



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Who Do You Say I Am?

Bible Reading: Luke 9:18-27

Jesus' Identity

18 While [Jesus] was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” 19 They answered, “John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, that one of the ancient prophets has come back.”

20 “But you,” he asked them, “who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”

His Death and Resurrection Predicted

21 But he strictly warned and instructed them to tell this to no one, 22 saying, “It is necessary that the Son of Man suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.”

Take Up Your Cross

23 Then [Jesus] said to them all, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it. 25 For what does it benefit someone if he gains the whole world, and yet loses or forfeits himself? 26 For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and that of the Father and the holy angels. 27 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:18-27 CSB)

Note: We can see the same story in Matthew 16:13–16 & Mark 8:27–29.

SUMMARY:

In Luke 9:18–27, Jesus brings His disciples to Caesarea Philippi, a place filled with pagan worship, and asks, “Who do you say I am?” Amid rumors that He is John the Baptist, Elijah, or a prophet, Peter confesses that Jesus is “God’s Messiah”—the promised Christ foretold in the Old Testament. This marks a turning point as the disciples begin to grasp that Jesus is more than a teacher, or prophet; He is the ‘Son of the living God’ sent to bring redemption.

Jesus then reveals that He must suffer, be rejected, killed, and rise again—defying expectations of a political & military conqueror. He calls His followers not just to believe, but to deny themselves,

take up their cross daily, and follow Him. True discipleship means surrender, obedience, and trusting the risen Savior who gave His life for us. Jesus still calls us to this discipleship today.

The Context

It is very helpful to check whether the other 3 Gospels include the same story we are reading and to see if the other authors provide additional details—which is the case for this passage.

- “Jesus went out with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the road he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” (Mark 8:27)
- “When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matt. 16:13)

Matthew and Mark tell us that this event takes place in a town in the far north of Israel called Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27; Matt. 16:13). This town was rebuilt by Herod Philip (the ruler of that region) in honor of Caesar, the Greek god ‘Pan,’ and himself. He constructed temples dedicated to Pan, where people came to offer sacrifices and worship in extremely sinful and pagan ways. At the base of the mountain where the pagan temple to Pan stood, there is a spring that flows out of a large cave. In the ancient world, this cave was believed to be a gateway to the underworld [hence, the ‘Gates of Hades’].

It is no accident that Jesus brought His disciples to this very location to ask the question, “Who do you say I am?” In a place filled with idols, false gods, and spiritual darkness, Jesus intentionally reveals His true identity.

By this point in Jesus’ ministry, Jesus is so well known that even the rulers of the country are taking notice of Him and trying to understand who He is. In Luke 9:9, Herod says, “John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?” And he sought to see Him. Herod is the Roman Empire’s representative who governs the northern region of Israel. He would be similar to a premier of a province in Canada.

We can understand why other Jewish leaders would feel jealous or threatened by Jesus’ popularity. He is not behaving like other rabbis or Jewish leaders, and He even calls them out for their hypocrisy and false teaching. Jesus is fully aware that there are consequences to confronting leaders and rulers, especially since Herod had recently beheaded John the Baptist. The possibility of suffering and death is a point Jesus is going to touch on in our passage.

Who Do You Say I Am?

“18 While [Jesus] was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” 19 They answered, “John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, that one of the ancient prophets has come back.” 20 “But you,” he asked them, “who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.” (Luke 9:18-20)

At this point there are many rumors circulating about who Jesus was. Jesus was alone with some of His disciples when He asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?” This must have been a question the disciples were already asking themselves or one another. Who is this man? Jesus was doing things they had never seen or even heard of before. He forgave people’s sins, He raised people from the dead, He controlled nature (stilled the storm) , and He had just fed 5,000 people. They answered His question: “John the Baptist. But others say Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.” The people believed He might be another great figure from the Old Testament.

Then Jesus asked His disciples the same question –“But you, who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “The Christ of God.” In Matthew 16, Peter says, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”(16:16).

“The Christ of God”

Jesus asked: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “God’s Messiah” (CSB) or “The Christ of God.” (ESV Lk. 9:20)

There are two titles here that we need to pay attention to. The first is ‘Christ.’ Christ is not Jesus’ last name, but a title that comes from the Hebrew word ‘Messiah.’ This title (Hebrew, Mashiach) refers to someone who has been anointed by God for a special purpose. There was a ceremony involving a mixture of oils and spices used to create a sacred anointing oil. You can read about this in Exodus 30:22–32. Throughout the Old Testament, we see different people being anointed—Moses anoints Aaron and his sons as priests; Samuel anoints King Saul and later David;

and prophets such as Elisha were also anointed. So the term Messiah or Christ was not unfamiliar to the disciples.

What is interesting is that Matthew records that Peter calls Him “The Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16). This is a title for a unique person promised throughout the Old Testament—a person who would take our iniquities (sins) and bring God’s redemption into this world.

This moment is the first clear indication that the disciples are beginning to understand that Jesus is more than just a prophet or a good teacher. They still don’t fully grasp who He truly is, but this marks a major shift in their understanding.

The Hero Who Loses

“21 But [Jesus] strictly warned and instructed [the disciples] to tell this to no one, 22 saying, “It is necessary that the Son of Man suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.” (Lk. 9:21-22)

After this declaration by His disciples, Jesus tells them not to tell others. At first, that seems like a strange strategy for growing His ministry—why would Jesus not want people to know who He truly is? I can imagine the disciples struggling to understand why Jesus would keep this a secret.

Jesus explains, saying, “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” (9:22). Jesus’ life and mission were centered on fulfilling the law God had given and accomplishing redemption through the cross. This would have been difficult for the disciples to hear and even harder to understand.

The Jewish people expected the Messiah to be a heroic figure—a powerful leader who would overthrow the Roman Empire and establish a kingdom that would never fail. It is difficult for any of us to grasp the idea of a hero who dies a criminal’s death at the hands of His own people when we are expecting someone strong, victorious, and unstoppable.

The Cost of Following

23 Then [Jesus] said to them all, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it. 25 For what does it benefit someone if he gains the whole world, and yet loses or forfeits himself? 26 For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and that of the Father and the holy angels. 27 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:23-27)

After Jesus tells His disciples that He will die and rise again on the third day, He immediately tells them the cost of following Him. Something important to notice is that Jesus is calling them not simply to believe in Him, but also to follow Him. Many people think believing in Jesus is something we do on Sundays—showing up to church and listening to a sermon. While gathering with the church is part of following Jesus, true discipleship means following Him every day—Jesus says “daily” in 9:23—in our workplaces, in our homes, and in every part of life—not merely saying that we believe in Him.

There is a cost to following Jesus. Luke 9:23–24 says:

“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.”

Telling your followers that they must “take up a cross” would have been shocking. A cross was not a symbol of religion at that time—it meant death, suffering, and shame.

But Jesus is not telling His disciples that they must literally die on a cross. He is telling them that being His follower carries a serious cost. Jesus is not an ‘add-on’ to our lives. He is about to give humanity the greatest gift ever—His own life—and He calls His followers to be willing to give up everything for Him and to walk in His footsteps.

Conclusion

Jesus invites us into a living relationship with Him. He died on the cross and rose from the dead on the third day, just as He said He would. He calls us into this relationship, and part of following Him is being willing to give up whatever is necessary in order to walk in obedience (to “take up your cross”).

Two Important Questions

There are two important questions we must answer:

First, Who do we say Jesus is?

Do we believe that Jesus is the Christ—the Son of God and God Himself—or do we think of Him only as someone who makes us feel good?

Second, Am I truly following Jesus?

Do we simply add Jesus to our lives like we add a little salt to our food, or do our lives actually show that we belong to Him and walk in His ways?