

Luke 9:10-27

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[0 : 00] I love this time of year in Aberdeen, the end of September, and the sun is shining as it always is in our fair city.

If you're new to Aberdeen and you're wondering, this is what it's like all the time. You know, other parts of Scotland, it may be cold and windy, but not Aberdeen.

Sunny, warm, that's just the way it is, as you'll discover. So I love this time of year. It's also a fun time of year because the new academic session kicks off with apologies for those of you who work really hard in Aberdeen College and other places where you've already been working for three or four weeks, and congratulations to you for that level of endeavor.

But for those of you at Aberdeen University or Robert Gordon's, well, this is the beginning of the year. New people, new faces, new beginnings.

For some of you, this is a very exciting, brand new beginning, as maybe you leave home for the first time or you come to this city to live and to study for the very first time.

[1 : 12] For others, it's a new start. Even if you're a returning student, or indeed, even if you're not a student, there is the opportunity to turn the page and start afresh.

And a new beginning is a good time to ask some big questions. And hopefully, not only ask them, but answer at least some of them.

Why am I here? And the answer to that is not that your higher results weren't good enough. For Edinburgh, that's not an allowed answer. Why am I here? What's it all about?

Well, that is a good one. What is it all about? What actually went bang at the big bang? Did anything go bang? Or more to the point, will anything go bang anytime soon?

Now, perhaps for some of you, the big questions are different ones. Just how did Aberdeen bring Cali's unbeaten start to the season, to a halt?

[2 : 15] Just how did that happen? Will my sass money be in my count in time for Freshers' Week? If I buy two jumbo-sized Domino's pizzas on a two-for-Tuesday deal, will they last right through to the following Tuesday?

Could that happen? Big questions. Biggish questions anyway. Is Grand Theft Auto V the ultimate in computer game technology?

I've never played the game. I'm willing to not confess, but to recognize. But I've heard all about it this week. \$800 million in sales in just one day would suggest that it must be pretty amazing.

Whether we think it's good or bad, it certainly qualifies as amazing. I don't know if you realize that the original creator of the game was a company from Dundee.

This isn't hugely important, but I thought I'd share it with you anyway. Now, I don't know. I don't want to be unfair to Dundee, but I would be surprised if the whole of Dundee is worth 800 million. But anyway, a company from Dundee were the original creators of this game that's hitting the headlines.

[3 : 28] Now, these are biggish questions. But I want us this morning to consider a seriously big question. It's a question that we find in the passage that we read in Luke chapter 9.

There we find Jesus in conversation with His disciples. And in the midst of that conversation, He poses this seriously big question.

Who do you say I am? Who do you say I am? And this is the big question that I want us to think about to get our heads around, but much more importantly, to answer this morning.

Who do you say I am? I hope you're willing to consider the question. And as we do, we can begin by clarifying some basic stuff concerning the question.

Who's asking the big question and who is being asked the big question? Well, there in verse 18 we read, once when Jesus was praying in private and His disciples were with Him, He asked them,

who do the crowds say I am?

[4 : 43] They respond to that question, and then He proceeds to ask this supplementary question, the one we are particularly concerned with. Who do you say I am?

He asked. He asked. Jesus asked. Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph and Mary, born in Bethlehem some 2,000 years ago, an itinerant preacher and purportedly a miracle worker in Galilee with the occasional foray into Jerusalem.

This is the man who asks the big question. And who does he ask? Well, we've read the passage. He asks His disciples, those who had already associated themselves with Jesus.

And He asks all of them, who do you say I am? That you is a plural form. So, He's directing the question to all His disciples who are before Him.

To all of them, but importantly, to each of them. Who do you say I am? Well, so far, it's simple enough to follow what is going on.

[5 : 56] Now, I want to propose something this morning. I want to propose that we can work on the assumption that Jesus is still asking that question, and that He is asking you this same question.

You might not believe that. You might say, well, I don't believe that's the case. Yes, maybe, if the account is true, maybe He posed that question to His disciples a couple of thousand years ago, but I don't believe that He's posing that same question to me.

Well, that's fair enough. But you're here this morning, so let's just work on the assumption that Jesus is posing that question, and He's posing it to you.

And having established that, or at least asked you to work on that basis, I have four questions that I want us now to think about. And the four questions, I'll say what they are, and then we can look at them each in turn.

The first question is, what are the answers out there to the big question? In this conversation, we have that aspect dealt with.

[7 : 07] You know, what the answers out there are. What do people say? What do the crowds say in answer to that question? We want to think about that briefly. But then we want to ask the following question.

What was Peter's answer to the big question? He answers the question. He takes the initiative. It's posed to all the disciples, and He jumps in and gives an answer.

Well, what did He say? What was Peter's answer to the big question? But then what is your answer to the big question? And then finally, what are the implications if Peter is right?

If the answer that Peter gives is the right answer, what are the implications of that? First of all, then, what are the answers out there to the big question?

What were they when the question was first posed? Jesus is interested in that. He introduces the big question with this preliminary question there in verse 18.

[8 : 10] Who do the crowds say I am? It's a bit less challenging, isn't it, when we're asked, what do other people think? We're more comfortable with that. And maybe this was Jesus' intention to, you know, to enter into a much more demanding question in this gentle way.

What do other people say? You know, what do the crowd say? What do those folk out there, what do they say concerning my identity? Who do the crowds say that I am?

We could pose that same question today. Who do the crowds say that Jesus is? If we were to ask a hundred freshers at Aberdeen University or Robert Gordon's or Aberdeen College, and we were to say, who do you say that Jesus is?

What answers would they give? I imagine you have an idea as to the kind of answers that might be given to that question. What about the crowds when Jesus first asked the question there in verse 19?

What did they say? Or what are they reported to have said by the disciples? Well, the disciples give an answer. There in verse 19 we read, They replied, the disciples replied, Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.

[9 : 33] Now, we're not going to, this morning, analyze each of the answers proposed, but what we do want to do is to focus on some general features of this variety of answers that were being given, that the disciples had heard and were aware of.

They were aware that out there people were saying these kind of things about Jesus. What general features of the answers can we notice? The first thing we can say is that all of the answers, certainly the reported answers, were largely sympathetic to Jesus.

John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life. We may think they're rather bizarre answers, but they're generally sympathetic. Now, I suspect the reason for that is that the disciples chose to give those answers that were generally sympathetic.

It's not that there weren't people who had a much more negative view of Jesus, but the disciples chose to relate to Jesus some of the more sympathetic answers concerning His identity.

And I would wager, you may disagree, and you have every right to do so, but I would wager that it's not so different today. If we did ask a hundred freshers what their opinion was of Jesus, I suspect it would be generally sympathetic.

[11:04] What their opinion is of Christians or of the church or of Christianity, that's maybe a different matter. But of the historical figure of Jesus, I would imagine that the answers would be largely sympathetic.

Maybe disinterested, but in as much as there was an opinion, it might well be sympathetic. What else can we say in general terms about the answers that the disciples were aware were out there when Jesus is asking about it?

The other thing we can say is that there were very varied answers. There were different opinions. Even the way in which the disciples respond to this preliminary question makes that very clear.

They replied, Some say John the Baptist. Others say Elijah and still others. And the idea is that the list could go on. This isn't, I don't think, an exhaustive list.

There were a variety of opinions that were being expressed, that were being voiced by the crowds concerning the identity of Jesus.

[12:05] Again, I don't suppose that's so different to today. The answers may be different answers, but again, no doubt a variety of answers could be identified.

I think there's something else we can say about the opinion of the crowds, of those out there concerning the identity of Jesus. And I think we can say this, that it was largely unthinking.

No, I'm not saying that that was true of everybody. I'm not saying that there weren't those who seriously gave thought as to who this man might be. But I think largely the opinions that would be given were unthinking opinions.

Why do I say that? Because I think you can detect in the passage and as we look earlier in the chapter, to what we might call a herd mentality.

We've noticed the answers that the disciples quote there in verse 19. But notice that in this same chapter, though it's quite possible that the events related in the earlier part of the chapter took place some time before, considerably before.

[13:12] Nonetheless, it's interesting that in this same chapter, what do we read there in verses 7 and 8 regarding Herod and his opinions concerning Jesus and the opinions that he had heard concerning Jesus?

What do we read there in verse 7 of chapter 9? Now Herod the Tetrarch heard about all that was going on, and he was perplexed, because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life.

He noticed the similarity with what the disciples say to Jesus when he asked them, what are the crowds saying? Now that suggests to me that you've got an awful lot of people just saying what other people say.

Well, this is what I've heard. You know, this is what my neighbor thinks. This is what people seem to be saying about this Jesus, maybe John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets, I guess.

And so I think there was an awful lot of unthinking opinion being voiced. People simply going with the flow, going with the current opinion, with the majority view.

[14:18] And so it seems to me that the opinions about Jesus at the time that Jesus is posing the question were often unthinking.

Now is that not also very similar to our own day, that so many people have never really sat down to think about who Jesus is, have never seriously considered this question of his identity, who he is and where he came from and what he did.

And simply repeat, parrot fashion, the opinions that they've heard others express. Largely sympathetic, varied opinions, unthinking opinions, but in a curious kind of way, there is an element of unanimity.

And that doesn't contradict the fact that they're varied opinions. Unanimity in this important respect, that they all see him as just a man.

Maybe a great man, maybe an amazing man, but a man for all that. Somebody to admire, somebody to be intrigued by, but certainly not somebody to follow or bow down before.

[15 : 33] Is it so different today? Who do the crowds say I am? There's another thing we want to consider, and of greater import, and that is, what was Peter's answer to the big question?

We read there in verse 20, But what about you? But what about you? He asked. Who do you say I am? Peter answered, The Christ of God.

The Christ of God. Christ, the title Christ, is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word, or title Messiah, or anointed one.

And to a first century Jew, the use of such a title would involve believing that Jesus was the God-promised deliverer of His people, the one who would, in some sense, save His people.

In the Old Testament, those anointed, and the Messiah is the anointed one, those anointed were prophets, and priests, and kings.

[16 : 43] And the Messiah, the promised Messiah, the promised anointed one, the promised Christ, in the Old Testament Scriptures, was the one who would fulfill and follow from all those who had gone before, the ultimate Messiah that all those who had come before pointed towards.

And so, for Peter to say, You are the Christ of God, is Peter saying something hugely significant concerning his convictions regarding the identity of Jesus.

Now, it is the case that in first century Palestine, many Jews would have conceived of the awaited Messiah in political or material terms, as one who would come and deliver them from the oppression of the Roman power.

Indeed, it's precisely for that reason, because that opinion was so widespread, it's for that reason that Jesus, in verse 21, strictly warned the disciples not to tell this to anyone, because His concern would be that if they were to spread abroad that He was the Messiah, the Christ, then those who had a wrong understanding of His mission, would then seek to encourage Him and to oblige Him to go down a route that He was not going to go down, and it would prove an obstacle to His ministering.

Well, that is true, that some would have understood the language of Messiah in that way, but it's very clear that Peter had a different and a more radical perspective, and that's confirmed by what He additionally says.

[18 : 35] You see, we have this question and answer session recorded for us, not only in Luke's gospel, but also in Matthew's gospel and in Mark's gospel.

And when we consider each of these accounts and do so, we're able to get a fuller picture of what was said.

And really, it's Matthew who gives the fullest account, certainly of Peter's answer to the question. And what is it that Matthew says? Well, he says this, you are the Christ, or what does Matthew record that Peter says?

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And what that title implies as it follows on from what he begins by saying, you are the Christ of God. Well, this title, this language, identifying Jesus as the Son of the living God, what that implies is perhaps best understood by listening to the point of view of Jesus' opponents.

[19 : 44] If we turn just very swiftly to John chapter 5 and verse 18, where we find the same language being attributed, in this case, to Jesus, to Jesus' pretensions as to his identity, and we notice how his enemies respond to that.

In John chapter 5 and verse 18. For reasons of time, we'll simply read the verse, though to have a better grasp of what's going on, probably we would need to read a little bit more of the passage. But let's limit ourselves just to verse 18. And there we read, for this reason, the Jews tried all the harder to kill him. That is, to kill Jesus. Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, and this is what's significant, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

See, on the occasion that's recorded for us then in John's Gospel, Jesus was speaking of God as his own Father, and his enemies say, well, what that means is that he is making himself equal with God, and so we have to kill him because he's a blasphemer.

Well, this is what Peter is saying. Peter is saying, you are the Christ of God, the Son of the living God. We don't know for sure, we can't know, on the basis of the information we have in front of us,

we can't know for sure to what extent Peter himself fully understood the significance of the language that he used.

[21 : 14] Indeed, none of us fully understand the significance of the language that we use. We understand in a measure. But the language that he uses in answer to this big question does reveal, by any measure, an exalted view of Jesus.

Using the language available to him, it would have been difficult for Peter to ascribe to Jesus a higher place or status than he does. which rather begs the supplementary question, why does Peter answer in this way?

How did Peter come to this conclusion? I think we can say two things. His answer to the big question concerning the identity of Jesus, his answer is grounded in evidence and revealed by God. Two things that may seem self-excluding, but they're not. Grounded in evidence and revealed by God. I say grounded in evidence because, indeed, even in this very gospel, we have already been presented by Luke, the author of the gospel, by different witnesses who identify Jesus as the Messiah.

At the very beginning of the gospel, we encounter the angels who identify the one to be born as the Christ, the Messiah. We remember Simeon in Jerusalem and how we're told that he had been given this revelation from God concerning the Messiah who was to come and when he sees Jesus, he identifies Jesus as the promised Messiah.

[22 : 55] We have, intriguingly, even the demons recognizing that Jesus is the Messiah. We're not looking up all the passages where we find these things, but maybe if we do just notice the one concerning the demons in Luke chapter 4 and verse 41.

Moreover, demons came out of many people shouting, You are the Son of God, but he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak because they, the demons, knew he was the Christ. And then we have, perhaps as a supreme witness to the identity of Jesus, Jesus himself in that same chapter 4 of Luke's gospel when he is in the synagogue and he unrolls the scroll and he reads from the prophet Isaiah, The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And then tellingly, Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

And of course, Peter would have been familiar with these things. He would have been familiar with these witnesses who pointed to Jesus and identified him as the Messiah.

[24 : 12] And in addition, Peter was a follower of Jesus. He listened to all that Jesus said. He observed all that Jesus did. And on the basis of the evidence before him, he reached his conclusion.

You are the Christ of God, the Son of the living God. And you must do the same. You must come to a conclusion on the basis of the evidence before you.

So his answer is grounded in evidence, but also, intriguingly, it is revealed by God. Now, in Matthew's account of this dialogue between Jesus and the disciples, that becomes very clear and is made explicit by Jesus himself.

In Matthew chapter 16 and verse 17, we read as follows. Matthew chapter 16 and verse 17, we can read from verse 16 so we can identify it as the same occasion.

Simon Peter answered, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus replied, Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.

[25 : 21] does this contradict what we've just been saying concerning the importance of evidence being weighed and conclusions being reached? It doesn't contradict it at all.

It complements it and it recognizes an important truth that ultimately it is God himself who reveals the identity of his Son to us.

He uses evidence, but it is God who reveals his Son. But let me say one more thing about Peter's confession. And it's a simple thing in a way, but I think an important one.

He does confess his convictions. He verbalizes what he has come to believe. He audibly and publicly answers the question that is posed to him, Who do you say I am?

And that is important. It's important not just to have an opinion, but to confess the conclusion that one has come to with regard to the identity of Jesus.

[26 : 27] We're reminded of what Paul says in his letter to the Romans, For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Have you answered the question? Have you confessed with your mouth that Jesus is the Christ of God, the Son of the living God?

The next question I want us to think about is more personal. What is your answer to the big question?

We've seen how others out there answer the big question, how Peter answers the big question, but what about you? The first words of verse 20 there in Luke chapter 9 are very striking.

They're translated in our Bibles, but what about you? And that does justice to what is said, but the manner in which Jesus says is somewhat more dramatic.

[27 : 31] It's simply, but you. But you. Who do you say I am? But you. Jesus markedly and pointedly draws a contrast as He aims His question with laser-like precision to each of His disciples.

And He says to them, I want you to forget now about what others say. I want you to leave to one side the opinion of the crowds, and I'm asking you. That's right, you.

I'm asking you, who do you say I am? And nothing has changed. Today, Jesus poses this same question.

What about you? Who do you say I am? Never mind for the moment what others think, what others believe, what your parents believe, what your friends believe, what your flatmates believe or don't believe, what your lecturers believe.

What about you? Who do you say that I am? Well, who do you say that Jesus is?

[28 : 48] This is the big question. There is no bigger question. I don't know what you're studying or are going to study. I don't know how many big questions you will grapple with in and out of the lecture theater and tutorial rooms and relationships in which you are or will be.

Big questions, no doubt. Many of them. But I know this, that whatever those questions are or may be, they all pale into relative insignificance, not absolute insignificance, but into relative insignificance when compared to this question.

who do you say I am? The Christ of God? The Son of the living God? The promised Savior of His people?

Your Savior? Your God? What is your answer? For Peter, this was the moment. The moment to answer the question.

Everything has been building up, as it were, to this critical moment where He would be given the opportunity to answer this question.

[30 : 00] It was His time to answer the question. And might it be that this is your time to answer the question.

Who do you say I am? But finally, I want us to just briefly notice what the implications are if Peter is right.

There were implications for Jesus, and there are implications for you and me. The implications for Jesus of Peter's answer being correct, that Jesus was indeed the Christ of God, the implications for Jesus were that contrary to popular belief, His identity would not lead Him to an earthly throne, but rather to a cruel cross.

You see, that's exactly what Jesus goes on to recognize as He continues to speak. In verse 22, He says, And He said, And Jesus said, The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

God's Messiah, the Christ of God, came to die. He came to be crucified. He came to die for sinners.

[31 : 25] He came to conquer death by dying a sinner's death, by dying in our place. These were the implications for Jesus of the truth of Peter's reply, the Christ of God.

And what about the implications for us? Well, if Jesus is the Messiah, if Jesus is the Son of the living God, we can do no other than bow down before Him in unreserved and joyful worship and surrender before Him.

And if we do so acknowledge Him as the Messiah, we too are called to die. But as Jesus go on to say in this same conversation, in verse 23, we read, Then He said to them all, to all the disciples, to Peter who had answered and very possibly voicing the convictions of His fellow disciples, Then He said to them all, If anyone would come after Me, He must deny Himself and take up His cross daily and follow Me.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will save it. The death that we are called to die is not unlike the death of Jesus. It's not physical death, certainly not an atoning death as the death of Jesus was, but it is real death. We are to die to self and to live in and for Jesus.

[33 : 00] You must take up your cross daily and follow Jesus. Who do you say I am? What is your answer to the big question?

I don't know if on your computer screen, I presume it's no different from mine, you get stuff that comes up every so often. Windows pop up about system updates and security renewals and all that kind of stuff.

I can't think of a better word than stuff. And it asks you, it says, it proposes something, and you've got to say yes, no, or remind me later.

I don't know about you, but I always take the remind me later. I don't want a yes because it's not a good time. I don't want to know because I'm thinking, well, maybe this is important. But remind me later just fits nicely.

Well, this is not a remind me later question. This is not a remind me later question. Who do you say I am?

[34 : 12] Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your son, Jesus. We thank you for who he is. We thank you that he is your son, the eternal son of God, the son of the living God, the one who left the glory of heaven to come into this sin-sick world to save us, to die a sinner's death in our place, that a way might be opened up for sinners such as we are to be brought into friendship with you.

We thank you for Jesus. And we pray that you would enable us, that you would indeed, as you did for Peter, reveal to us clearly and without delay the identity of your son, that we might, with Peter, respond to the big question, that we might be able to respond, the Christ of God, the son of the living God.

And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing again. We're going to sing Psalm 8 in the Scottish Psalter.

You'll find that on page 207. Psalm 8, and we'll sing the whole of the psalm. We'll sing to the tune Gainsborough. How excellent in all the earth, Lord, our Lord, is thy name, who has thy glory far advanced above the starry frame.

Psalm 8, singing the whole of the psalm. We'll stand to sing. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[36 : 03] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. From the infant's land, from sun-wings land, thou didst strength ordain.

O'er thy most close and soul amized, the vengeful is saved.

When thy new love had to the ends, which thy old fingers framed, unto the moon and to the stars, which will I be ordained.

Say, I want this hand that ye, remember this by thee.

[38 : 10] Or what the son of man that died, so kind to him should be.

For thou are days above us, and by the angels' weight.

With glory and with dignity, the prophet has his set.

All high hands were the basted Lord, all wonders be displayed.

All sheep and oxen, yea, and bees, that in the field to sway.

[39 : 47] Thou softly air, fish of the sea.

All that pass through the sea. Our legs shall lay in all the earth.

Lord, our Lord is thy name. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always.

Amen.