

Bible Studies for Life: March 17

The Identity of Jesus • Luke 9:18-26

By Carl White



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Our lesson begins with an encounter between Jesus and his disciples. He has two questions of them. Out there, among the people, who are they saying Jesus is?

Jesus' authority, his conflict with the Pharisees, and his miracles have brought about much speculation about his identity. The disciples report that people are saying he is "*... John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.*" (vs 19 NIV)

Though Jesus was likely curious about people's opinion, the first question was asked to set up the second, more personal question. "*But what about you?*" he asked. "*Who do you say I am?*" (vs. 20a) Peter answered correctly on behalf of the disciples saying, "*God's Messiah.*" (vs. 20b) Peter's insight will be affirmed at the transfiguration. (Luke 9:28-36)

Jesus questioned his disciples about his identity. It is fair to assume he would also question us, for we, too, are potentially his disciples. Who do you say that Jesus is? Do you make him out to be what you need him to be? Do you make him into your image or to your liking? One thing is for certain, Jesus will not be party to such. The Gospels, along with the prophecies of the Old Testament, won't allow it.

Long centuries ago, the prophet Isaiah announced in the Suffering Servant Psalm of the Messiah: *"But he was pierced for our offenses, He was crushed for our wrongdoings; The punishment for our well-being was laid upon Him, And by His wounds we are healed."* (Is. 53:5) This is the prophecy behind how Jesus describes himself in verse 22 of our text. *"... 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."*

Some people only want to hear about a God of warmth and love. Well, God is love and warmth, but he is also a God of righteous anger. You cannot have great love without great anger. That which you love you will fight to protect. God acted in sending His son, fighting to protect us from the eternal consequences of sin. The opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference. If he was indifferent toward us, he would not send his son to suffer and to die. You must accept Jesus for who he is: the perfect expression of God's love, and the focus of God's wrath on our behalf.

The Disciple's Call.

Considering who he is, what are we to do? Hear and respond to the call to be his disciple. The beginning of this call is expressed in three action words found in verse 23: deny, take, and follow.

Deny yourself. A very successful high school basketball coach once told me, "Preacher, you and I are in the same line of

business. We are both trying to get a group of people to believe in something greater than themselves. For me it's the team, for you it's the Gospel." You need to believe in something bigger than you to have a truly fulfilling life, and there is nothing else like the Gospel, for in Jesus there is life.

Take up your cross daily. The image these words evoke for us is of a beautiful cross on the wall of the church. Not so for Peter and company. It evoked for them an instrument of terror. They all knew about the "perp walk" of criminals forced to carry their crosses up the hill for their execution. The disciple's call is serious business. Do not take it lightly.

Follow him. He is asking no more of us than what he has given. Jesus was willing to die for you. Are you not willing to live for Him?

Here we see the kind of paradox that is the Gospel. (vss. 24-25) If you want to be saved, you've got to be willing to die to yourself. You save your life by losing it. Or, if you want to gain this life, you must forfeit yourself for Jesus' sake. This is not human reasoning. This is spiritual reasoning.

The Son of Man wants to present you to the father without shame. So, don't be ashamed of him. He is God's Messiah, the Son of the Living God!

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