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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“FOUR QUESTIONS”

Luke 9:18-26

- ? *Who do you say Jesus is?*
- ? *Do you trust in his cross and resurrection?*
- ? *Do you want to be a disciple of Jesus?*
- ? *Do you want to live?*

These questions are so simple a child can answer them quickly and easily. They are so profound that we can wrestle with them for decades.

- Please turn with me to Luke 9:18-20:

¹⁸ Once [as] Jesus [is] praying in private and his disciples [are] with him, he [asks] them, “Who do the crowds say I am?”

¹⁹ They [reply], “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”

Let’s pause here. Did you catch what the crowds are *not* saying about Jesus?

- There is compelling evidence that some in this crowd *used* to call him “Messiah” – but not anymore. Not since he began to prophesy his death, and to teach that eternal life depends on believing in him and sharing in his death and resurrection. **“From this time [on] many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him”** (Jonn 6:66). Many still accept Jesus as a good and

powerful man, a prophet sent from God – but not as Messiah.

Does any of this sound familiar?

- Now, verse 20: **“But what about you?”** Jesus asks, **“Who do you say I am?”** Peter replies, **“God’s Messiah.”**

○ {Heb 4:12, TNIV / NLT} **“The word of God is alive and active.”** Scripture does not lie inert on the page, passively waiting for us to dissect it; it **“penetrates”** our **“soul and spirit... [judging] the thoughts and attitudes of the heart,”** “[exposing] us for what we really are.”

? As this text enters our ears and eyes, Christ speaks to us as surely as he spoke to Peter. He asks, **“Who do you say I am?”**

Allow me three observations.

↘ 1st, this question is inescapable. Once you come up against it, it is like an obstacle in the “Bear Hunt” song: you can’t go around it, can’t go over it, can’t go under it, you have got to go through it.

How you answer is up to you. But you cannot bypass the question.

↘ 2nd, this question is unceasing. It is not like a simple addition problem that we complete once and put away. It is more like a never-ending quest, and if we are to go deeper in and further up we must keep wrestling with it.

↘ 3rd, this question is pivotal. Our answers draw us near to, or push us away from Jesus. They pull us closer into, or push us further out of, alignment with {Jn

14:6) **“the way and the truth and the life.”** I am reminded of Robert Frost’s poem, “The Road Not Taken”:

**Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could...**

**Then took the other....
...I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.**

**I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.**

Who do you say Jesus is?

■ Moving on to Luke 9:21-22, ²¹ **“Jesus strictly [warns] them not to tell this to anyone. ²² And he [says], ‘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.’”**

? Jesus asks, *Do you trust my death and resurrection?*

● {Mt 16:22} Peter doesn’t, not at first. According to Matthew and Mark, **“Peter [rebukes] [Jesus]. ‘Never, Lord!’ he [says]. ‘This shall never happen to you!’”**

● {Mt 16:23} This is not an outburst of love and loyalty. **“Jesus [turns] and [says] to Peter: ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’”** {NLT} **“You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, and not from God’s.”**

○ {1 Co 1:18, 22-23} Paul nails it when he writes: **“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.”**

These aren’t exclusive ethnic categories. Many Gentiles refuse to trust God unless he uses his power to deliver them from earthly hardship, disease, and grief. They demand their Best Life Now, and to them the cross looks like shameful defeat.

Likewise, many non-Greeks refuse to accept divine truth unless they can fit it neatly into their philosophical system and corroborate it by the scientific method. They demand earthly wisdom, and to them the cross looks like superstitious nonsense.

○ {1 Co 1:24} **“But,”** Paul adds, **“to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks”** it is **“the power of God and the wisdom of God.”**

What about you? Do you trust Christ’s death and resurrection?

■ Luke 9:23: “Then he [says] to them all: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’”

? Jesus asks us, *Do you want to be my disciple?*
Allow me to make three observations.

✎ 1st, this cross is integral to discipleship. If we say “Yes” to Jesus, we are saying “Yes” to a cross. “Whoever wants to be my disciple *must...take up their cross.*”

✎ 2nd, this cross hinges on death to self-will, self-interest, and self-seeking. “Whoever wants to be my disciple *must deny themselves.*”

✎ 3rd, this cross requires an ongoing decision. “Whoever wants to be my disciple *must deny themselves and take up their cross daily.*”

Do you want to be his disciple? Will you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow him?

Right about now, someone is thinking: Way to sell discipleship! Sign me up!

■ But don’t stop listening. Hear the Word of the Lord in verses 24-26:

²⁴ **whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.** ²⁵

What good is it for you to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit your very self? ²⁶ If any of you are ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.’”

? Jesus asks, *Do you want to live?*

✎ This is the really Good News: {Jn 10:10} Jesus has come that we “**may have life, and have it to the full.**” Cross-carrying opens us up to receive the abundant, eternal life of Christ!

○ Romans 6:3-5:

Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

{Bonhoeffer} “**When Christ calls a man [a woman, a child], he bids him come and die**” – so that we might live!

A young pastor was martyred in Zimbabwe some years ago. Here is an excerpt from a note he left behind:

....The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I won’t look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure.

I am finished and done with low living, sight-walking, smooth knees, colorless dreams, chained visions, worldly talking, cheap living and warped goals.

I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean in His presence, walk by patience, am uplifted by prayer, and I labor with power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is Heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions are few, my guide is reliable, my mission is clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the enemy, pander at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, or let up until I have prayed up and paid up for the cause of Jesus.

I confess, literal martyrdom holds no appeal to me.
But I long for that kind of life, and how!!

Do you want to live?

Who do you say Jesus is?

Do you trust in the cross and resurrection?

Do you want to be a disciple of Jesus?

Do you want to live?

Christ Jesus is asking us these questions today.
How will we answer?