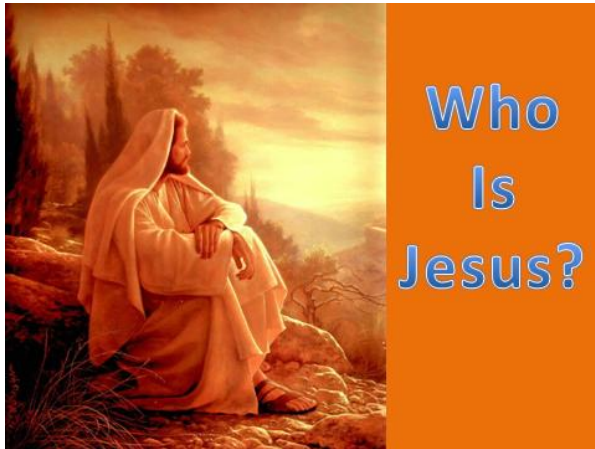


# Who is Jesus? (Luke 9:7-20      October 25, 2009)



A survey taken earlier this year asked Australians who the most influential figure in all history was. <sup>1</sup>

The result was this:

Coming in third – 9% said Charles Darwin has influenced this world the most.

Number two:

16% of those who voted – suggested it was Albert Einstein.

But not surprisingly – the runaway winner with a huge 54% of those polled saying He was **the** most influential figure in all of world history:

Jesus of Nazareth.

I said this was not surprising – because virtually every poll, outside those taken in Muslim nations, has Jesus of Nazareth at the top of the most significant figures in world history.

He is the man countless millions – including me – would give anything to have a meal with.

He spawned the great world religion. His teachings intrigue millions. His claims astound millions.

He is revered but He is also hated. Worshipped and ridiculed. Studied yet misunderstood. Deified by many – dismissed as a myth by others.

The two most numerous monotheistic religions hold Him in awe.

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<sup>1</sup> Research by [www.allaboutlife.com.au](http://www.allaboutlife.com.au)

There is no doubt that He is a figure who draws extreme opinions. Is He lion or lamb, servant or King, prophet or priest, teacher or Lord, God or man?

Whether you bow the knee to Him or not – you have to admit that Jesus stands at the forefront of world history.

Even sceptics have to acknowledge that the evidence is overwhelming that Jesus of Nazareth was no myth – He walked this world – and He changed this world. Even atheistic Australians admit this. In that recent survey 83% of Australians said they agreed that Jesus was a real figure from history.

But the great question becomes – **Who is Jesus?** This is no exclusively modern debate. It is a question that has raged from the days of Jesus and has only intensified in the years since. Prophet, angel, teacher, Messiah, God? The opinions are stark.

While many argue over who Jesus was – the reality is that Jesus Himself was never ambiguous about His identity. The problem is that who Jesus claimed to be was so outrageous and incendiary and incredible – many simply refused to even consider His claims.

And many refused to accept **all** the claims of Jesus.

In the same survey – the 83% who said Jesus was a true figure from history – were then asked – so who do **you** believe Jesus was.

43% of this group responded that they believed Jesus had miraculous powers and that He was the Son of God.

The question that this raises is this – is believing this enough to become a disciple of Jesus – a Christian – a part of the body of Christ?

Over the next few weeks we will be looking at what Jesus had to say about who He was – and Jesus makes it very clear that just believing He is Messiah or God incarnate – while that is crucial – it is **not** enough.

The gospel message demands a deeper understanding of who Jesus is *and* a radical call to commitment.

Last time we began a section that began in Luke 9 with the sending out of the twelve – and ends in Luke 10 with the sending out of the seventy.

I told you that the differences in the sendings had to do with Jesus teaching the disciples that the message they were to deliver to the world was not just for the Jews.

Jesus makes it very clear that His message is for *all* the nations. He is a Messiah who comes to save men who come from every tribe and tongue and nation.

But in between these sendings – from Luke 9:7 to 9:62 Jesus gives His disciples the message they are to take to the world.

Have a look with me at this section – Luke 9:7 to 9:62.

Notice if you will that Jesus makes **three** points – and to make sure that we get them – He repeats every one **twice**.

The first point is that Jesus demands we accept that:

- He is **Messiah** vv. 7-20 *and* 28-43a

He is God in human flesh. He is the long anticipated Saviour. He is the one way to heaven – the only source of life.

But this is not enough. A disciple has to grasp that:

- He is a **crucified** Messiah vv. 21-22 *and* 43b-45

Jesus is not the Messiah anyone expected – and the main point of stumbling for the disciples **and** for every man and woman confronted with the gospel – is His cross.

But even accepting Jesus is a crucified Messiah is not enough.

Jesus makes one last point:

- He is a crucified Messiah who calls **crucified disciples** vv. 23-27 *and* 46-62

Jesus wants us to grasp who He is so clearly that He repeats each point twice. I can't emphasise how important each of these three points are.

You might hold Jesus to be the Messiah – but if you don't know that He is a **crucified** Messiah – He is not the Messiah of Scripture – He is not the Messiah who saves.

You might hold Jesus to be a crucified Messiah – but if you have not heeded Jesus' call to **crucified discipleship** – then you are not one of His followers.

Listen to Luke 14:27:

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me **cannot** be my disciple.

However you view Jesus – unless you have bowed the knee to Him as a crucified Messiah who calls crucified disciples – whatever gospel you have heard it is **not** the gospel of Jesus delivered once for all to the saints – and only **this** gospel can save.

These truths are so crucial Jesus repeats them twice in these two chapters **and** then repeats them again and again until His death.



Let's look at the *first* of these crucial truths.

He wants us to know that **He is Messiah** – and He makes this clear in vv. 7-20.

Notice that this section begins with Herod wondering who Jesus is – and being told – maybe He is John the Baptist raised from the dead, possibly Elijah returned or a great prophet of old.

Then Jesus performs an incredible miracle that should tell anyone with ears to hear and eyes to see who He is.

But after the crowds have left, Jesus asks His disciples – this crowd that follows Me – those who saw My miracles – who do they think I am? The disciples reply maybe John the Baptist raised from the dead, possibly Elijah returned or a great prophet of old.

Everyone wants to know who Jesus is. Jesus is telling them – showing them – and yet what He says is so radical no one even seems to consider that He could be God.

No one is crying out – Jesus of Nazareth is the long-awaited Messiah – God in human flesh.

Then Jesus gets to the heart of the matter – He asks His disciples – OK – who do **you** say that I am?

And here we find the greatest question anyone could ever ask – and this morning I want you to ask yourself – who do **you** say that Jesus of Nazareth is?

This is no doubt **the** greatest question of all history. Heaven and hell – life and death – truth and error – all hang on this question.

This question was on the mind of Herod – verse 7:

Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed.

This Herod is Herod Antipas – the one who had John the Baptist killed.

Put yourself in Herod's shoes.



After Herod the Great died his kingdom was divided up. Herod Antipas ruled over the territory of Galilee.

He was a man who was used to doing as he pleased. He divorced his first wife because he lusted after Herodias who was married to his brother. He was hated by the people – but he had soldiers and power and kept them at bay through sheer brutal force.

Then – around 26 or 29AD – rumours start arriving about a prophet in the wilderness preaching repentance and that the true King is about to come.

Initially he ignores this – but the crowds grow – the expectation rises.

As a King – and an immoral one at that – the announcement of the coming of a godly King – preceded by repentance – is hardly good news.

When John started to openly criticise Herod's incestuous marriage – that was the last straw. He had John imprisoned and then beheaded.

That little distraction was finished – or so he thought – because he rumours did not stop – they accelerated. Someone else was now travelling around Galilee supposedly healing, casting out demons, raising the dead and preaching that the kingdom of God was at hand.

Herod had inquired about who this was and verses 7 and 8:

It was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen.

Amazing isn't it. Jesus never claimed to be John or Elijah or a great prophet raised to life. He claimed to be the Son of God – the Christ – one with the Father. But these aren't the options floating around Galilee.

We have seen earlier in Luke that Jesus was so different to the expected Messiah – His claim to be one with God is so outrageous – that few people seriously considered what He actually said. The notion of God in human flesh was beyond the bounds of what Jews would accept.

Some form of prophet is about as much as they can get their heads around.

These responses left Herod perplexed. Verse 9:

Herod said, "John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?"  
And he sought to see him.

Herod thought his little religious revival problem had been nipped in the bud when he killed John. So who is this Jesus of Nazareth? Herod wanted to meet Him. It is not until Jesus trial just before His death that He finally comes face to face with Jesus of Nazareth.

In Luke 23 – Pilate sent Jesus to Herod. Luke 23:8 says:

When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him.

Right to the end – Herod was intrigued by Jesus – especially the stories of His miracles – but He never grasped who He was.

But here is the point – Jesus was a man on everyone's tongue. His miracles and teaching had stirred the nation. Huge crowds dogged His every move. And the nation was asking – who is Jesus of Nazareth?

Now we come to a section where Jesus performs a miracle that should tell anyone – once and for all – who He is.

Luke 9:10-13a:

On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing. Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, "Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place." But he said to them, "You give them something to eat."

The disciples came back from their time of proclaiming the kingdom of God.

Jesus takes them to Bethsaida – which is an area on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. This is a wilderness area with little population.

But the huge crowds that followed His every move went with Him to this deserted place. There Jesus preached to the crowds about the kingdom and healed them.

As the day wore on it suddenly dawned on the disciples – they are a long way from civilisation – they have no food – the crowd will be getting hungry.

They urged Jesus to send them away. Jesus then says – “You give them something to eat.”

5,000 men and many more women and children – in the middle of the wilderness – and Jesus says – you guys feed them!

John 6:6 says Jesus said this to test them.

But what is the test?

I want to suggest that the test is this – did they really grasp who Jesus is?

Notice that Jesus has set the whole situation up to link back to the events of the Exodus.

In John 6:3-4 we find this comment regarding the feeding of the 5000:

Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

Jesus has taken them to a **wilderness** area – like the sons of Israel wandering in the wilderness during the Exodus.

Jesus goes up on the **mountain** – like Moses did during the Exodus.

And notice this happened at the **Passover** – the time the Jews celebrated the events of the Exodus.

Jesus picked the timing and place – the Passover up a mountain in a wilderness area to make a connection with the Exodus.

Why?

In Exodus 16 the people are in the wilderness – there is no food – and they begin to grumble. Where can we get food in this desolate place?

Exodus 16 verses 4-12:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, ... that I may test them.” ... “At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD.” ... “**Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.**”

God Himself would feed the hungry Jews in the wilderness – so they would know His power and know that He is the Lord their God.

The question now is this – do the disciples understand who it is who is standing before them in the wilderness surrounded by hungry Jews?

If they understood this – then they would have trusted in the power of God to feed the 5000.

Remember that Jesus had just sent the twelve out – He had given them His power and authority. They could cast out demons and cure the sick. He had sent them out with nothing – no staff or bag or bread or money.

And they went out and healed and preached and God provided for them.

You can imagine them coming back to Jesus:

Teacher it was incredible – one word from us and the blind saw – even demons were subject to us. We never went hungry – your people fed us and provided for us.

Here is their first test after their evangelistic expedition. Surely feeding a few people is no problem to one who can open the eyes of the blind?

Jesus has performed the signs of Messiah – He even enabled them to have that power.

Do they understand that Messiah – Jesus who stands before them – He is the One who fed Moses and the children Israel in the wilderness?

And by the same power they healed and cast out demons and were provided for – this same God can provide for these people in this wilderness?

Unfortunately – they failed. Verses 13b-14a:

They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five thousand men.

The disciples looked around. There are 5000 men sitting there. You add in the women and children and there are maybe 10,000, possibly as many as 20,000 people.

They didn't have the money to feed the people – and even if they did – there was nowhere to buy that much food anyway.

This was a test – did they understand who Jesus was and what He could do – and the disciples failed this test.

Israel had perhaps 2,000,000 people in the wilderness. And God fed them faithfully for forty years. He showered them with manna from heaven and quail. **Nothing** is impossible for God.

I am sure that if you asked the disciples – do you believe that God can do anything – do you believe God could feed this crowd? – The answer would have been a very honest and resounding – absolutely.



But that is not the real question. The question is this – did they believe Jesus was God and could empower them to feed this crowd?

At this point – even the disciples don't have this faith.

So He gives them a very pointed lesson. Verses 14b-17:

And he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." And they did so, and had them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Jesus gave them enough bread and fish that everyone ate as much as they wanted. He satisfied their hunger.

Jesus gave them miraculous bread in this wilderness area to feed them. God fed the Jews – Jesus fed them – Jesus is God. The miracle is supposed to show who Jesus is.

The fact that there are *twelve* baskets left is significant. Twelve is an important number. He chose twelve disciples modelled after the twelve tribes showing they are now the people of God – the church.

Just as God fed the twelve tribes in the wilderness so Jesus Himself will feed His people – the church.

In John's Gospel – the feeding of the 5000 is followed by Jesus discourse where He proclaims – I am the bread of life.

There He says:

Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. ... I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ... I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

Jesus could not be clearer – He is God – He is the source of eternal life – without Him no one can live.

The crowd came looking for a miracle – like the bread and fishes.

They should be seeking for the greater miracle – the bread that does not perish – the bread that sustains forever – Jesus Himself.

Do they believe this? The great question is this – do they believe Jesus is God and could feed this crowd – not just on physical bread – but the bread that gives eternal life?

This is the great hurdle every man, woman and child who seeks to enter the kingdom of heaven has to enter – and it is a great hurdle.

Jesus now turns to His men. Have they grasped this? Verses 18-20:

Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” And they answered, “John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.” Then he said to them, “But who do **you** say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”

Matthew tells us that this exchange took place in *Caesarea Philippi*.

This city had a long history. In the Old Testament, it is mentioned many times as a centre for Baal worship. Later, when the Greeks came to rule Palestine – the natural features of the area led them to believe this was a perfect place for a temple to the god Pan.

They built a temple to Pan next to the cave – and later a temple to Zeus was also built.

It became a prominent centre of idolatry because each year as winter began to wane, the people believed that in order to entice the return of Pan to bring fertility to the land they had to take part in deeds such as cultic prostitution and gross animal practices.

To the right of the cave there are five niches hewn out of rock – three of the niches bear inscriptions in Greek mentioning Pan, Echo and Galerius (one of Pan’s priests).

Small statues of the gods were placed in these niches and worshipped.

Later the Greek rule of the area was replaced by Roman rule. In 20 BC, Caesar Augustus gave the city to Herod the Great who erected a temple of white marble to honour Caesar. This became a site of emperor worship – and caused the Jews to hate the area even more.

In the days of Jesus – Caesarea Philippi was a place reviled by the Jews – the Greek gods were still worshipped at the base of the cliff alongside the temple where the worship of Caesar took place.

It was here in this place surrounded by the gods of the nations – Baal and Pan and Caesar that Jesus asked His men, “Who do crowds say that **I** am?”

I just performed a miracle that shows who I am – did they get it? No they say you are John or Elijah or a prophet.

John the Baptist; Elijah; a prophet – these are **safe** answers.

I find it interesting they did not mention the idea He might be the Messiah – let alone the one true God.

Since the Jews never thought of Messiah as God Himself – saying Jesus was Messiah would be a bit riskier – but it isn't totally radical. So why weren't some openly saying – is Jesus the Messiah?

I believe it is because He claimed to more than Messiah. If He is the Messiah – then you better accept what He says about Himself – and the idea that this man who was born and eats and drinks and laughs and sleeps is the all-powerful, uncreated Creator is too much to accept.

The question is – did the disciples believe? So, surrounded by these signs of pagan idolatry – with the failure of the crowds ringing in their ears – Jesus asks His men – who do **you** say that I am?

Do you accept that I am Messiah – God incarnate?

When you look at all of the major world religions – Christianity is the *only* one where the identity of the One who brings the message affects the message itself.

Buddha was asked if he was a god – his reply was basically that who he was did not matter – what mattered was his dharma – his teaching.

Mohammed claimed to be the prophet of Allah – but it was his message that ultimately mattered – not who he was.

But with Jesus the identity of the messenger *is* the message.

If He is not God come in human flesh to die – then His message of salvation is rendered useless. He came not just to teach – but to save – and that salvation depends on Him being the Messiah – God Himself.

Jesus made it clear – if He is who He says He is – then whether you believe Him or not determines your eternal destiny. Heaven and hell ride on this question.

I would imagine that the air would have filled with tension when Jesus asked His disciples – who do **you** say that I am?

Did they really believe the incredible truth claims of Jesus? Had they overcome a lifetime of teachings that would say no man could be the one true God? Could they accept this one they walked with and ate with created them?

Had the disciples learned anything from the feeding of the 5000? Yes they had.

Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

I believe that You are the Christ – You are the Messiah – the One we have been waiting for.

You are the One true God.

I am not certain that Peter understood every nuance of the incarnation at this time – but he certainly understood something of Jesus as God. This is an incredible claim. This is an astonishing confession for a Jew to make.

It cuts across everything He had been taught – God become flesh – dwelling among man as Messiah.

There are certain truths about Jesus that are an essential part of the gospel.

The first truth about Jesus is that **He is Messiah**.

Don't mistake this. The word Messiah means different things to different people.

To the Jews it simply meant a King like David.

To the Muslims it means a prophet.

To others it means an angel or teacher or a good man.

But, it is Jesus Himself who defines what we must believe about Him.

He and the Father are one.

He is the way the truth and the life – no one comes to the Father but through Him.

He is the bread of life – the light of the world.

He is God made flesh. There is no eternal life apart from Him.

But this is so hard to accept. In John 6:14-15 we read what the crowds concluded:

When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

They saw the sign of the feeding of the 5000 but would only accept Him as Prophet or King – not as God.

Jesus had given them the discourse – I am the bread of life – and John says that at this point, many of those who had wanted to be His disciples turned away – it was too hard for them to accept Him as God.

In 1993, Jacob Neusner, a prominent Jewish scholar, author of over 500 books wrote a book entitled *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*. He admitted that he respected Jesus as a man and a teacher. The Sermon on the Mount left him impressed and moved. He said that if he had lived at the time of Christ he would have had his interest quickened to

the point that he would likely have joined the crowd who followed Jesus from place to place, feasting on his wisdom.

Ultimately, though, he said that he would have parted company with the man from Nazareth.

Why? Because Jesus didn't just teach. He made claims about Himself that only God could make. He equated Himself with God. And Neusner said – to accept those claims takes faith that Jesus is who He says He is and he was unable to accept that.<sup>2</sup>

It seems the crowds were like Rabbi Neusner – accepting Jesus as God is a bridge too far.

If you are here this morning and have not come to accept the truth of Jesus as God – the one way of salvation – then I ask you to consider the claims of Jesus – His teaching, His life, His miracles.

As C.S. Lewis so famously put it:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher. He'd either be a lunatic – on the level with a man who says he's a poached egg – or else he'd be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse.

You cannot ignore Jesus. You have to decide – is He who He claims to be – God – the one way of salvation – or is he a liar or a lunatic.

For those who already trust Christ – you have probably been sitting through all of this saying – but I am a Christian – I believe Jesus is God – the one way of salvation – what is the point for me?

The point is this – do you really believe He is Messiah – the Word made flesh – the one way of salvation?

Too often we treat Him like the Jews or the Muslims or the liberals.

He becomes a King who will save us or a prophet who will reveal truths or a teacher who will point the way – but not God incarnate to be worshipped and obeyed.

We have to believe that the One who walked this world is the same God who spoke and flung the stars into place and made man from the dust. The One who can do anything. The One who has the words of eternal life.

Embodied in flesh and blood is the eternal, almighty, all-knowing God.

Heaven or hell hang on whether we grasp this.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) p. 96.

He is the One we worship and obey. He is our life.

On Tuesday morning I had breakfast with Rodney Pearce.

He commented that one of the hardest things about being a Christian is accepting the sovereignty of God in our lives. Turning control of our lives over to Him.

If Jesus is a mere teacher or King or prophet – we remain the Lord's of our life.

But, if He is God – He owns us – He can command us – our life is His.

We are not our own – He created us and He bought us.

If He is our God – we voluntarily and gladly declare that He is sovereign over the fate and direction of our lives.

If He says – do not sin – we dare not sin – for He is a holy God who cannot even look upon evil.

If He says – lay down our lives to gain them – we gladly lay them down.

If He says – share the gospel – we share the gospel.

If He says – do not covet or do not lust – we obey.

We struggle – because we are sinners – but if we grasp who Jesus is – His awe and power and majesty – we delight to obey.

Because in Him and in Him alone is life.

So, when Jesus says we have to grasp.

- He is **Messiah**
- He is a **crucified** Messiah
- He is a crucified Messiah who calls **crucified disciples**

In many ways the first point is the easiest – but it is also the hardest. Once you come to grips with Jesus as God – the other points flow.

On one level it is easy to say – He is Messiah – but it is incredibly hard to deal with the consequences that flow from this truth.

Acts 2:36 says:

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

He is Lord **and** Christ. He is God and King. He is Saviour and Sovereign.

Our lives are His. Our destiny is His.

But He loves us and came to save us and do good for us.

This is the God we worship – a crucified Messiah who calls crucified disciples.