

Session 3

March 17, 2024

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

Luke 9:18-26

Here we find the great confession of Peter, whose profession of faith—“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”—is the bedrock upon which Christ built His church (Matt. 16:16). While Matthew’s account is the better-known version, Luke (like all the Gospel writers), brings his own unique perspective to the occasion. I have chosen to look at Luke’s text through the lens of “mistakes” that Jesus needed to correct; all of which in some way involved His identity.

Mistaken identification (vv. 18-19). This great prelude to Peter’s confession was a set-up by the Lord. He certainly knew what people were saying! But His purpose was to see if they had been paying attention to both what the people said about Him and to what He had been teaching them. Two details about the setting are notable. First, Luke pointed out that the Lord had just come from a period of private prayer. This might indicate that the questions He posed were precipitated in His preceding prayers. Second, the conversation He had was with the disciples alone. This reminds us that Jesus spent the greater part of His ministry not preaching to the multitudes but investing in the lives of the Twelve. Simply put, Jesus spent the majority of His time discipling His disciples. The speculation that surrounded Jesus was born of both fanciful speculation and scriptural expectation. That a prophet would arise “like Moses” (see Deut. 18:15 ff) was an encouraging messianic prophecy. The final verses of the Old Testament predicted the coming of a second Elijah (Mal. 4:5). These were the kinds of rumors swirling around Jesus. Even Herod the King had heard speculation that John the Baptist (or another prophet) had risen from the dead (Luke 9:7-8) and was preaching in Galilee. For reflection: *What kinds of “mistakes” are being made about Jesus’ identity even today? Is it possible that some might even show up in the church?*

Mistaken motivation (vv. 20-22). This of course was the heart of the matter. Jesus knew what the crowd said, but He wanted to hear what His chosen said. Matthew’s account makes much more of Peter’s confession, but Luke recorded the meat of it. There is no indication that Peter was blurting out a response (as Matthew’s account is so often depicted). Rather, the indication from Luke is that Peter was answering for them all and was indeed representing their view. He was the Christ; the Messiah; the Anointed One, sent by God. Verse 21 is interesting. Why would Jesus want this essential truth kept quiet? Certainly, He approved of their assessment. Yet the warning to silence was strict, almost to the point of harshness. Several reasons for this come to mind. First, it may simply not have been “the right time” (see John 8:20). Second, they might not have been ready to make such an announcement, and then be able to defend it. As the Geneva Bible noted, “Men first must learn, and then teach!” Third, such a claim might have again moved the crowds to make Him a king (see John 6:15). Fourth, such a claim would no doubt have stirred up the angst of His enemies (see John 8:58-59, for example). Perhaps Jesus explained His reasoning indirectly in verse 22. Apparently, while they understood *who* the Messiah from God was, there was some confusion about what exactly the Messiah from God would actually do. For reflection: *What seems to be the mistaken idea of what the Messiah was supposed to do? Why might His death seem “out of place?”*

Mistaken perception (vv. 23-26). “Then He said to them all...” Mark’s account makes it clear that “them all” refers to the crowd. The startling details of His death, burial, and resurrection—given only to the Twelve—no doubt contrasted with the general Messianic ideal the disciples had. The teaching Jesus then gave to the multitudes presented a contrast as well. This was not the exalted and triumphant Kingdom life they were expecting! Rather than a reign of peace and prosperity, Jesus was calling them to a life of self-denial, where the only way to win was to lose! And those who might spurn either Christ or His gospel message would themselves be spurned at the culmination of the age; an event clearly depicted in verse 26. For reflection: *What do you think the connection is between Peter’s confession in verse 20 and Jesus’ exhortation to the crowd in verses 23-26?*