

Title: Who do you say that I am?  
Text: Luke 9.18-22  
Theme: Realizing who Jesus is  
Series: Luke  
Prop Stmt: Coming to faith in Christ is a lifelong commitment that generally takes a good bit of time.

Catechism is a word that refers to a series of fixed answers to specific questions that are learned (memorized and reviewed) in order to train someone in a specific discipline. It is often used in religious contexts because a series of questions with these fixed answers can help summarize the tenets of the Christian faith. On the first and third Sundays of the month I am taking you through a catechism. I am reviewing with you, succinct answers to specific questions that help you understand and articulate what the Bible teaches. These are the questions and answers that are being taught in our children's ministry. I want you to know what is being taught and I want you to be able to review this with our children being confident in the truths as well.

Who is God: God is our Creator and the King of everything.

This week we are adding the next question and answer.

Does God keep His promises? Yes, God always keeps His promises because He is faithful.

This catechism is useful but it is not the sum total of following Jesus. Following Jesus is more than knowing the right truths. Following Jesus is not less than knowing the right truths. You cannot follow Jesus if you do not know who he is and what he has done. But just because you give intellectual assent to the doctrines of the Christian faith does not mean that you believe them in your heart.

I've tried to capture this in what I call the clock of Saving Faith. There are plenty of examples in both the 2,000-year history of Christianity and in the current state of the church where the pendulum has swung to one side or the other. What I am very zealous for you to see in our study of Luke's gospel is that genuine faith is doctrinal and personal. It is both. It has to be both. One or the other is not genuine faith and will not save you.

I was asking a gal about what it meant to be a follower of Christ. She told me that her mom had been in the hospital and was in serious condition. So, she went to the chapel in the hospital and prayed for her and felt this sense of peace that her mom was going to recover, and sure enough she did. For this gal, this was when she thinks she became a believer. (pendulum on the personal experience side). Did she have a personal experience? Yes. Did it appear to be validated by her mom's recovery? Yes. Did she have any concept of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Christ and what he accomplished for her? No. Was she a follower of Christ? No. Can a person be a follower of Christ if they don't even know the foundational truths of the faith? No, so in an effort to train people, particularly children, several branches of Christianity have used catechisms. When a child completes the course, then based on the fact that they

have answered the questions correctly (or at least enough of them), they are, in many cases, confirmed as a Christian. That is, a church official says that based on your correct answers to these questions, we declare that you are now a Christian. (pendulum on the doctrinal side) Then there is a party, pictures, gifts given, and a special service at church commemorates the whole thing. Aunts and uncles come and the kid gets money. It can be quite a deal. But, does going through a class make you a genuine believer. Not without the right doctrine and with personal assent.

So, as much as I see the value of catechisms, I know that memorizing answers is not the heart of saving faith. Jesus is. The emphasis upon knowing the correct doctrine and personally engaging with it, is the heart of this text. And this text is the very bullseye of this section. Everything in Luke's gospel has been building to this, so far.

Read Text:

Two weeks ago, I pointed out that the identity of Jesus is a focal point of this chapter. The local king, Herod, asked "who is this?" in v.9. Here Jesus asks the disciples who the crowds think he is and who they think he is. Two weeks from now we should be studying the Transfiguration of Christ where the Father says, definitively who Jesus is. "This is my Son, my Chosen One." (v.35) Beloved, one of the truths that I try to emphasize because the Bible emphasizes it, is the personal nature of the relationship that God has as God. God the Father, loves his Son, Jesus and Jesus loves his Father and loves to make much of him. There are all kinds of implications from this, but notice what we see just in our text. The first point is very clear.

1. **Genuine faith is personal.** (18-20)

*"Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him."* (18a) That just fascinates me. God the Father and God the Son are having a conversation. Jesus is talking to his dad. What are they talking about? The Creator and the Sustainer of all that there has ever been and will ever be are having a conversation. Jesus is praying alone. But the disciples were with him. They were aware that he was praying to his Father. I suspect that Luke includes this detail here because this conversation between Jesus and his Father had a direct relationship between the next conversation that Jesus has with his disciples. In fact, the kind of relationship that Jesus enjoys with his Father sets the pattern for the kind of relationship that he has for us. Our God enjoys perfect love, perfect trust, perfect harmony, complete satisfaction, security and joy and Jesus came to this earth in order to secure that for us to enjoy with him and one another forever. God is, by his very nature, triune and as a triune God he speaks. He communicates. Before Jesus speaks to his disciples, he is speaking to his Father. Before he relates to his followers, he is in relationship with his Father. Even though the disciples do not yet understand all of that, notice that Jesus is praying while they are with him. The grammar of the sentence puts the emphasis on the disciples being with him. They were observing how personally engaged he was with his Father. God the Father was not an abstract force to Jesus. God the Father was and is his Father. God is a personal God. God is comprised of three persons. That is God has personality. He has intellect, will, emotion, insight, connection, and he is deeply

relational. He was praying to his Father and then he talks to his disciples. “Who do the crowds say that I am?”

The answers reflect the fact that on a popular level the people at least understood that there was something special about Jesus. If he was John the Baptist, or Elijah or a prophet of old, then he would have had to come back from the dead. But that wasn't the question that he really wanted to focus on. It was a means to the real question: “***But who do you say that I am?***”

Do you see what Jesus just did? It doesn't matter what the crowds say, but it does matter what you believe. The crowds are often wrong as they are here. The beliefs of the crowds then reflect many beliefs now. The crowds back then and now respect Jesus. They generally view him in a positive way. That is not good enough. Their view of Jesus is incomplete and an incomplete view of Jesus is not sufficient. Genuine faith is personal and Jesus cares about what you believe. He cares about it, because your personal faith in him, is the only means by which what he accomplished for you in his life and death is effective for you.

Let's say that you are an oncologist. You know cancer. You've written papers, made presentations at conventions, worked with research labs to refine treatments and have thousands of patients that you have worked with. And let's say that you are diagnosed with cancer. What if you refuse to believe that you actually have cancer? If you do not see how all that you know relates to you, all that you know will be useless for you. Genuine faith is personal. One of the questions that you have to ask yourself is this: Is my faith in Christ my own. Is this something I stake my life on? Of course, related to that is the essential truth that...

## 2. Genuine faith is doctrinal. (20)

***But who do you say that I am?*** By asking that question Jesus is connecting personal belief to correct doctrine. This is exactly what Paul reflects in Romans 10.9, “*if you confess with your mouth (say) that Jesus is Lord (right doctrine) and believe in your heart (personal faith) that God raised him from the dead (right doctrine), you will be saved.*” (the goal) This text here is a preview of that text. Jesus is asking them about what is their understanding of who he is. For months now, Jesus has been teaching about the Kingdom of God and performing jaw-dropping miracles that demand an explanation. The explanation for the very life and ministry of Christ contributes to the body of truths that we have to know, understand, and embrace. Genuine faith has sustenance to it.

Just being here, attending, enjoying the camaraderie, the music, the events, the structure, the traditions, and the benefits from the encouragement and the prayers helps give you a boost in life and that this is the goal, you haven't understood the heart of authentic Christianity. God has given us his Word so that we can study and learn, so that we will engage our minds and our hearts and believe and follow. I cannot believe for you. There is no ceremony that you can pay to participate in that will give you life insurance and heaven insurance for the afterlife. You have to be convinced for yourself. You have to know this and believe it. Look at what Peter said. He declared that Jesus is “*the Christ of God.*” Jesus is the Messiah who is from God. Peter and the

disciples did not have all of the gaps filled in, but this was a big one. They were confessing with their mouths that Jesus was the One who was promised in the OT. This was a huge step forward, but it was not sufficient. The disciples rightly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but they had an incomplete view of the Messiah. So, now that they were convinced that Jesus was the One promised to bring deliverance and salvation, Jesus goes to work on helping them understand what kind of deliverance and salvation he came to bring. Look at verses 21-22.

### 3. Genuine faith is a process and an event. (21-22)

Just when the disciples thought that they were on the cusp of a major revolution (which they were), Jesus drops a bomb. First, he tells them that they cannot tell anyone this. This was not a suggestion, but an explicit command. *“And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one.”* Why not? What do you mean you can’t tell anyone? How is this going to work if you can’t tell anyone? They weren’t ready to tell anyone because they did not yet understand what kind of Messiah Jesus was. So now Jesus again tries to help them get a better definition of the Messiah by telling them, *“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.”*

When Matthew relates this account, he states how at this point Peter tells Jesus that this will never happen. In fact, Peter (Matthew 16.22) “began to rebuke” Jesus. Jesus of course confronted Peter and dressed him down by pointing out that Peter was, in that moment being and unwitting tool of Satan, was a hindrance to Jesus and was only thinking like this world thinks instead of setting his mind on the things of God.

These 4 phrases introduce the disciples to a vision of the Messiah that they had never considered but it also answers the natural question of why they were not permitted to tell anyone that Jesus was the Messiah. Suffering must come before greatness. The Son of Man must suffer many things. The disciples were not ready to hear this. He must be rejected and be killed. On the third day be raised. You wonder if they heard that 4<sup>th</sup> phrase. They certainly did not grasp this, yet. But Jesus is introducing them to a critical piece of truth in the Christian life. Death is the means to glory. Through dying we get life. This is the path that Jesus chose to walk and we walk it too. Those who only want glory but refuse to die to an old way of living, that is die to self, die to the pursuit of our own glory, do not understand what it means to follow Christ. Jesus goes on to explain this in our text for next week. I am not rushing through this, because this is not easy for us to grasp either.

This happened over and over then and it happens over and over now. People hear about Jesus. They see the evidence of his power. They see that he is good, kind and faithful. They see the benefits of following Jesus. So, they decide to follow Jesus because Jesus is good for them. Jesus has made a difference in their lives. They think that they are now a follower of Christ and that the future will only get better and better. If following Jesus has made them kinder, gentler, helped overcome some bad habits, reset some relationships, can you imagine how much greater life is going to be down the road? The assumption is that Jesus will make your life better and better. He does, but not always in ways that we think. This is where the disciples, you and

me, and the people we share the gospel with all converge. We love the fact that Jesus is the deliverer. We assume that this means that Jesus will deliver us from adversity and from our enemies. What we do not realize is that our biggest enemy is our own hearts. What we do not realize is that Jesus is not the ticket to getting a life that is free from struggle and adversity. In fact, struggle and adversity are usually the ticket to helping us realize that Jesus is the ultimate treasure and is worth loving and trusting no matter what. That is why I said that genuine faith is a process and an event. It is a process in learning who Jesus is, and what he has actually come to do. Coming to faith in Christ is an event. There is a point in time when we cross the line from unbelief to belief, from darkness to light. But Jesus wants us to know that following him is not getting what I want now. Glory comes. Glory is certain. Glory is guaranteed, but suffering is the path to it. This is going to test the disciples. This is the issue that Judas Iscariot refuses to embrace. What about you? What is it worth to you to follow Jesus?

Jesus, you are the Messiah! Do you believe this? Are you still willing to believe this when I am rejected, arrested, beaten and crucified because this is what is going to happen? Are you willing to believe me, no matter what? A few years ago a young couple were invited to come to church here. Their formal religious upbringing did not prepare them for this. The singing was nothing they had experienced. They had never heard preaching that was verse by verse and made sense. In spite of being way out of their comfort zone, they seemed to be hooked and they came back again and again and again. Slowly they started to understand the gospel. Life was starting to make sense and they felt like they were discovering the meaning and help they wanted. They also found out, to their delight that they were expecting a child. Life was only getting better and better. The day came for her to give birth and their little baby was born, dead. The anguish is unbearable. When she was released from the hospital this couple drove straight to the church and we met. We wept together and we prayed. The shock and grief was overwhelming. How could this happen? How could Jesus let this happen? The question I asked them was the question that they would have to face and answer. Is Jesus worth believing no matter what? Is Jesus your treasure, or is Jesus the means to the life that you wanted? The following months were dark and lonely. But the seed of God's Word had fallen on good soil. The cares of this life and the heat of adversity did not ruin it. When they professed their faith before us when they got baptized, I knew that the steel of their conviction had been fired in the furnace of adversity. Jesus was indeed their treasure. Their understanding of Jesus grew. He was not a deliverer from struggle, he was the ultimate treasure, the ultimate king, the ultimate salvation who was worth treasuring, trusting and embracing, no matter what. What they learned is what Jesus is preparing his disciples for. Genuine faith is for keeps.

#### 4. **Genuine faith is for keeps.** (22)

Verse 22 introduces the twelve to the fact that there is a cost of discipleship that Jesus will go on to explain, but the point is clear. Jesus is telling them that they are following the Messiah who is going to be executed. This is serious. Jesus is not a spoke on the wheel of your life. He is the hub, the center, the source, the heart and the goal. He will not share his pre-eminence with anything else or anyone else. He alone is worth your trust and therefore, He is right to demand from you that He is your highest priority.

Implications:

- 1) Be patient and through in your evangelism.

It took the disciples a long time to come to terms with who Jesus really is and what it means to follow him. Along the way, one of them, who initially said that he wanted to follow Jesus, realized that in the end, he was not willing to. Be patient and through in your sharing the gospel. You want people to understand the benefits of the gospel and the priority of following Christ. This generally takes time.

- 2) Be patient in your parenting.

With Peter as their spokesman, the disciples professed faith in Christ, but they did not yet understand what that meant. Your children may profess their faith in Christ and they may indeed be believers. However, be patient and discerning. Time will reveal if this is convictional or not. When you see evidence of a willingness to pay the cost for being aligned with Christ, a sensitivity to the Spirit, a tenderness to holiness, and a love for God's Word, you have some evidenced that their profession is authentic. You do not see those things overnight, so be patient in your parenting.

- 3) Be intentional in your personal evaluation.

What if a hurricane (literally or figuratively) barreled through your life and left you with nothing. Would it still be well with your soul? Is your faith in Christ conditioned upon how things are going for you, or is your faith in Christ grounded in who he is and what he accomplished for you in his life and death? Think seriously about what you really believe in and what this means.