

## The Seeker: A Study Through Luke

### Part 9: Jesus Alone

#### Luke 9:18-36

August 13, 2017 - Rick Lum

In a fallen world, among fallen sinners such as we are, it is tragically easy to misunderstand and to be misunderstood. We routinely misunderstand who people are or what they mean. We misunderstand their intentions and their actions. We sinners make false assumptions, we jump to conclusions, we even purposely falsify or present only half truths. Our misunderstandings are often the stuff of comedy. I thought I would dip into the classics to illustrate just how difficult communication can be . . . Here's Inspector Clouseau in The Pink Panther.

Video clip, 2:05; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnIIWpZSPXU>

One element in communication that greatly reduces misunderstanding is clarity. That is the primary function of this section of Luke's narrative. It clarifies. Here Luke gathers together some ideas that he has previously introduced so that we, the readers of his gospel, cannot misunderstand who Jesus is, what He will do, and what he asks of those who would follow Him. As we read this section, it is as if this amazing figure of Jesus, - who has performed miracles and taught as no one else that we have ever heard - comes into focus. It is as if we are seeing him clearly for the first time. And as this happens we are confronted with Jesus in all His uniqueness. We realize that we have never seen or heard about anyone quite like Him. He is a singular in His identity, his mission, his majesty.

It is worth noting that the verses we read together begin with the word "alone" – "as he was praying alone" – and they end with the same word "alone" "And when the voice had spoken 'This is My Son, My chosen One. Listen to Him!,' Jesus was found alone." In all of our experience, in all of our knowledge, in all of history and humankind, Jesus is found to be alone. He is without equal, beyond comparison. These verses make it clear that there is no one like Him. First, they tell us that . . .

**1. Jesus is alone in his identity** Luke certainly wants us to notice Jesus' identity here. He raises this subject in four different ways: 1) Earlier in this chapter just before the passage we read, Luke reports that Herod was "perplexed" by the identity of Jesus. He had heard the possibilities voiced by the crowds – John the Baptist raised from the dead, Elijah, one of the other prophets of old; 2) Then Jesus Himself asks his disciples "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They give the same opinions that were reported to

Herod. 3) Then Jesus asks “Who do you say that I am?” and Peter answers, “The Christ of God.” 4) Finally on the mount of Transfiguration (which mountain?) God the Father declares, “This is my Son, my chosen One. Listen to Him!”

There is a progression here away from misunderstanding toward clarity. It moves in four steps: a prophet, the Christ, the Son of Man, the Son of God.

The crowd believes Jesus to be one of the prophets, perhaps even an especially noteworthy prophet like Elijah or John the Baptist, risen from the dead. They've concluded that Jesus is interesting, even a compelling teacher – but they've known of others like him. He is one of the prophets and they know about prophets. This is very much like how many think and speak of Jesus today – He is one among other great religious leaders: Buddha, Mohamed, Confucius, Gandhi, even Martin Luther King. They think they honor Him by placing him in such exalted company - but they are very wrong. Jesus is not a prophet who has and delivers God's Word; He is God's Word, God's revelation of Himself. He is not to be honored; He is to be worshipped. He is not one among others of the same kind; He is alone.

Peter's answer “The Christ of God” while a step forward, as far as it goes, but conceals a misunderstanding of a different kind. Jesus accepts Peter's answer – this is even more evident in Matthew's account of this exchange (Matt 16:17; “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”) – but he immediately and emphatically commands them not to tell anyone. – “He strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one.” Then he goes about correcting their idea of who the Messiah was and what he would do.

The Messiah of popular conception and desire, is someone who will defeat Israel's enemies and restore Israel's independence and prestige among the nations. We know something about the Jewish Messianic expectation from the Dead Sea scrolls. The Messiah would be Israel's military, political, and economic savior and hero. The crowds had heard or seen their share of Messiahs of this kind. Each had been, in one way or another, a disappointment. Gamaliel mentions two in Acts 5, Theudas and Judas the Galilean. Jeff mentioned Judas the Galilean two weeks ago – whose short lived rebellion was crushed by the Romans and whom they crucified along with several hundred of his followers. This was in Galilee, in Sephoris, not far from Nazareth. And Jesus would have been a very young child at the time. Josephus mentions four rebellions led by various Messianic figures, but notes that there were many more.

Jesus, however, did not want to be confused with these other Messianic figures. His mission was too important to be side-tracked. And so he clarifies His intentions for his disciples by explaining what would happen to the “Son of Man”, another Messianic title by the way. I am certainly the Christ, the anointed one, but not the Messiah of popular

conception. I am the Christ, the “Son of Man,” (interestingly another Messianic title from the book of Daniel) but the path ahead of me is sacrifice, suffering, and death, not military or political victory. There may be other so-called “Christs,” but only the “Christ of God,” the “Son of Man” will save His people by dying for their sins and only he will be raised again. Jesus alone is this Christ, this Son of Man.

Then eight days after these sayings . . . Luke certainly wants to link these two events together . . . Peter and John and James went up the mountain with Jesus to pray. . . and we have the transfiguration.

The Father declares “My Son, My chosen or beloved. Listen to him!” Why Moses? Why Elijah? Because of all the figures in the history of Israel – Moses the preeminent law giver; Elijah the preeminent miracle worker – these two were certainly worthy of attention. If any of the prophets who spoke for God should be listened to – these two certainly should be listened to. Moreover, Elijah was the very prophet of old that some were identifying with Jesus. And yet, when the voice from the glorious brightness speaks it does not command “Here is Moses, to whom I entrusted My law on mountain, listen to him.” Nor does the voice say, “Here is Elijah, who stood alone against the prophets of Baal and whom I honored by sending fire from heaven, listen to him.” No, Moses and Elijah vanish into the glorious brightness and the voice out of the glory of God says, “This is my Son, my beloved, my chosen one, Listen to Him!”

And Jesus was found alone. God the Father declares His identity. There have been other prophets but Jesus alone is God's Son who speaks with an authority that exceeds even that of Moses and Elijah. There may be other Messiahs, but Jesus alone is the Son of Man who will die in our place for our sin. Jesus alone is God's beloved and chosen Son. “Listen to Him!” He God's my word, God's final word. Listen to Him. John 1:1,14; Hebrews 1.

**2. Jesus alone in His mission** Although Luke has already provided clear evidence that Jesus' mission is unique - “a savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11, 30; 3:1; 4:21; 5:21; 5:32; 7:48) – the crowds and even the disciples had not grasped the true nature of his mission. In this chapter Jesus explains that his coming death, burial, and resurrection are central to His mission as the Christ who will save His people from their sins.

The crowds had Jesus' mission all worked out – he was to meet their physical needs and desires. In the feeding of the five thousand account just before the passage we read, we notice the expression “They ate and were satisfied.” There are two sides to this – Jesus fulfill their need for physical food completely – They were satisfied; but there is another, less positive, side to this assessment - they ate the physical bread that he offered them and were satisfied with that. They hungered for nothing more. They did

not hunger after righteousness; they hungered only after physical bread. And they wanted Jesus to keep providing it. In John's account of the feeding of the five thousand he recalls that (John 6:15) "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 were interested in Jesus mission only in so far as it coincided with their own agenda. They wanted a Messiah a king who could provide the perfect welfare state. Okay maybe they would have to listen to a sermon now and then, but he wasn't a bad speaker, interesting actually, and as long as the bread kept coming. Jesus saw through this kind of self-centered adulation - "You are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."

I suspect that Peter's confession that Jesus was "the Christ of God" rose only a little higher than that self-centered hunger of the mob. We can hope for more from the disciples and Peter. They knew Jesus more intimately. They had after all left their homes and livelihoods to follow him. They had heard his teaching, see his miracles, and knew that he was sent from God. They knew that He, and he alone, had the words of life. I think that Peter, probably hoped that the spiritual life and hope stirring in their hearts would be extended to Israel as a national spiritual revival. They understood that Jesus was the Christ of God who could call Israel back to God. They didn't, however, have a clear conception yet of what such a rebirth would cost Jesus who was indeed the Christ. So Jesus explained . . .

Here's my mission "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 be raised." Later on the mount Peter, John, and James heard this very thing discussed by Moses, Elijah, and Jesus as they talked about His departure, which he would soon accomplish in Jerusalem. Still later in this chapter Jesus explains his mission with special emphasis "Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men." Luke's comment causes us to shake our heads in puzzlement, "But they did not understand this saying and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying." **But they did understand**, after he was raised from the dead. They would proclaim the Messiah's mission, literally to the ends of the earth. They would declare his death, burial, and resurrection and that Jesus alone brought salvation as to Israel and to all men -

Acts 4:12 "Peter, filled with the Spirit, would declare to the high priests themselves "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Paul would write and tell everyone he possible could that "There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all." (1 Tim 2:5).

**3. Jesus alone in His worthiness** In these verses we find extraordinary demands that Jesus makes on his those who would follow him. He asks them to **deny themselves** – others have asked this. He asks His followers to **take up their cross daily** – others have asked for obedience that has involved daily suffering. He **asks them to follow**, faithfully, without hesitation or question – others have asked for such obedience. He asks his followers to be willing to lose their lives – others have asked this.

Politicians and generals (Napoleon, Alexander), leaders of government services. But in almost all of those cases I think the leader asks the follower to give his life for a cause – to save his family, his city, his nation, for glory, or simply for profit and gain of territory. Jesus demands that we would give our life for him. And he promises that if we do this – if we give our life for him – we will save it. He also says that if we are ashamed of Him and His words, that He will be ashamed of us when he comes in glory. Matthew, in his gospel, adds “Whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.” If anyone else had said this we would consider megalomania or egotism of the most extreme kind. We could not take them seriously. Yet when we read the gospels, we do not at all get the impression that Jesus was a self-centered, grandiose, self-deluded, egotist. He seems, rather, just the opposite, gentle, humble. Children seemed to have loved our Lord and flocked to him.

What is remarkable is that those who knew him best, who were closest to him, those who might have sniffed out any hint of insincerity or exaggeration – his disciples – actually went on to proclaim the truth of what he said. Moreover, they did this after his death, when he was no longer with them. They had had time to reflect on Him and on His life and they and they still denied themselves, picked up their crosses, and followed, giving their lives for Him and for His teachings.

In fact untold millions have heard Jesus’ call to follow and have followed, denying themselves, taking up their crosses daily and following him. There are those today – by the accounting of some more than at any other time in history – who are losing their possessions, their homes, their families, their lives because they are not ashamed of Him and His words. They understand that Jesus’ demands are extraordinary – but they believe that Jesus is worthy of their obedience. Jesus alone is worthy of this kind of devotion.

What about this promise “Some of you standing here will not taste until they see the kingdom of God?” Perhaps he meant that some of them – Peter, John, and James would see a fore-glimpse of kingdom on the mountain of transfiguration in just a few days. Perhaps he meant that some, all except Judas Iscariot, would see the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and the inauguration of the kingdom of the gospel.

Now that I understand who He is, now that I understand His mission, now that I understand that He alone is worthy, will I follow Him?