateful for his book as a resource for this coming month.

Back to Jesus’ question...

It’s found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Each gospel writer presents the question as a turning point in the life of Jesus. After Peter answers the question, Jesus and the disciples then head into the final stretch of Jesus’ ministry...Passover in Jerusalem and the cross.

The question is this: “Who do you say that I am?”

Matthew and Mark tell us Jesus asked this question near the bustling town of Caesarea Philippi. It was busy, noisy, and crowded. Jesus had just fed thousands, sparred with Pharisees, and healed the blind. Life was buzzing with activity.

Luke tells it quite differently. Jesus was in a small rural fishing village, praying in private, alone. The setting was quiet, reflective, even intimate.

Two very different contexts—busyness in Matthew and Mark, stillness in Luke. But the same question.

Isn't that true of life? Sometimes the big questions come in the chaos—amid deadlines, spinning plates, and the noise of competing voices. Is this all worth it? Who should I listen to?

Other times the big questions come in the stillness—when sleep won't come, when we're left alone with our thoughts. What's the meaning of it all? Where is God? Who am I?

Whether in busyness or in stillness, the question remains:

“Who do you say that I am?”

In verse 18 Jesus began gently, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” The disciples rattled off the latest poll numbers. “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, others one of the prophets come back to life.” Reasonable answers.

When something new comes along, we often compare it to what we already know making it easier for us to get our minds wrapped around it. When astronauts first saw the Earth from space, they called it the “big blue marble.” When the internet was new, we called it the “information superhighway.”

So, when people saw Jesus, they reached for familiar categories: John the Baptist—like him, Jesus called people to repentance. Elijah—like him, Jesus challenged the powerful and lifted up the poor.

All true. But not the whole truth. Jesus was more than all of that.

Then came the real question: “But what about you? Who do YOU say that I am?”

Peter stepped forward and declared in Luke, “God's Messiah” and in Matthew 16:16, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

That word Christ comes from the Greek Christos; the Hebrew equivalent is Messiah. Both mean “Anointed One.” In Israel's history, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed. But the Anointed One was the figure God would send to bring God's kingdom, to set things right.

Peter declared: “That's you, Jesus. The One we've been waiting for.” That was the correct answer. Jesus almost seems stunned when he replies to Peter in Matthew 16:17, “...this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father.”

It was also true. But, again, it was also incomplete.

Notice what Jesus does next. He doesn't pat Peter on the back and say, “Well done! You nailed it.”

Instead in verse 21, this is so weird...Jesus “strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone.”

And continued with this strange comment, “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.”

In other words: Yes, I am the Messiah. But not the kind of Messiah you’re expecting. I was sent from God and I am “God With You”. But not a conquering hero, not a political liberator. I’m going to suffer, die, and rise again.

And then Jesus goes further in verses 23 and 24: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”

The right textbook or Sunday School answer isn’t enough. The real test is whether we let that answer change our daily lives, allowing this truth to become deeply ingrained and automatic.

The author of the book, *Questions Jesus Asked*, tells of a time when his daughter Grace received her learner’s permit. She had studied the manual, aced the test, smiled for the picture—she had all the right answers.

But knowing the answers in the book...even this one (hold up your Bible) isn’t the same as knowing how to drive a car; isn’t the same as knowing how to apply truth to how we live.

On her first day behind the wheel, she did great—smooth turns, good awareness. After about 90 minutes I said let’s head home. But she wanted to try parking one more time.

She pulled into a space perfectly—until, just for a second, she confused the brake with the gas. She floored it, jumped the curb, and slammed into a light post.

Nobody was hurt. But I calmly said, “I’ll drive us home now.”

Grace learned that day that passing the test wasn’t enough. Driving takes daily attention, focus, and practice.

Faith is like that. Saying “Jesus is the Christ” once isn’t enough. The question must be answered in light of, “If anyone wants to follow me, they must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow me.”

John Wesley understood how to answer this question. When he invited people to renew their covenant with God every year on New Year’s Eve, one of his steps was: “Resolve, in God’s strength, never to go back.”

That word resolve comes from the Latin root meaning “to loosen.” To resolve to follow Christ means loosening your grip on anything pulling you back into sin, dismantling anything that distracts from Jesus, dissolving every tie that keeps you from full devotion.

Think of a long friendship or marriage. Early on, everything feels new—you're discovering each other's passions, quirks, dreams. If that person asked, "Who do you say that I am?" your answer then would sound different than 20 years later.

Why? Because relationships grow. Life events bring new depth and nuance.

The same is true with Jesus. Our answer may stay rooted in the same truth—he is the Christ—but the depth of what that means matures as we walk with the Lord through joys, doubts, and trials.

But sometimes we get stuck in how we see Jesus. Sometimes we don't always keep maturing in our understanding of who Jesus is.

I have an example of this from a movie but I am not endorsing the movie. It's just a good example, okay?

There is this scene in the comedy Talladega Nights that humorously exaggerates how we like to see Jesus on our own terms.

At the dinner table, racecar driver Ricky Bobby begins his prayer: "Dear Lord Baby Jesus..." He keeps repeating "Dear Baby Jesus...dear tiny, infant, Jesus."

Until his wife interrupts: "You know, sweetie, Jesus did grow up."

Ricky replies: "Well, I like the Christmas Jesus best. When I say grace, I'll say it to baby Jesus. When you say grace you can say it to the "Grown Up Jesus" or "Bearded Jesus".

But then Ricky's friend chimes in, "I like to picture Jesus in a tuxedo T-shirt, because it says, like, "I want to be formal, but I am here to party, too."

One of the kids then adds, "I like to picture Jesus as a ninja, fighting off evil samurai."

It's kind of funny. Kind of because it exaggerates something we all do. We want Jesus to fit our preferences, our comfort zones, our agendas.

But Jesus keeps asking: "Who do you say that I am—now? In this moment? In this season of your life?" The answer doesn't change—He is the Christ of God—but our understanding of what that means deepens, stretches, and matures – hopefully.

That's even true in prayer.

Early in my faith, I pictured Jesus like an "uncle". I used to call Jesus, in private, "Uncle Jesus" because I just didn't get what he was up to...just like my real Uncle Mike. I never knew what Uncle Mike was up to.

Other times, I treated Jesus like a vending machine—insert prayer, wait for the blessing. Other times He was a close friend in the chair beside me.

All those images had truth, but none were complete. And when those images failed me, I entered seasons of prayer drought.

But those droughts became invitations to grow. Over time, I've come to see Jesus as present in every breath, every heartbeat, every ordinary moment. Prayer has become less about fancy words and more about attentiveness—recognizing God's presence in all things.

I'm still working on it and growing but I've dropped "Uncle Jesus".

At the end of the day, the most important nuance of Jesus' question is this: What difference does your answer make?

History shows that Christians have done great good in the world—building hospitals, schools, and movements of compassion. But Christians have also done great harm—the Inquisition, the Crusades, exclusion and persecution.

It's not enough to say, "Jesus is the Messiah." The real question is: If you believe that, how will you live differently?

So, let me ask you today—Who do you say Jesus is?

Who is He in the busyness of your daily grind? Who is He in the stillness of the night when questions rise in your heart? Who is He when life pushes you beyond what you thought you could handle?

If Jesus is the Christ, then He cannot simply be a figure from history or a name we recite in prayer.

If Jesus is the Christ, then He is Lord—of your decisions, your relationships, your worries, your future.

And here's the good news: you don't walk that road alone. The Christ who asks the question and the one to whom we must give an answer is the Christ who gives you strength daily. He is with you in the chaos, He is with you in the silence, and He is with you in every step between.

So today, and tomorrow, and every day after, may your life itself be your answer:
"Jesus, You are the Christ—my Savior, my Lord, my everything."

Time of Reflection:

Jesus, You ask me, 'Who do you say that I am?' Show me where or how my answer is shaping the way I live, make decisions, and love others today.

Lord, if You are truly the Lord and Savior in my life, what needs to change in me so that I follow You more fully each day?