

Sermon for July 13, 2025 - 5th Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 9:18–24 EHV

Theme: Jesus is the Christ of God.

- 1) What that confession meant for Jesus. (18-22)
- 2) What that confession means for us. (23-24)

¹⁸One time when Jesus was praying alone and the disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” ¹⁹They answered, “‘John the Baptist,’ but others say, ‘Elijah,’ and others say, ‘one of the ancient prophets come back to life.’” ²⁰He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.” ²¹He gave them a strict command not to tell this to anyone. ²²He said, “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.” ²³Jesus said to all of them, “If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. ²⁴For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

“Who am I?” is a question with which everyone struggles. Answer it correctly, and your life will have true meaning, purpose, and direction. Sadly, many people don’t know the answer. Instead of looking to their Creator for their identity, they look everywhere else — unable to find true peace.

By the grace of God, dear Christian, you know who you are. Your identity is found in Jesus, who alone gives your life true purpose and meaning. Therefore, the most important question you can ask is not, “Who am I?” but, “Who is Jesus?”

With our sermon text as our guide, listen to Jesus reveal to you who He is under the theme: **Jesus is the Christ of God.** 1) What that confession meant for Jesus. 2) What that confession means for you.

Part One: What that confession meant for Jesus

Our sermon text took place late in Jesus’ ministry. Jewish opposition against him was growing, and many of His followers turned away from Him because He wasn’t the kind of Messiah they wanted.¹ Because His crucifixion was fast approaching, Jesus needed to prepare His disciples so they wouldn’t fall away on account of it.

¹⁸One time when Jesus was praying alone and the disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?”

Before we get into Jesus’ question, I want you to notice that He prayed before He spoke. Why? While the Bible doesn’t reveal the specific content of His prayer, I can imagine it being similar to the one He offered up for His disciples shortly before His betrayal, recorded in John 17. In that

prayer, Jesus asked His Father to keep His disciples united in Him, knowing the truth of who He is and what He came to do.

Why do I point this out? For two reasons: First, just as Jesus prayed for His disciples then, so He continues to pray for you today, as the Bible declares: *Christ Jesus, who died and, more than that, was raised to life, is the one who is at God's right hand and who is also interceding for us!*ⁱⁱ

Secondly, if Jesus considered it important to ask God to strengthen His disciples' faith, shouldn't you also pray for each other, asking the Holy Spirit to strengthen one another in our common faith?

After Jesus finished praying, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"¹⁹ They answered, "'John the Baptist,' but others say, 'Elijah,' and others say, 'one of the ancient prophets come back to life.'"

Except for their religious leaders, the Jews of Jesus' day had nothing bad to say about Him. They recognized Him as a great prophet and teacher. However, as much as the people admired Jesus, none recognized His identity as the Christ, *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*ⁱⁱⁱ

Today isn't any different. Muslims, Hindus, Agnostics, Atheists, and almost everyone else will agree that Jesus is an outstanding teacher and example of morality. Sadly, that's as far as they go. Like the Jews of Jesus' day, they don't understand His true identity and work.

²⁰He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

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The word "Christ" means "the anointed one," and refers back to God's promise throughout Old Testament scripture to send a special servant whom God would send to take away the sins of the world. Peter confessed Jesus to be that perfect Saviour.

Sadly, the Jews of Jesus' day thought that the Christ would be an earthly King, who would overthrow Rome and establish their nation as a worldwide empire. They wanted a political Saviour, not a spiritual one. Therefore, Jesus commanded His disciples not to reveal His true identity until after He rose from the dead,^{iv} as He didn't want the people's false ideas about the Christ to hinder His fulfilment of our salvation.

However, Jesus didn't want the disciples to have any misconceptions about His work. Therefore, He explained to them what was about to happen: how He would fulfil His work as the Christ of God.

²²He said, "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."

Jesus didn't come to be a political king. He came to save us from sin. The only way Jesus could do this was by fulfilling Scripture, which prophesied that His people would reject Him, that He would suffer humiliation at the hands of the Romans, die on the cross, and, on the third day, be raised from the dead. Jesus said that He "must" do these things because that was the path God the

Father ordained for His Son. By fully submitting to His Father's will, Jesus would win the righteousness we need to stand before God. When dying on the cross, He would suffer the punishment our sins had earned. His resurrection would prove that all sin had been paid for in full, reconciling us to God.

Who is Jesus? He is the Christ, our divine Saviour, promised in Scripture. What did this truth mean for Jesus? It meant that He, true God from all eternity, would become man and die on the cross for our sins. It also meant that He would be raised in glory, seated at the right hand of the Father, and be given dominion over everything, which He would use for the benefit of His believers.

Part Two: What that confession means for us.

Now that we understand what Peter's confession meant for Jesus, let us consider what it means for us, who bear His name. Being a Christian means that we find our identity, purpose, and meaning in Christ alone, as the apostle Paul confessed: *²⁰I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I am now living in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*^v

²³Jesus said to all of them, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.

I don't think that we can fully grasp how shocking Jesus' words were to His original hearers. When we hear the word "cross," we think of decorations in our churches and homes. However, Jesus' first disciples envisioned naked, bloody bodies nailed to posts with a crossbeam, left to die shamefully and agonizingly.

Death by crucifixion was something to avoid at all costs, and yet Jesus says that his followers must *daily* take up their cross and follow Him. What did He mean by that? He means that we, as Christians, should not find our value in the people and things of this life, but in Him alone.

When Jesus said, "*If anyone wants to come after me...*," He wasn't merely addressing His twelve potential apostles. His words extended to everyone who desires to identify as a Christian, including you and me.

Let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. Jesus wants us to willingly deny our old sinful selves, who take pleasure in living selfishly without thinking about God or others.

Seeing our identity mirrored in Him, Jesus wants us to leave the sinful world behind and follow Him in faith, pursuing nothing but Him. He wants us to be willing to suffer the loss of everything for Him, trusting that He is our everything—that the ridicule, persecution, and death we may have to suffer for His sake, *are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.*^{vi}

This leads us to the next point I want to make: many people think of Christianity like a country club, where if you pay your dues and follow the rules, you should have a nice, comfortable life.

But that is not how Jesus describes our life at all. He says, *In this world you are going to have trouble. But be courageous! I have overcome the world.*^{vii}

Yes, the crosses God allows in our lives are often excruciating. But just as Jesus was able to endure His cross by fixing His eyes on God the Father, so we fix our eyes on Jesus, trusting His promise to use every hardship we face for His glory and our everlasting good.^{viii} Because Jesus has overcome the world through His cross, we can courageously pick up ours, confident that we are already more than conquerors through faith in Him.^{ix}

²⁴*For whoever wants to save his life will lose it: whoever pursues temporal ease, wealth, and glory over against the LORD will lose the everlasting life Christ won for him. Why? Because He will no longer consider Jesus important or His sins all that serious. By loosening his grip on Jesus to cling to the world, he will let salvation slip through his fingers.*

“But,” Jesus says, *“whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.* Whoever acknowledges the seriousness of their sins and turns to Christ in repentance will receive the everlasting life He won for all through His cross. Why? Because Jesus is who the Scriptures proclaimed Him to be: the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

When I hear Jesus’ call to daily deny myself, pick up my cross, and follow Him, I feel ashamed. Why? Because I often fail to do that. I constantly struggle with my sinful flesh that wants me to hide my faith, pursue worldly things, and do the opposite of what God wants me to do. I have sinned all too many times against God’s good and gracious commands, so where does that leave me?

The same place I hope to meet you: at the foot of the cross, confessing all my sins to Jesus, trusting in His mercy to forgive. And Jesus does forgive us. Through the Gospel, He reminds us of the once-for-all sacrifice He made for our sins and of the hope, salvation, and everlasting life He graciously gives all who turn to Him in repentance.

His Gospel promises change us. Instead of wanting to pursue a life of ease on this earth, we want to pursue Christ. His promises move us to deny ourselves of the sinful pleasures our flesh enjoys as we place our focus on Him. Why? Because Jesus is the Christ of God who created, saved, and put His name on us in Holy Baptism that we might belong to Him forever.

Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ: whenever you are tempted to wonder who you are, look to the cross and remember who Jesus is: the Christ of God, your Saviour from sin. Then remember God’s promises connected with your Baptism: that, ²⁶*In fact, you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.* ²⁷*Indeed, as many of you as were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.*^x

Therefore, live as the son God declared you to be – willing, in the peace of His forgiveness, to give up the world and everything in it for His sake. Trust His promise to use everything you experience in life for your everlasting good, all to the glory of His name. Amen.

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- ⁱ Cf. John 6:60-66
 - ⁱⁱ Romans 8:24b EHV
 - ⁱⁱⁱ John 1:29 EHV
 - ^{iv} Cf. Mark 9:9
 - ^v Galatians 2:20 EHV
 - ^{vi} Romans 8:18 EHV
 - ^{vii} John 16:33 EHV
 - ^{viii} Cf. Hebrews 12:1-3
 - ^{ix} Cf. Romans 8:35-39
 - ^x Galatians 3:26-27 EHV