

Identity

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[0 : 00] If you'd like to have your Bibles open before you, look chapter 9 on that great verse in verse 20. But what about you, he asked? Who do you say I am? Peter answered the Christ of God.

One of the great things so far about being in placement here in St. Columbus is that I get to go out for a lot of coffee. And just the other day there Derek and I were at a meeting and we were in a cafe, a cafe that will remain nameless to protect it innocent. But let's just say it's not that far from here and it's a favourite spot for ministers and theological students.

And as Derek and I were ordering our coffee, we struck up a conversation with the young guy who is serving us and after the usual customary remarks the young guy said to us, what are you up to? And so we explained I'm doing a placement here in St. Columbus, Derek's my boss, I'm his new slave. And then I thought, well here's a natural opening to ask a wee question. I said, in fact, I wonder if you could help me. This Sunday I'm going to preach on who is Jesus. And I wonder if you could tell me what your thoughts are on Jesus. Who do you think Jesus is? And right at that moment, this young guy's eyes just went totally glazed. I was not expecting what he was about to say.

He just simply shrugged the shoulders and said, I don't know. I think the thing that most struck me or stunned me was the fact that this guy for the last year or so has been coming into contact daily with ministers and theological students and he didn't know who Jesus was.

[1 : 44] Perhaps there are some of you here this morning and you too are in a similar position. If you'd been asked that question, who is Jesus? I wonder what you would have said. Well it's great that you're here and one of the great things is this morning we're going to be looking at this great question and then seeing one of Jesus' disciples answer it. Because today we begin our new series, a series entitled Disciples in the Dock. And as I said earlier, over the coming weeks we're going over the coming weeks we're going to be looking at key questions that Jesus asked his disciples in the gospels. And it's my prayer that these studies will really enable us, whether we're Christians or not, to search our hearts, to have the Holy Spirit shine His light into our hearts and to expose what our relationship with Jesus and the gospel really is like.

If you are a Christian here this morning then I trust that these studies will really uncover and peel back what your relationship with Jesus is like. I trust that it will reveal that you have based and built your faith on the solid foundation of the gospel. But if you're not a Christian here this morning then it is our hearts prayer as a church that you would come to know and you'd come to love the one who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of sinners. And today we begin with probably the most important question that can ever be asked and can ever be answered.

What about you? Who do you say I am? This question is a question that ultimately concerns Jesus' identity. Hence the title of the sermon is just identity. Today we are going to look at the man who towers above every other man that has ever lived. We're going to look at the one who stands, whose life stands as a testimony of the unbelievable power and love of God, whose life, death and influence have had greater impact than any other persons in the history of mankind.

For 2,000 years men and women have travelled the entire world to make this man known. Millions today esteem him, love him, trust him and follow him. Not out of compulsion but out of love. And today we are going to look at this man who cannot be equaled, whose life and his death and his resurrection and his resurrection are so important for you and for me. According to the Bible, how we respond to Jesus will determine our eternity. Now I want to look at this question under three very simple headings. First of all the background, then we'll look at the ultimate question and then we'll look at the ultimate answer. So let's look at the background. Many of you are familiar with watching films and you're familiar with the way that film directors plan their movies and plot their movies.

One of the things they do when there's a climactic scene just about to happen is they give us hints and clues of this climactic thing that's going to happen and one of the things they do is they fade in some music and as the scene builds up the music gets a bit louder, the music begins to take on a greater pace and then bang, the dramatic thing happens. On a very similar way Luke the author of this gospel sets up this question, who do you say I am by giving us hints and clues?

[5 : 31] Because in the previous chapter he uses a couple of stories that beg the question of the undisclosed identity of Jesus. For example when I was sharing with the kids that's a story from Luke chapter 8.

When Jesus calms the storm they're all in the boat, everything's afraid, they wake them up, Jesus, we're going to drown and Jesus calms the winds and the waves and they're left stunned that by a word Jesus has power and authority over the winds and waves and what do they ask? They say who is this?

And then in chapter 9 and verse 7 we read about the story of King Herod and Herod's heard all these things about Jesus that there's this one going about and he's heard that people say that this man is John the Baptist raised from the dead. That's significant because it was Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded and still others are saying to Herod, no you might be Elijah, in fact I think he even might be one of the prophets of long ago and it says in Luke chapter 9 and verse 9 but Herod said, I beheaded John, who then is this that I hear such things about?

In other words Luke has been building up his narrative, who is this? And it seems that everybody in Jesus day is asking that question, who is he? I just love the way that Luke has set this into motion. I wondered does it beg the question in your heart this morning especially if you're not a Christian? Who is Jesus? Have you ever taken the time to consider who he is? Have you ever been intrigued by him? Have you ever wondered who he is, who claims that he, who the Bible says that he can calm the winds and the waves? The one who's able to raise people from the dead? The one who's able to cast out demons? Have you ever asked the question who is this? And if you are a Christian and you're sitting here this morning I wonder how often do you ask that question, who is Jesus? How often when you're reading the pages of Scripture in your private life, in your devotional life and you see the great miracles and you see the mighty deeds of Jesus, how often are you left like the disciples, stunned? Who is this? It's I think one of the sad realities that we can fall into as Christians, especially when our faith is lukewarm. I said Jesus never strikes us.

[8 : 10] Whenever struck by him in all his greatness, whenever struck by him in all his wonderful works, it's what it really is. It really has to become our prayer that we would say to God before we read Scriptures, God open our eyes that we may see Jesus, that we see him in all his fullness, in all his glory, and all his wonder. But part of the the background of this question is that Jesus asks a preliminary question before he asks the ultimate question. In verse 18 Jesus says to his disciples, now who do the crowds say I am? You're probably thinking wow, did Jesus have identity problems? Did he did he struggle with who he was? Why did he want to know what people thought about him? Surely Jesus if he is God isn't concerned about whether people liked him or not and you're right he isn't concerned about what people thought about him. He isn't asking this question to find out the latest gossip that's going on about him. It's more likely that he's asking this question to set up the ultimate question. It serves to really bring to bear the power and the force of when he asks but who do you say I am? But it is interesting to consider what the disciples respond when Jesus asks this question. Who do the crowds say I am? The disciples respond in verse 19. Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah and still others that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life. In other words everybody in Jesus day seemed to have an opinion of him. There's a really valuable point that can be made here because in one sense nothing has changed. Everybody today still has an opinion of Jesus. Even the young guy in the coffee shop had an opinion of Jesus, an opinion of indifference. I don't know, I'm not interested,

I don't care. The kids had an opinion of Jesus. Jesus is God. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Savior. Jesus is the Messiah. It's funny that in our world today so many people have an opinion of Jesus. You just have to watch the television and you'll hear their opinion of Jesus. You'll hear it. I wonder if you could count just watching daytime TV how many times the name Jesus is used and it's often used when they're taking his name in vain. That's striking. I think that speaks of a great significance because why isn't they take the name of Jesus? No one else's name, no other religious leader's name, not Allah, not Buddha, they take Jesus's name. I think that even speaks of his significance in a weird perverse way. You still many others in our society have an opinion of Jesus.

One of the things I love watching TV is stand-up comedy. I can't watch it anymore because recently every comedian I've been watching seems to use Jesus as the butt end of their jokes. Not only that, every religion has an opinion of Jesus.

Muhammad Gandhi said Jesus was a good and moral teacher but that was it. Islam says Jesus is a prophet but he's not superior than Muhammad. Joe's witnesses believe that Jesus is the Archangel Michael but he isn't God. The Dalai Lama said of Jesus that Jesus is a fully enlightened being who helps us even today on our journey to spiritual enlightenment. But the question still remains friends, who actually is Jesus? So here we come to the ultimate question. Maybe you could just put yourself in the shoes of the disciples for a moment as they stood before Jesus and he asked, he looked them square in the eyes and he said to them, but what about you? Who do you see I am?

This question will reveal his ultimate identity. If you're not a Christian what comes to mind when you hear this question? Who do you say I am? In your heart of hearts, who do you believe Jesus to be? Have you imbibed the popular modern culture's opinion of Jesus? Have you accepted that he is maybe just a good and moral teacher? Have you accepted perhaps he might be a prophet or some great one in the past who helps us to spiritual enlightenment? But friends as Christians we believe that any opinion of Jesus must be based on and built on this, the sole authority on who Jesus is as the Bible. Because as Christians we believe this to be the true, inspired word of God.

[13 : 32] And so if you're not a Christian here today and you're wondering who is Jesus and perhaps you have opinions of him, I would challenge you to see in the Scriptures who the Scriptures claim him to be.

And what about Christians here this morning? Who do you tell people Jesus is? I hope it's not wrong to assume that we are telling people who Jesus is. What does your life communicate to the non-Christians around you about Jesus? This is a really important question if we're going to live lives as disciples of Christ. What is our non-Christian family members, friends, work colleagues, think about Jesus based on our lives? Are we living inconsistent hypocritical lives that really don't communicate anything to them about who Jesus is? Because as Christians we are convinced that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. He's the one worth living for and the one worth dying for. He's the one that we give all our praise, all our glory and all our adoration. I wonder what do our lives communicate as Christians to the people around us who Jesus is? And so we come to the ultimate answer. And here we have Peter who is a spokesman of the disciples when he hears the question, but what about you? Who do you say I am? Peter says the Christ, the Christ of God. Friends, this is the moment when Peter and all the disciples get it. This is the moment that Luke's Gospel has been building up to. The undisclosed identity of Jesus Christ now comes to the forefront. You are the Christ, the Christ of God. Now the time we have left, I just want to look at this answer by asking two very simple questions. What does it mean that you are the Christ of God? And why does it matter? So what does it mean? It's really amusing that as people who live in the West that we place little emphasis or little value on the significance and meaning of names.

[16 : 01] One way to highlight this is every day we introduce ourselves to somebody we don't know and we might say, hi, I'm Andrew and they'll say, hi, I'm so-and-so. And literally within a moment we've forgotten their name and they've forgotten ours because we don't place much emphasis on the meaning and significance of names. I have a friend who's from an Eastern culture, he's from Nepal, I'm sure many of you know, his name's Suraj. Suraj understands the significance of names.

It's really striking that if you ask Suraj the names of God in the Bible, he can reel them off virtually in the Hebrew. Elohim, Yahweh, El Shaddai, one after the other. He just reels them off and he can tell you the meaning of the names. And in an Eastern culture they actually value and appreciate names. And that was the same back in Jesus' day. And so when Peter said, you are the Christ of God, he was communicating something very powerful because the word Christ has a real deep significance.

As I said, the word Christ says at the bottom in our NIVs that it can also be translated Messiah, the promised one, the chosen one. And quite literally it also means the anointed one.

This whole idea of being the anointed one is tremendously significant. But it does raise a question, anointed for what? And to understand this we really need to receive illumination from the Old Testament as it were. I don't know if you know this, but in the Old Testament there were three types of people who were anointed by oil for God's work. There was the priests, the prophets, and the kings, all anointed for God's work. If you don't know how the prophets were, the prophets were just simply God's spokesmen. They would reveal God's words and God's message to the people.

They would be involved, they would be anointed, set apart for the work of revealing God to man. And you have the priest, they worked and lived in the temple. You remember the priests would offer sacrifices and pray up on behalf of the people so that the people could have their sins forgiven as it were. They were anointed for this office of reconciling sinful man to a holy God.

[18 : 27] And then of course you had the kings who were anointed to rule the nation, to lead the nation, to protect them. Maybe you remember how King Saul and King David were anointed in Samuel.

So all these people being anointed, it was for the work of revelation, the work of reconciliation, the work of ruling. And what is fascinating about that is because all these things actually just pointed forward to the one who is the anointed one. The whole of these offices just pointed forward to Jesus Christ, the ultimate prophet, the ultimate revelation of God, Jesus Christ, the ultimate priest, the one who would give his life as a perfect sacrifice so that man could be brought into a relationship with God. And Jesus Christ, the ultimate king, the one who reigns sovereignly and supremely on high. And so when Peter says to Jesus, you are the Christ, he's saying Jesus, you are the anointed one. Back in Luke chapter 4, there's this Luke records the story of when Jesus at the beginning of his ministry is in a temple. If you turn on your Bibles, it's worth reading. Luke chapter 4, it's just a few pages before us.

And Jesus is in the synagogue. And it's in chapter 4 verse 17. And Jesus takes out a scroll from Isaiah, an Old Testament book, and he begins to read it. And it says in verse 18, this, the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. And then Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened in him and he began saying to them, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

In other words, when Peter says you are the Christ, he's got it so right. You are the ultimate one. So that's what it means. But very briefly, why does all of this matter?

[20 : 48] It matters because in understanding friends who Jesus is, it means that we can have a relationship with him, a relationship that will radically change us. As I said at the beginning, the way we answer this question will determine the rest of our eternity. I want to ask friends, have you made Jesus your Savior, your Master, your teacher? And to put it another way, is he your prophet, your priest, and your king? Is he the Christ of God to you? The reason this matters, the reason the identity of Jesus matters is because embracing Jesus as our Savior means that we only look to him for our salvation. Confessing that Jesus is the Savior means that we say to Jesus, Jesus, I recognize that I'm a sinner. I recognize that I need a God, I need a Savior, I need one who can reconcile me to God. I recognize that my sin deserves your just and perfect judgment. But I thank you that I can come to you, the one who was anointed, the one who was anointed to live the perfect life, to die the sacrificial death, to be raised from the dead because he was the feeling sin and its power. So it means to embrace Jesus as your Savior. It means to experience his grace, love and forgiveness. It also matters because understanding the identity of Jesus means that we embrace him as our teacher, which means that we give up the right to disagree with him.

His teaching becomes our creed. And for us to do this, this is a great step of faith because there's so many things that Jesus says and we don't even understand them or we find them hard to follow. But the fact to accept Jesus as our teacher means that we commit ourselves to him.

We embrace him as the one who's the way, the truth and the life. He's the one who leads us and guides us. He's the one who sustains us. He's the one that we live under. That's what it means to embrace him as our teacher. And then finally, his identity matters because we are to embrace him as our master, as our Lord, which simply means that we give up our right to rule our own life.

Confessing that Jesus Christ is the mass of our life means that we resign the control of our life to him. The agenda of our life is now not to do what pleases us, but to do what pleases him.

This is if we say, I claim no rights of my own. I'm giving up my life to you because I know that in you I find life. Friends, the central issue of our life today is this question. Who is Jesus? Is he your Savior? Is he your teacher? Is he your master? Let me ask it again. Imagine it as if the risen Christ were asking you today, but what about you? Who do you say I am? Let's pray.

[24 : 18] Father in heaven, we come before your throne of grace. We thank you for this great challenge in this passage. Who is Jesus? He is indeed the Messiah, the Christ of God. We thank you, Father, for this challenge. We pray that if there be anybody in our midst here, anybody here

with us this morning who does not know you, that they would see that salvation is to be found in him and him alone. That they would see that he's one worth living for, dying for, and giving our life holy to.

And Father, for those of us who know you and love you, we pray that we would have the hearts, the eyes of our hearts renewed to see you and your Son afresh as the one who was anointed, to save us, to lead us, to relish and to guide us. Father, help us to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Help us to go forth from this place and not be scared to tell people who Jesus is, that he is indeed the Savior of the world. If I continue with us in our worship, go before us and receive all the glory in Jesus' name. Amen.