Pentecost 5 Luke 9:18-24
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Who Do YOU Say Jesus Is?
I. We confess our faith with our mouths.
II. We confess our faith with our daily lives.

Dear Christian friends,

It's been said that there is no such thing as a **dumb** question. **Parents** – **teachers** – don't want children AFRAID TO ASK a question or to ask for help. There are actually ALL KINDS of questions. **Some** are trivial – **some** are important – **some** are being polite, "MAY I HELP, you?"

Then there's this question, ***"Who do YOU say I am?"*** That really is the ALL-IMPORTANT question! HOW a person **answers** that question determines where they will **spend eternity** – in heaven or hell. That's also the INESCAPABLE question – everyone MUST answer that question **even if** they don't want to.

Today we look at this ALL-IMPORTANT – INESCAPABLE question – ***"Who do YOU say I am?"*** We answer that question – we CONFESS our **faith** – 1)with our mouths AND 2)with our daily lives.

I. We confess our faith with our mouths.

Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus was WAY UP NORTH in Galilee – off by Himself with the twelve apostles. It was TIME for Jesus to get away **from the crowds** and give some PERSONAL TIME and attention to His disciples. **Luke** loves to show us Jesus praying and so he does here at this IMPORTANT POINT. ***"One time when Jesus was praying and the disciples were with Him, He asked them, 'Who do the crowds say that I am?'"***

People's opinions about Jesus VARY greatly. ***"Some say John the Baptist"*** – King Herod thought Jesus was John the Baptist come back from the dead. ***"Others say Elijah or that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."*** Those answers recognize Jesus as SOMEONE SPECIAL – even sent by God. But **none** of them go far enough. They don't confess that Jesus is the **eternal Son** of God and the **long-promised** Savior. A person whose faith stops short of that IS NOT a Christian.

"But what about YOU?" Jesus continued. ***"Who do YOU say I am?"*** Jesus addressed that question TO ALL the apostles and Peter answered FOR them all. Without any hesitation Peter confesses, ***"The Christ of God"*** – of as Matthew reports it, ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*** Peter's confession is TWO-FOLD. Jesus is not just a GREAT GUY but **God Himself** – the eternal Son of God born a true man. Jesus is ALSO ***"the Christ"*** – the **long-promised** Savior.

"Christ" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word **Messiah**. Christ – Messiah – both mean "the ANOINTED One." **Anointing** in the OT emphasized that GOD HAD CHOSEN and equipped this person to **carry out whatever** the job. Calling Jesus ***"the Christ"*** is confessing that GOD SENT Jesus to be our Savior and that God FULLY BACKS UP Jesus in His work as our Savior.

Jesus really is **God** Himself – the **Savior** of the world. Jesus wants the apostles to CLEARLY UNDERSTAND what this **confession means**. In fact, Jesus strictly orders them ***"not to tell this to anyone"*** at this time because people so misunderstood it. Many were looking for the WRONG KIND of Savior – one who would kick the Romans out of their country and give them an EASY and GLORIOUS life – yes, a HEAVEN ON EARTH.

That's not the Savior Jesus is. It was time for Jesus to CLEARLY SPELL things out for His disciples. ***"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and***

experts in the law. He must be killed and be raised on the third day." Not even Jesus would have an EASY here on earth. There was no avoiding the **cross** yet Jesus was CONFIDENT of the **victory**.

Jesus – God Himself – our Savior – ***"MUST suffer many things – be killed."*** That's the ***"must"*** of God's LOVE and FAITHFULNESS. Nobody can force God to do anything – He's GOD! Yet Jesus ***"must"*** suffer and die. He's compelled – forced – to do this BY HIS LOVE. He ***"must"*** do this **because** SO HE'S PROMISED and unlike us God NEVER GOES BACK on His promises.

Jesus ***"must suffer – die – be raised on the third day"*** because that's THE ONLY WAY we could be saved. The **cross** makes so clear JUST HOW SERIOUSLY **God takes** our sins. Nothing less than the "HOLY, innocent, bitter sufferings and death" of the ***"beloved Son"*** of God could fully pay for the sins of the world. There literally was HELL TO PAY for our sins and that's just what Jesus endured on the cross JUST AS He in love had promised to do for us.

"Who do YOU say Jesus is?" With Peter and all Christians we confess, ***"the Christ of God."*** He's our Savior! We TRUST IN Jesus for the forgiveness of all our sins and peace with God. We're RELYING ON Jesus to take us to heaven when we die. Jesus is ***"the Christ of God"*** and so we CAN BE ABSOLUTELY SURE we're forgiven and that we are going straight to heaven when we die. SO GOD SAYS and so He's promised us!

That Jesus ***"is the Christ of God"*** meant He COULDN'T AVOID the cross. That we confess Jesus to be ***"the Christ of God"*** means WE CAN'T AVOID the cross in our lives. We confess Jesus to **be our God and Savior** with our mouths AND…

II. With our daily lives.

Jesus had been OFF ALONE with His disciples but now there are others with them. ***"Jesus said to all of them*** (the disciples and the crowd), ***'If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'"***

Note well that WE DON'T SET THE TERMS for **being a Christian**. We don't tell God, "THIS IS HOW we're **going to do** this – take it or leave it!" We don't DICTATE to God how our relationship with Him will be – **as if** God should be happy we **even want** Him in our lives. We're the ones who should BE HAPPY – **thrilled!** – that God wants to STILL BE in **our** lives!

But people try to flip it **around**. They want to make God NOT THE CENTER of their lives but a convenience in their lives. God should be there **when we need** Him but otherwise He **shouldn't interfere** in our lives. God HELP me but don't try to CONTROL me. God love and forgive and take care of me but **don't try** to CHANGE me. God doesn't buy that for one minute!

"If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself." Think of Peter ***"denying"*** Jesus – ***"I don't know the Man!"*** Peter wanted NOTHING TO DO with Jesus – **don't** you dare associate me with Him!

"Let him deny HIMSELF" – his sinful nature. That **sinful nature** is SUCH A PART of our **everyday** lives. That sinful nature is so strong – so stubborn – so IN LOVE with **sin** – so hating God. **Every day** that sinful nature puts up SUCH A FIGHT trying to pull us **away** from God and **into sin**. Paul put it so well in Romans 7. ***"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. What a wretched man I am!"***

"Let him deny himself." This ISN'T OPTIONAL if we want to be Christians. When the **sinful nature** acts up we are to tell it to "SHUT UP!" – that we want nothing to do with it. As Christians we ***"no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died for us and was raised again."***

"Take up his cross." The ***"cross"*** is not the pains and problems of this life. Unbelievers also have pains and problems but they haven't ***"taken up the cross."*** The ***"cross"*** is the suffering – the problems, pains, etc. – that come our way JUST BECAUSE we **are Christians**. The ***"cross"*** can be PHYSICAL – emotional – spiritual suffering **just because** we're Christians. The ***"cross"*** can be being ridiculed for STICKING UP for what God's **Word clearly says** – HOLDING ON to God-pleasing morals and values. Someone you **know at work** – a friend – a RELATIVE – is living together with their girl/boyfriend – or they regularly skip church – their language is **filthy** – their priorities are all screwed up, etc. Do you keep quiet to KEEP PEACE in the family – at work – in the neighborhood – or do you make clear – do you confess – WHAT GOD SAYS about **whatever** it is? I'm not talking about being IN YOUR FACE obnoxious and **rude**. We can quietly – respectfully and IN A LOVING WAY **make clear** that we don't and can't approve of whatever **because** GOD DOESN'T approve of whatever. That may cause trouble for us **among the relatives** or at work. THAT is ***"the cross"*** of confessing Jesus to be ***"the Christ of God."*** Jesus doesn't give us the OPTION of not speaking up for Him OR keeping quiet about our **Christian faith** and **values**. What's MORE IMPORTANT to us – peace in the **family** or being faithful to our **Savior**?

"Let him deny himself, take up his cross DAILY." Did you catch that ***"daily"***? Every day it's a REAL STRUGGLE to confess Jesus **with our lives**. Every day it's a REAL BATTLE with the devil – the world – our sinful natures. They just don't believe in GIVING UP!

"And follow Me." **As Christians** we don't follow "THE CROWD." The crowds were all wrong about WHO Jesus is. ***"Following Jesus"*** often means going against POPULAR OPINION and that doesn't make you VERY POPULAR. Just remember whom we're ***"following"*** – Jesus. We're ***"following Jesus"*** in paths pleasing to God – ***"following"*** Jesus HOME to heaven. As we follow Jesus ***"day after day"*** He may WARN us – "Don't go there – don't believe that – don't fall for that – it will ONLY HURT you." **As we follow** Jesus He may call us, "STICK CLOSER to Me. You're getting too far AWAY from Me."

For Jesus were was NO AVOIDING the cross. Yet Jesus went to His **cross** CONFIDENT of the victory and glory of heaven. So too **for us** AS WE FOLLOW Jesus. That's no promise of an EASY LIFE now. There's no avoiding ***"the cross"*** in our lives UNLESS we want to ***"deny Jesus"*** instead of ***"ourselves."*** Yet we can follow Jesus and ***"take up our cross"*** CONFIDENT of the **victory** and the **glory** of heaven. We can be so confident because we are following Jesus – ***"the Christ of God."*** Amen.

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