

I. Quotes

- A. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- B. A man once joked, “I don’t mind being a servant of Jesus Christ, I just don’t want to be treated like one.”
- C. Either Jesus is Lord of our life or we are. We cannot have it both ways. Ron Ritchie

II. Introduction

- A. A couple years ago I went to Turkey with a friend to visit a number of Biblical sites. The writers of the Bible did not refer to Turkey as Turkey, they called it Asia Minor. So many are surprised to learn how many of the Biblical sites – Paul’s hometown or Tarsus, the places he planted a number of churches – e.g., Galatia, Ephesus, Colossae – the location of most of the seven churches mentioned in the first few chapters of Revelation – are all in Turkey.
- B. After a couple long day with our guide – a very kind Muslim man who we’d pried with all kinds of questions – we were dropped off at a hotel in the center of Istanbul and coached to be very careful if we went out that night.
- C. We did. We walked through Taksim Square (the center of town) where we saw lots of families and felt quite safe, although we were aware that something was up, especially when we came across a group of young people who were signing people up for something. The air was charged. We decided that this was either some sort of political rally or one of the highest-pressure multi-level marketing programs we’d ever been around. It turned out it was political. In fact, three weeks later these young people launched a massive protest that spread throughout the country – and the very place we were standing was pictured on the nightly news every day for the next month.
- D. Revolutions have to be about something – you do not get people to riot just to riot. The protest in Turkey was about the government’s step towards Islam; the American Revolution was protest against “taxation without representation;” the French Revolution was ostensibly against an old way of life and thinking and for human rights: liberty, equality and fraternity; the Cultural Revolution in China (along with the Communist Revolution in Russia) was supposedly also about equality and “for the people,” although it was anything but. Hundreds of millions died at the hands of their own government.

- E. As a rule, those revolutions that promise the most good do the most bad. Christ’s revolution stands as an exception to this. A second way that what Christ launched is different is that it was not (is not) organized around an idea or an ideal as much as it is organized around a person. This is also one of the principal ways Christianity is different from all of the religions out there. In the end it has less to do with the teachings of the founder than it does with who he is and what he does.
- F. We see some of this in the passage that was read for you – which contains Peter’s famous Confession that Jesus is God.
- III. Before we work our way through that passage, let me offer a few higher level observations.
- A. First, though we are not positive, we think we are now into the third year of Christ’s ministry. Jesus has been traveling around Galilee (in the North) preaching. Today’s text brings us to the highpoint of his time there. Very soon he will turn toward Jerusalem and start the long and final march there.
- B. This does not mean we are most of the way through Luke. We are not. We still have lots to go because: 1) we still have the teaching sections – and Luke includes lots of Parables; and 2) the last week of Christ’s life takes up one-third of the book.
- C. Finally, it’s also worth noting that though Luke gives us an “orderly” account – a chronological one; he does not give us an exhaustive one. By looking at the other two Synoptic Gospels we can tell that he has left a number of things out¹ -- between the feeding of the Five Thousand and Peter’s Confession he travels around a fair bit. It’s likely that Luke has left these out to answer Herod’s question: who is Jesus. The answer comes by lining up: the feeding of the 5,000 – which demonstrates Christ’s power and compassion; Peter’s Confession – which offers a straight answer; and then the Transfiguration – where we get to peak behind the veil and see Jesus in his glory.
- IV. With that said, let’s walk through this passage. Luke 9:
- A. **¹⁸ Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him**

¹ To discover what Luke left out, read Matthew 14:22 – 16:12, Mark 6:45-8:26 and parts of John 6. Why would Luke chose to leave anything out? 1) He cannot completely cover all of Christ’s life. He is directing us to the parts that are the most important; 2) He appears to want to answer Herod’s question and feels as though the Feeding of the Five Thousand and Peter’s Confession do that quite well; 3) it is likely that he was bumping up against the limits of one scroll – on which it would have been written. (Luke’s is the longest Gospel).

1. In Luke 11 – which we’ll get to shortly after Easter – the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray. They obviously recognize Christ’s prayer practices as part of his power and wisdom. They want to know how he does it. We’ll be pausing there for a brief series on prayer. There’s a lot to learn there. Right now I’ll simply note that Jesus was always getting up early, staying up late or slipping away from others in order to pray. He makes prayer a priority and part of the normal course of events. He would certainly affirm the 10 + 10 we talk about, though I suspect he would see it as a bit anemic. He models something much more robust than that. And as we are about to see, Jesus seldom made small asks – which I am guilty of. Ten minutes of Bible reading and ten minutes of prayer is not much. Jesus didn’t make those appeals. He has a big one coming up.²

B. V18: Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?”

1. The Greek term used here refers to the “uncommitted masses.”³ Jesus asks what they are thinking. One of two things is happening here:

a) First, either Jesus didn’t follow much social media. He didn’t know what was trending at the moment – what Tweets were being retweeted – so he turned to the disciples for a little market research. After all, they were just back from their first mission and had obviously heard some things. So he asked them, “What did you hear?”

b) Or, Jesus knew what was being said about him, but he wanted to talk about “the question.” He wanted to force them to think about who he was.

2. For the record, there are questions – who will win today’s game – and there are QUESTIONS. The second question Jesus asks: who do you understand me to be – is The Question.

a) This is the question Herod asked in the first verses of this chapter.
Who is this man?

² There is a second thing to note here: Jesus was always training them as a matter of course. Here he is modeling what He is asking from them. The text says that He is praying in private and that his disciples were with him. They are looking on.

³ In Mark (8:27f) and Mt (16:13f) they use the term men (anthropoid); Luke uses crowd (ochloi).

b) This is the question behind the question Larry King said is the question he’d most like to ask. Just before he retired King was asked who he’d most like to interview and what question would he ask. He said he wished he could have interviewed the Virgin Mary, and he would have asked her if it was really a Virgin birth (virgin conception,; because if it was, then that ultimately answered the question about Jesus.

c) Years ago, Charles Malik wrote a book entitled, *A Christian Critique of the University*. Malik was quite an impressive man

(1) He had a PhD from Harvard; he had held numerous teaching positions in the US and Lebanon; he had written on all kind of topics in journals in the US, Europe and Near East; he had been awarded fifty honorary doctorates from all of the most impressive schools; and he was the only person in the history of the UN to hold the top five spots: 1) President of the General Assembly; 2 & 3) President of both the Economic and Social Councils; 4) President of the Security Council; and 5) Chairman of the Human Rights Commission

(2) In his book, *A Christian Critique of the University* – he argues that there are seven major institutions in society (the family, the church, the state, business, professions, the media and the university). He then argues of these the University is the most important because it shapes all of the others, and then asks: what does Jesus think of the University?

3. Obviously, Malik had answered the question in his own mind. Jesus is the most important person of all time – and Jesus is also God. Let me just say, there are variations on a theme, but the question of all time is: who is Jesus. And your answer not only affects your beliefs and lifestyle, it affects your destiny.

4. There is a sense in which Luke has been answering this question all along.

a) In Luke 2 we get the answer of the angels and two saints – Jesus is the Messiah;⁴ in Luke 3 we get the answer of John the Baptist – Jesus is the Lamb of God; in Luke 4 we hear from Satan, who calls Jesus “the Son of God;” in chapter five, Peter calls Jesus Lord; in chapter seven Jesus is identified by a sinful woman; in chapter 8 a demon announces that He is “the Son of the Most High.”

b) If you read Luke you find Jesus referred to as: the Son of God; the King, Savior, Christ, Lord, the Holy One, the Son of Man and the Son of the Most High.

5. Luke is making the answer as clear as he can. Here Jesus raises it for the disciples to answer.

C. Who do the crowds say I am? V19: Some say John the Baptist.

1. Remember, John the Baptist (Christ’s cousin) had been the big deal just before Jesus. Thousands had come out to hear him preach. As part of God’s plan, John was there to help prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah.⁵

D. ¹⁹They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah

⁴ The saints are Simeon and Anna – who announced that the baby is the Messiah

⁵ John called on people to be baptized as an act of preparation. Baptism after Christ has a different function – it is a sacrament, a visual sermon representing what has happened to you. (Going under the water suggests dying with Christ; coming up represents rising with him from the dead; and the whole thing suggests being cleansed of your sin.) Christian baptism does not secure our salvation – our sins are not literally washed away. But, there is no New Testament example of a Christ-follower who has not been baptized.

1. Elijah will get more ink in next week’s sermon when he shows up with Moses at the Transfiguration. Jesus will take Peter, James and John further up the mountain and there, along with Moses and Elijah, He will appear in great splendor. Peter – the young Peter – will make a bit of a fool of himself. That’s next week. The point at this moment is: Moses will be there as the premier Law guy. (He’s the one who came down from the Mountain with the Ten Commandments); and Elijah was there as the premier prophet. He went toe-to-toe with Ahab and Jezebel and then the 800 prophets of Baal.⁶ He’s a big deal in the Old Testament. And John the Baptist figuratively steps into his role, fulfilling the prophecy from Malachi.

E. What are people saying about me? Who do they say that I am? V19: “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”

1. This is essentially the same list brought up by Herod Antipas earlier in the chapter when he asked, “Who is this man?”

F. ²⁰“But what about you?” Jesus asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”

1. You are the Christ. (Christ is not Jesus’s last name. It’s a title. It means Messiah.) You are the Anointed One; the *Christos* – all of which points back to Isaiah 61, which Jesus preached out of back in chapter four. Remember, he went into the synagogue, read out of Isaiah 61 and then said, “This is about me.”?

2. It’s also worth noting that the way it’s framed here – you are God’s Messiah – is an interesting possessive, and takes us back to Luke 2, when Simeon (the old man at the temple) claimed that God had promised him that he wouldn’t see death until he had seen “the Lord’s Christ” (using the same possessive construct).⁷

3. So to the question Jesus asks, Peter says, “You are The One. You are our Savior. You are The One that God promised to send all the way back in Genesis.”

⁶ I Kings 18

⁷ The book of Hebrews also identifies Jesus as “the Lord’s Messiah.”

G. And how does Jesus respond? Does he say, “No! No! No! That is too much! That’s blasphemy.” He does not. He agrees. In fact, in Matthew’s account – chapter 16 – Jesus says:

1. “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Then he changes Peter’s name from Simon to Peter – which means “rock.”

2. In Alpha this past week I read a great quote from C.S. Lewis. In an effort to point out that Jesus is unique, Lewis notes that there is only one person who overlaps between two groups: the first group are those people who have founded a major religious movements; the second group are those who claim to be God – almost all of whom are institutionalized. The one person who is in both groups is Jesus. Lewis writes:

a) “There is no half-way house, and no parallel in other religions. If you had gone to Buddha and asked him, ‘Are you the son of Brahma?’ he would have said, ‘My son, you are still in the veil of illusion.’ If you had gone to Socrates and asked, ‘Are you Zeus?’ he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Muhammad and asked, ‘Are you Allah?’ he would have first rent his clothes and then cut off your head.” But when Jesus asked Peter who Peter thought he was, and Peter responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus agreed.

H. V21: Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone.

1. So, Peter gets the right answer, but Jesus tells him to keep it quiet. What’s up with that? There are a few reasons, but the big one is this: it was the wrong time. The Jews were very frustrated by the Roman occupation and so they were looking for a Messiah in the image of David – someone who would lead them in battle over the Romans. Jesus was not interested in meeting those expectations.⁸

⁸ At least two other ideas have been put forward: 1) Jesus did not want to claim the title; he wanted to earn it first and then have others ascribe it to him; 2) He was prepared to move on – to withdraw the offer from those who have continued to reject it / Him. As in John 12, Jesus was ushering in a judicial judgment. He was hiding the truth from people who had already confirmed their rejection of it. The preaching assignment he had sent the disciples on was his last effort to reach the Jews living in the area. God has His limits. And when hardness is final, the message is withdrawn. If you will not believe the time will come when you cannot believe.

2. If you read through the Old Testament you see three different types or categories of prophecies about the Messiah. 1) there were images of the Messiah as a strong, powerful general or leader – like King David. This is the one the Jews focused on; 2) there were images – like Isaiah 53 – of the Messiah as a “suffering servant;” and 3) there were mystical descriptions of the Messiah.

3. The Jews focused on the first, and until Jesus showed up no one was trying to put all three together. How could you combine a strong, conquering hero and one who suffers? Like so many of the Messianic prophecies, it doesn’t make sense until Jesus comes along.

4. So, anyway, Jesus was the Messiah, but He needed more time to explain what that meant.

I. ²² And he said, “The Son of Man

1. This is also a title. It’s the one Jesus uses most often to refer to himself. It comes from Daniel and it’s a huge claim. In Daniel 7 we read

a) In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

2. So, though he says, “I am the Son of Man” and that sounds more humble than saying, “I am the Son of God.” Those who knew what “Son of Man” meant, knew that it was a huge claim.

J. ²² And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law,⁹ and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

1. This caught the disciples by surprise. They were likely excited to think that Jesus is The One – because it surely meant big things for them. He was the Messiah. He was the King!

⁹ This group – the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law – are described with one definite article. They are a monolithic power bloc here.

2. I am a bit behind in my reading of *People* magazine, but I am aware that Kate is pregnant again. Why am I aware? Because when an heir to the crown comes along, there is lots of celebration and pageantry; there is power and gold and nice things!

3. Jesus’s comments do not sound like nice things.

K. ²³ Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷ “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”

1. The last sentence is a confusing statement because it sounds like the ultimate arrival of Jesus as King – which did not happen: which has not happened. Some theologians believe it’s a reference to Pentecost. More believe it’s a reference to the Transfiguration, which would happen eight days later.

V. OK, so what do we do with this? There are three things to note here:

A. First, Jesus is God

1. If you were here last week you’ll remember that this was my first point then as well. I return to it for a couple reasons, starting with this one: this is Luke’s main point for the entire Gospel. Luke did all of his field work – retraced Christ’s steps, interviewed eye-witnesses and then filed this report with Theophilus – and the essence of the report is: Jesus is the One. He is the Messiah we were promised.

2. A second reason I keep making this point is because I occasionally hear people say, “Jesus doesn’t ever really claim to be God.” *Au contraire*. It is true that the first century Jewish understanding of the Messiah was not that the Messiah would be God.¹⁰ But the Jewish understanding of Messiah is not the assignment Jesus took on. What He came to do was much bigger than they expected. And it is obvious that He claims to be God, after all we see that in things like his claim to be the Son of Man.
 3. There are other ways Jesus clearly claims to be God: his use of the title “Son of Man;” His claim to be “one with the Father;” His claim to be able to forgive sins; his claim to be the real temple – the place where God and mankind intersected; his claim to be the judge of all humanity.
 4. Point one is: Jesus is God.
- B. Second, it’s worth noting that Peter doesn’t really understand what he is saying.

¹⁰ Many of the prophecies were such that they really only made sense going backwards. Consider the prophecy found in Genesis 3 – i.e., God will send “seed of woman.” Once you read about the Virgin birth you can go back to Genesis 3 and understand that “seed of woman” referred to the virgin birth, but you couldn’t read it forward. You’d have to be really good. It’s like an Agatha Christie story. Unless you are really, really good, you don’t pick up the clues until after someone explains them to you.

1. During my senior year in high school I took calculus. I’ve talked about this before. I took a second year of calculus in college, and I often wonder why. I have yet to do a calculus problem in real life. And today I’m not sure I’d recognize the opportunity if it sat down in front of me. But, as a senior in high school I had calculus. Why am I whining about this? Because, I was a very mediocre calculus student. Every day we’d get an assignment. The next day in class we’d offer answers. And because the problems got harder and harder, you wanted to be called on early. And by the end there were only two or three of the students who could be expected to have the answer. Well, one night I was at some event and there was a guy there who was brilliant. He would later get a PhD in something math related from MIT and get hired by the government for one of these jobs no one knows about but has something to do with national security. I took him the last problem and he worked it out and gave me the answer. He also tried to explain it to me but all I understood was that we were figuring up the area of something that would look like a deflated football. (I haven’t talked with this guy in 30 years. Perhaps he works for the Patriots now). Anyway, the next day in class we worked our way down the questions and when we got to that one, no one had an answer. The teacher asked the three students who might have been able to do it, but they hadn’t. I waited until it was quiet and then raised my hand, and you could see the shock, like: Woodruff? I know you don’t have the answer. When he called on me I said, $4/3\pi$ – which was right. Well, you could tell right away he wasn’t buying it. So he starts asking me how I did it until after a few minutes – during which time I’d said “it looks like a deflated football about 12 times – I had to confess that I hadn’t done it.

2. We have a similar thing going on here. Peter had the right answer, but he didn’t understand it, and as soon as he said it Jesus said, “Someone gave you the answer! You didn’t do your own work.”

3. In his defense, as a Jew he was one of the ones to be able to wrap his head around God showing up in the neighborhood. Think about it. The major Jewish creed – which he would have grown up saying every day was, Deut. 6:4: **Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.** As a Jew Peter would have viewed God as one and also as holy and unapproachable. The idea that God was holy and in heaven and also standing next to him was something it would take a long time to accept. And, it’s not only unworkable in his mind, it’s crazy. The suggestion that God would show up in order to die on your behalf – this is not something anyone was expecting.

4. Why did he do it? Why did God work things out this way? I’ve been wondering about this more lately. Why did God do things the way He did? Why not work out our rescue another way.

a) I understand that the way He did so preserves both his holiness and his love. God had to punish sin or he is an unjust judge, but as a loving father he needed to protect us. The gift of Christ is the only way forward.

b) But I’ve been asking, “Wasn’t it possible that you could have changed things earlier?” And what increasingly strikes me is that without Christ’s death we’d have no idea how amazing God is. For all of eternity we will have a greater understanding of how awesome God is. What more could we ask than that he would die in our place.

C. The third thing – and I’ll just briefly note this before we turn to communion – is that Suffering is Expected. Christ will suffer and that is expected of us as well.

1. Having heard that He is the Messiah, the disciples’ expectation is: power, glory, victory, political freedom. They are expecting a future filled with power and wealth. They were not expecting that He would die. Nor would they expect that they would be called on to live a life of sacrifice and service. But those are highly esteemed values in the new kingdom. It’s an upside down world. The call on us is radical – we do not like denying ourselves.

2. We are given an opportunity now to do things that will matter forever. Revolutions cost someone. But I promise you, that they make the win more fun.

a) There is a little game coming up this afternoon. Those who are playing in it have largely given their life to get there. Lots of hard work and discipline. It is fleeting glory. We are invited into eternal glory, but it comes with a cost. It’s clear from this passage that we can only really be called Christ’s followers when we make the radical decision to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow him.

3. We should not be surprised by how hard things might get in this broken world. Jesus went to his cross to secure the win, but the skirmishes remain until the end.

4. That doesn’t mean that the suffering is easy, but we cannot doubt God’s great love.

VI. Let me pray for us as we prepare to come to this table.

VII. Transition to communion: I spoke of the amazing love of God that is behind his decision to send his son. At so many levels that decision – that God would become a man and die in our place – makes no sense. Many chose not to believe it. But that idea, that reality lies at the heart of the Gospel. And it is what we turn to now as we approach this table.