



A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Luke 9:7-9; 9:18-22; 9:28-36

He meant it as a compliment.

Larry Danner, a seminary brother, and I went to listen to our favorite Bible teacher...Dr. J. Vernon McGee. He was visiting a church in Dallas and we had listened to him for years on the radio and had received a pretty solid Bible education through his radio ministry.

We idolized him for his faithfulness to the Word and for his simplicity. He was so clear. That doesn't mean, looking back, that I agreed with everything Dr. McGee taught. I didn't and don't but you ought not to think that that got in the way of my affection for him...it didn't.

Anyway, we went over to Dallas to hear him speak and he delivered a wonderful message on the Epistle to Philemon. I still remember the title. It was, "The Apostle Paul Used a Credit Card." I have preached on Philemon myself and I when I did I used his title, "The Apostle Paul Used a Credit Card" as a sign of my respect for him.

Now the sermon was based on the fact that Paul asked Philemon to forgive his runaway slave Onesimus and take him back and he asked him to do so on the basis of the fact that he owed his life to Paul. Paul had evangelized Philemon you see. Anyway, Paul writes to Philemon and says, "Whatever Onesimus owes you...still owes on the basis of his having run away...charge that to me and I will repay it."

It was Paul's way of Philemon that he too had some debts that had not been payed and that he ought to forgive Onesimus.

Anyway, Dr. McGee then went on to explain that all that we owed God in terms of obedience and payment for our sin against him was ultimately charged to the Lord Jesus on the cross. The way Dr. McGee did that was just so lovely...I cannot adequately express to you how much it affected me.

I thought it was the best sermon I had ever heard in my life and Larry thought the same. After the service we got in line to go and shake Dr. McGee's hand and when our turn finally came, Larry reached out his hand to shake Dr. McGee's hand and said, "**Dr. McGee, I know you always say on the radio that H.A. Ironside was the greatest Bible teacher of the 20th century but I have to tell you I don't see how that could be right. I think you are the best Bible teacher of the 20th century.**"

Like I said earlier, he meant it as a compliment.

Anyway, Dr. McGee without so much as a smile asked Larry, "**And did you ever hear Dr. Ironside preach?**" He knew, of course, that we were both too young to have ever heard him in person and that it was unlikely that we had ever had the

chance to listen to any of the handful of recordings made of his preaching before he died.

Larry gulped and finally said, **“Well no. I never had the privilege to actually hear Dr. Ironside preach.”**

“Ah,” answered Dr. McGee, **“there you go.”**

It was Dr. McGee’s polite way of saying, **“You don’t really know what you’re talking about because you didn’t really know him or who he was. As a result, of course, what you think is so uninformed that it is not worth very much.”**

Now I wanted to tell you that story because it reflects much the same kind of thing going on in our text this morning. You see in Luke 9, Luke is very concerned that readers come away with an accurate sense of who Jesus Christ really is. Another way to say that is that the Luke 9 addresses the issue of who Jesus is three separate times and each time he addresses the question the quality and authority of the witnesses improve.

Now it shouldn’t surprise you that Luke has three separate stories or pericopes concerned with the same thing. We noticed last week that Luke likes the number three. We remembered together that in Luke 15, there are three lost things...a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. And when they were recovered the owners of each rejoiced with great rejoicing and the reason they are mentioned in the first place is to explain how God feels about repentant sinners...that is He rejoices when that which is lost is found.

Then in the sermon last week from Luke 5, we noticed three groups of experts...a Galilean fisherman, a Levitical priest that specialized in leprosy, and some Jewish experts on the law and the reason they are mentioned in the first place is to demonstrate the surpassing wisdom of the Lord Jesus.

Now we have the same sort of thing going on here in Luke 9 this morning. We are going to see the issue of the identity of the Lord Jesus come up in the text three separate times. Now the arrangement is from the lesser to the greater. What I mean by that is that the least important witness will be first and the most important witness will be last but that too is common in Luke.

You might want to think of it as something like a trial in which three groups of witnesses are called with the "star witness" coming at the very end.

Now let add one more thing and then we'll dig into the text itself. Luke 9:1-36 contains six paragraphs. Three of the paragraphs are concerned with the nature of Christ's disciples and three are concerned with the identity of Jesus. I am especially grateful to Alister Begg for pointing out that fact in one of his sermons. It helps immensely to understand the passage's structure.

If you wanted to mark the paragraphs in your Bible you could say that Luke 9: 1-6 is concerned with the nature of discipleship.

Luke 9: 7-9 is concerned with who Jesus is.

Luke 9:1-17 is concerned with the nature of discipleship.

Luke 9: 18-22 is concerned with who Jesus is.

Luke 9:123-27 is concerned with the nature of discipleship.

And Luke 9: 28-36 is concerned with who Jesus is.

Let me say it another way.

Paragraphs 1, 3, and 5 explore the nature of discipleship.

Paragraphs 2, 4 and 6 explore the identity of Jesus.

The two ideas are more or less interwoven like layers of a sandwich. If you will keep that in mind it will really help you to see the structure of the passage and Luke's overall argument.

Now that having been said, let's look at the second paragraph and the first question raised concerning who Jesus is. Look with me at Luke 9:7.

^{ESV} **Luke 9:7**...Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, ⁸ by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. ⁹ Herod said, "**John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?**" And he sought to see him.

Now the Herod mentioned here is not the same Herod that killed the babies around Bethlehem at the birth of Christ. That was the Herod's father...Herod the Great. Nor is he the Herod Agrippa that will later on be mentioned in the Book of Acts. Herod Agrippa was Herod the Great's grandson and this particular Herod's nephew. This is Herod Antipas, one of Herod the Great's few surviving sons. He was a vile human toad that later became the ethnarch or ruler of the province of Galilee. He is the same Herod that committed incest by marrying his brother's wife and he is the same Herod who locked up John the Baptist for

preaching about his sin. In fact, he was a lecherous old goat that caved in to Salome's request to give her John the Baptist's head on a plate after she performed some sort of erotic dance in front of him... a dance that caused him to offer to give her whatever she asked.

Now the text says that he heard about what was happening and that caused him to wonder who it was that was doing such things and the question is, of course, "What things?"

The immediately preceding verses answer that question. You see the thing that caught his attention was the itinerant ministry of Christ's disciples. They were out preaching and healing people and huge crowds were coming to listen to them and to Jesus and that caught Herod's attention so much so that he began to wonder who Jesus was. And when he asked around, he found there were three prevailing ideas about who Jesus might be. One group thought Jesus was John the Baptist. Another group thought he was Elijah come back from heaven and a third group was less sure and wondered whether he might be one of the prophets from old come back to life...someone perhaps like Moses.

Now I want you to notice his response to what he heard. You can see in verse 9.

^{ESV} **Luke 9:9...Herod said, "John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?"** And he sought to see him.

The one thing Herod was sure of is that Jesus was not John the Baptist. He knew that because he had killed John the Baptist himself. John had pointed out that Herod's relationship to his wife was an incestuous one...he had stolen his

brother's wife and Herod didn't like John the Baptist pointing that fact out so he locked him up in prison and eventually had him beheaded.

Notice one more thing. Herod wanted to see Jesus for himself. Look at the end of verse 9.

^{ESV} **Luke 9:9**... And he sought to see him.

The tense of the verb in Greek is such that it means he constantly wanted to see Jesus.

Now you ought not to think that Herod wanted to inquire into the faith or anything like that. Herod wanted to be entertained...to be wowed. He wanted to see Jesus do tricks. We know that because of Luke 23.

Let me set the scene for you.

Jesus had been arrested by the Romans in the Garden of Gethsemane and had stood before Pontius Pilate and had so frustrated Pilate that Pilate decided to send him over to Herod, the ruler of Galilee, who just happened to be in Jerusalem for the Passover.

Luke 23: 8 says...

^{ESV} **Luke 23:8**...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.

But Jesus refused to perform for Herod. In fact, he said nothing to Herod at all. And when Jesus refused to talk to him Herod grew tired of his obstinacy mocked him and treated him with contempt and dressed him in royal robes and sent him back to Pilate.

But all that was still in the future.

What we have here in Luke 9 is Herod wondering who Jesus is and not ever really coming to an answer. I think it is fair to say that Herod is not sure who Jesus is...but he is sure about who Jesus is not. That is, he is sure Jesus is not John the Baptist.

Now the next paragraph, paragraph three, contains the story of the feeding of the 5,000. I don't want to spend any time on the passage right now though it is a wonderful passage because I want to focus on this question of the identity of Jesus. But let me say one thing...Jesus makes it clear in paragraph three that the nature of discipleship is to feed seekers and I don't just mean physically. Jesus does that but it is a metaphor for giving to hungry seekers the bread of life. You can tell that when Jesus sharply rebukes the disciples for trying to send the crowds away by telling, **"You give them something to eat!"**

Now after Jesus feeds the 5,000, he goes off to pray and takes the disciples with him. When he finished praying, Jesus asked them a question. The question is asked is recorded in verse 18.

^{ESV} **Luke 9:18**...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?"**

The disciples answer the question in verse 19 and their answer is basically the same answer that Herod had heard and that is that most people thought that was either John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets of old risen from the dead.

Look at verse 19.

^{ESV} **Luke 9:19**...And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen."

And then Jesus reframes the question and changes it. He turns his attention away from the crowds to the disciples themselves. That is he asks them what they think...that is, he asks who they think he is.

Without hesitation, Peter answers the question at end of verse 20 in one of the most memorable lines in all of Scripture.

^{ESV} **Luke 9:20**...Then he said to them, "**But who do you say that I am?**" And Peter answered, "**The Christ of God.**"

Now that word "Christ" is not a part of Jesus name. If he had had a birth certificate it would not have said Jesus Christ. It would have said Jesus ben Joseph or Jesus ben Mary or perhaps even Jesus ben David but there would have been no mention of the word "Christ". You see the word "Christ" is a title. It is a title like "Lord Jesus" is a title. It would have been more proper to say Jesus the Christ than just Jesus Christ.

Now the word "Christ" means something like "the anointed one" or "messenger". It is a Greek word that had come to mean the same thing as the

Hebrew word “Messiah and there were all kinds of hopes and expectation connected to the idea of the “Messiah”. Those were ideas sprang from many, many Old Testament prophecies...prophecies like Psalm 2 or Psalm 22.

Usually, Messianic hopes centered on the idea of strength and deliverance. In other words, most Messianic prophecies concerned a strong, charismatic leader delivering God’s people from their enemies and oppression. It is true, on the other hand, that there were also many prophecies about a future suffering...suffering on behalf of the people of God. Still, the dominant thought in Jesus day focused on the Messiah as a deliverer...a deliverer like Moses.

That is where the disciples got their preconceived notions about what the Messiah or the Christ would accomplish. They reasoned that if the Messiah was going to deliver his people from oppression that had to mean, at the very least, that he was going to deliver them from the Romans. That is why they chafed at any suggestion that Jesus might have to suffer.

That is why Jesus says what he says in verse 21. You see, he wanted to make it clear to the disciples that his actual work was going to be a lot different than what they expected.

He wanted to explain to them that his work involved shame, and suffering and death on the cross.¹ Look at how he puts it in verse 21.

^{ESV} **Luke 9:21...** And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, ²² saying, **"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 day be raised."**

On the one hand, the disciple's inability to understand what Jesus was saying about his future suffering is one of the great mysteries of the New Testament. It is hard to understand why they could not understand what he said about his impending suffering and death on the cross...especially when he said it so plainly.

On the other hand, perhaps it shouldn't really surprise us all that much. I mean we have certain expectations of Jesus as well. We expect him to do this or that and when he does things differently than what we expect or ask we are often disappointed. I have seen people leave the faith over some unfulfilled expectation. We shouldn't think that the disciples were much different than we are in terms of their expectation.

Still Jesus gave them props to prop up their weak faith just as he does us today. You can see that in verse 27.

^{ESV} **Luke 9:27**...But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

You see in this promise, Jesus tells them that some of them will not die before they see the glorious kingdom of God. Now the ultimate fulfillment of that promise has to do with the resurrection but there is a very real sense in which our last paragraph...paragraph 6...the one contained in verses 28-36...also fulfills this promise.

^{ESV} **Luke 9:28**...Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was

praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.

Now the first thing you ought to notice about the passage is that there are three disciples present. It seems clear to me that these three disciples made up something of an inner circle within the disciples. But the fact that there are three of them there is more important than that. Calvin makes the point that in important instances of testimony it is very important to have two or three witnesses. He says that on the basis of Deuteronomic law.

What is fascinating about this passage is that you wind up having three witnesses bear witness to three witnesses.

Anyway, the text says that Jesus face and clothes became dazzling white. That is, he began to shine...the actual Greek expression is that he began to shine like lightning. Now if you have ever watched a thunder storm on a dark night you can understand something of just how dramatic his appearance must have been.

You see, the Father in heaven was transfiguring the Son with something of his pre-incarnate glory...that is, he was permitting the disciples to see something of the glory that Christ possessed before coming to earth. In fact, the Father Himself was weighing in on the question about who Jesus was.

But verse 30 tells us there were also two other witnesses.

^{ESV} **Luke 9:30**...And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure², which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now I have no idea how they knew the two men were Moses and Elijah...but they did. But here's what I want you to notice. They appeared in glorious attire themselves and were speaking to him about his departure...the one he was to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now that word for departure is not the typical Greek word used for leaving one place for another. It is a specialized word. It is the word, "exodus".

What you have here is Moses...the great prophet of God who led God's people in the exodus from Egypt...speaking to the Lord Jesus about the exodus he himself is about to make.

What you have here is Elijah...the great prophet of God who contended against the servants of Baal on the mountain speaking to the incarnate Son of God who is about to contend with sinfulness of mankind on Calvary.

But why Moses and Elijah?

Moses is the great lawgiver and Elijah is the premier prophet of the Old Testament kingdom. What you have in Moses and Elijah is the perfect representation of the law and the prophets bearing witness to the identity of Jesus.

Now, the remaining verses of the passage contain Peter's strange response to the presence of Moses and Elijah. Notice the disciples were very sleepy but they finally woke up and understood all that was going on.

^{ESV} **Luke 9:32**...Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.³ ³³ And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents⁴, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"--not knowing what he said.

The tents to which Peter is referring here are the ceremonial booths that the Jews used to set up during the feast of tabernacles. They were booths...usually made from the fronds or leaves of palm trees and were supposed to remind the Israelites of their wilderness wanderings...that is, they were supposed to remind the Israelites that they had wandered around in the desert for forty years until the Lord God brought them into the land of Canaan.

I think what Peter really wanted was to preserve the moment. I think what he wanted was to keep things as they were...to set up shelters or booths for Moses, Elijah and Jesus. He seemed to miss the point altogether that Jesus was moving toward Jerusalem and that there would be no rest now for Jesus until he provided permanent rest for his people.

Still, what Peter is asking to do is interrupted by a final witness...a witness that needed no corroboration. For in that moment, a cloud came down and covered them over. That cloud was the same cloud that came down and filled the tabernacle and later on the temple in Jerusalem. It is the same cloud that covered the top of Sinai. It was the cloud that covered the glory of the presence of God Almighty and from the cloud boomed forth the voice of God the Father.

^{ESV} **Luke 9:34**...As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One⁵; listen to him!"⁶ ³⁶ And when

the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

Now the Father says two things about Jesus. First, He says that Jesus is His chosen one. It is almost certainly a reference to Isaiah 42 where God says:

^{ESV} **Isaiah 42:1**...Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ² He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³ a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴ He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth;

But the Father does not stop there. He goes on to command the disciples to listen to Jesus which is almost certainly a reference to Deuteronomy 18:15 where Moses says:

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 18:15**..."The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers--it is to him you shall listen--

You see the Father is bearing testimony to identity of the Lord Jesus. He is doing what Moses and Elijah and the whole of the Old Testament does. He is showing him to be the suffering servant who will bear the sin of his people and because Jesus does that he is endowed with glory and honor and authority and is to be obeyed and listened to is all that he commands.

Now my question for you this morning is this, "Is that the Jesus you follow? Is your Jesus the Jesus of the Bible or is he the inoffensive Jesus of our modern culture?" My prayer for you this morning is that you will come to embrace fully the Christ of Scripture...as the incarnate Son of God who loved us and bore our

sin on the cross as a propitiation to turn aside God's wrath and that doing so you will come to love him as he is.

We have the collective witness of Peter through the Holy Spirit. We have the witness of Elijah and of Moses. And we have the witness of the Father Himself concerning His precious Son. Ought that not to be enough to convince even the deadest heart?

When I think about that, I think of the story of the minister who at the turn of the century visited England. On Sunday morning, he visited the chapel of a very famous preacher. He listened to the eloquent style and marvelous vocabulary of this famous minister and when the service was over, he noted the many comments of the parishioners as they left the service. He summarized their comments as a group by saying,

"My, what a wonderful preacher we have."

Later that night, this same visiting minister went to hear Spurgeon preach. And Spurgeon proclaimed the full fury of the Law and then the marvelous sweetness of the Gospel. As the congregation left the Metropolitan Tabernacle, he noted that the response was somewhat different. When pressed by his friends upon arriving home, he stated that Spurgeon's parishioners exclaimed to a man, woman, and child,

"My, what a wonderful Savior we have."

Let that be our prayer as we study, work, and pray and consider the full weight of just who Jesus is.

Let's pray.

¹ Thomas W. Martin, "What Makes Glory Glorious? Reading Luke's Account of the Transfiguration Over Against Triumphalism" in the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29 no 1 S 2006, p 3-26. He writes, "Here is another case where the meaning of the story is connected with its context, which the person listening in the pew will not have heard. Jesus has just revealed his messiahship to his disciples and then foretold his death, a shocking and discouraging prospect. In the midst of these tumultuously conflicting feelings the three disciples join Jesus on the mountain.

Note that the transfiguration takes place during prayer, while Jesus is in close contact with the Father, a detail Luke alone notes.

Note also that Peter gets it wrong. He proposes to build three booths—we suppose to set up a persuasive tourist attraction—"not knowing what he said," as Luke adds. Peter's ignorance is not his failure to recognize the need for Jesus to return to the valley to continue his way to Jerusalem and the cross. Peter's mistake is his proposal to build three booths, as if Jesus now joins the triumvirate with the other two as the three main biblical figures. **No, the point of the story is that Jesus is alone the culmination of the law and the prophets, the finale, so to speak, of the biblical drama. Had Peter proposed one booth, Jesus would not have accepted, but at least Peter's suggestion would have accurately understood the scene.**"

² I Howard Marshall, *NIGNT Commentary on Luke*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1978), 384. He writes, "It is Jesus' *ἐξόδου*, literally, 'departure'. The word is used of the 'departure *par excellence*', the Exodus from Egypt (Heb. 11:22), and euphemistically of death (Wis. 3:2; 7:6; cf. 2 Pet. 1:15, significantly in the context of an allusion to the transfiguration). But the precise force here is uncertain; it may refer to: 1. simply the death of Jesus (W. Michaelis, TDNT V, 107; Schürmann, I, 558); 2. the whole event of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension as his departure to heaven (cf. 9:51; Zahn, 383); 3. the death of Jesus as an act of salvation, repeating the Exodus conducted by Moses (J. Mánek, 'The New Exodus in the Books of Luke', Nov.T 2, 1955, 8–23); 4. the whole life of Jesus as a 'way' which leads from his *εισοδος* (Acts 13:24) to its conclusion in Jerusalem. Although the accent is firmly on the death of Jesus, we should probably not exclude the thoughts of the resurrection of Jesus and of the saving significance of the event."

³ Marshall, 385. He writes, "It follows that there were no witnesses to the conversation described by Luke, so that its content must have been later disclosed by Jesus or has been sympathetically supplied by the narrator. Nevertheless, the disciples did awake. The verb can also mean 'to remain awake', and this possibility deserves consideration, in which case the sense would be that although the disciples were extremely sleepy they nevertheless managed to stay awake. But the sense is unaffected; in either case, the disciples failed to take in the message about the 'exodus' and only saw the glory of Jesus and the fact that he was accompanied by the two men standing with him; the prophecy of glory in 9:26 is substantiated."

⁴ Referring to booths or tabernacles related to the wilderness wanderings...cf. Marshall, 386. Peter wanted to prolong the experience.

⁵ **ESV Isaiah 42:1**...Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

⁶ **ESV Deuteronomy 18:15**..."The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers--it is to him you shall listen—