

The answers we give to some questions can affect the whole of the rest of our lives, "Will you take this woman to be your wife?" is one that comes to mind. If you say yes then it affects how you live your life from then on doesn't it?

With the youngsters just having had their A level and GCSE results it reminds me of standing in a phone box in Tenby many years back and asking how I'd got on in my A levels. . I needed two passes to do a special four year degree course at a Teacher training College but only got one. So I did a three year course but towards the end there was the chance if I did well in the exams of staying for a further year. I remember clearly coming out of the first exam and talking with friends about what we'd put and realising I'd misread the first question. I am convinced that one question meant I didn't get the distinction I needed to do a further year.

However in that year I found a job, I was finally converted, linked into a church where I later met my wife and I began to train as a lay reader from where I went on to ordination. Our answers to questions can and often do have an effect on our lives.

Let me ask you one here and now. Do you know Jesus as Saviour and Lord? Whatever answer we give will have an effect on our lives and on our eternal future but if the answer is yes then it should have an effect on our lives. That is the heart of the passage we have today from Luke 9:18-27

1. What are people saying?

Luke's account here is slightly different from that in Matthew and Mark but the point is the same. Here Luke begins with Jesus praying and then he asked them the question, "Who do the crowds say I am?" In context they have just fed the 5000 so as the food was being passed round there must have been some conjecture about who this man was.

What were they saying? v14... They were saying he was a prophet another Jeremiah opposing the religious leaders and declaring judgement. They were saying he was John the Baptist again a man sent from God to prepare for the Messiah. They were saying he was perhaps Elijah a great prophet from the O.T. who hadn't died but been taken up into heaven and who was expected to return to get things ready for the coming of the Messiah, God's special messenger who would save the people. We see the same thinking on the part of Herod in 9:8 as he tried to understand who Jesus was.

In many ways in these responses we can see people trying to cope with the apparent supernatural nature of Jesus without making too great a claim for him. So he was seen as a man from God with a message but not the Messiah, not the saviour and certainly not God. That is not an unusual way of seeing Jesus today. Many today would say Jesus was a good teacher. That he had some helpful things to say. Even the Moslem will accept that he was a prophet from God. But most would explain away or rationalise the supernatural nature and actions of Christ. To do that is in a way to render him harmless to us. Just another teacher who we can ignore if we wish, judge if we must but certainly not allow to demand anything of us.

2. What did the disciples think?

Of course this was where Jesus was leading. He was wanting them to respond to him. So Peter did with that answer in v20 "The Christ of God". There is no sign of doubt or uncertainty. It is not a case of playing 20 questions "are you the Christ?". Not even we think you are the Christ. Simply you are the Christ. The confession that he was the Messiah the anointed one of God.

Now that is interesting because if we look back to 8:25 clearly the disciples were not sure who Jesus was. Then in 9:10-17 he has fed the 5000 but there's no sign that it has had a significant effect on them. So what has changed that has led to this confession? The only thing is that God has been at work in them and that this is a supernatural revelation as indeed it is for anyone who claims Jesus to be the Christ. Perhaps that was why Luke put it in the context of Jesus praying.

However it happened Peter's answer on behalf of the 12 is that Jesus is the Messiah, God's rescuer.

Friends I hope that all of us here today can see this.

I hope we can all say yes Jesus is God. If you can't then why not talk to me later and let's see if I can't help you to deal whatever it is that is holding you back.

But if we can surely this is what we want for our friends, spouses, children, neighbours and so on. As I say I think for Peter it was God who revealed it to him so can I encourage you to pray for those you would long to see come to faith?

Who do you say that I am? – the Christ of God.

That answer was to have huge implications for Peter and for the others. But before Jesus spelt out those implications

3 The qualification by Jesus

In vs 21&22 Jesus removed any sense of triumphalism that the disciples might have had. Firstly by warning them not say to anything about it to others because he didn't want a wrong idea getting out. He didn't want people crowning him as their champion because his nature as Messiah was different from what might be expected. His path was to glory but only via suffering and death. Yes he was the Messiah but not a Messiah as they might have expected.

4. The implications of confessing Jesus.

To acknowledge Jesus as saviour and Lord had implications for Peter and the others and it does for us as well. Just let me bring out three from this passage:

a. v23 "If anyone would come after me he must deny himself." Immediately here we are into a conflict with the natural way of things. The world we live in, which while it may have moved on from Jesus day is still very much the same, is obsessed with the self. Self assertiveness, self advertisement, self help, self improvement, self adulation. If ever there was an upside down piece of teaching it is this. In a world where we deny ourselves nothing Jesus says deny yourself. The thought behind his words is of the Christian as a servant living under the Lordship of Christ. It would be a pretty odd affair if the servant going on a journey with his master got his own luggage aboard the train and settled himself into his first class seat without a thought to his master and his wishes. Just as a servant's first thoughts are for his master, so the Christian, under the Lordship of Christ, is called to put Christ first in thought and life. We as disciples are called to love the Lord our God..... and our neighbour.... In one sense this should be obvious to us. After all it is self and following our own selfish will that has set us apart from God. If now we are returned to God then repentance is the only way and repentance means a change of mind. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. A surrender to Christ means denying myself. But how does that work out? Well this is not the Lenten practice of giving up chocolate for a few weeks. Jesus

here is being much more radical and he is focussing upon things that really matter, that matter in our relationship with him. He called those first disciples and he calls us to be ready to give up something that is not superficial like chocolate. Just for a moment think about different parts of your life and ask how much of self is there in your relationships?

In your relationship with your spouse? With your children? With your friends? Do you ever deny yourself that others may flourish? Think about your friends outside the church. One of the reasons people give for not sharing faith is that others may think we are odd or Bible bashers and so on. Are you willing to deny yourself in terms of risking what others think about you so that they may see Jesus as Saviour and Lord?

What about in the use of money? How do you determine what you will spend your money on? When we speak about giving to the work of God here at Christ Church do you think, "I'll give what I can, what I don't need?" That is hardly denying ourselves is it? The widow put all she had to live on into the offering. Do we ever give in a way that means we deny ourselves something?

The answers we give to questions can affect our lives. To answer, "Jesus is Saviour and Lord" has implications!

What about your time? I often hear people say "I needed a bit of space for myself" and I can understand that but again do we ever deny ourselves so that we can give time to God and his people?

So much of our life is self centred. It is me, me, me. I honestly think that one of the few times when we stop being self centred is when someone preaches and then we think that's right Minister you tell them. They certainly need to hear that.

Jesus said, "If you would follow me you must deny yourself." Now this is a bit heavy so let's take a moment to look at the sunlight coming in through the window or admire the flowers because as Jesus continues it gets even heavier.

So Jesus called his disciples to follow his way which meant denying themselves and then

b. "and take up your cross daily." Again what did Jesus mean? I think we must get clear from the start that the cross we are called to bear is not an individual affliction: migraine headaches, a bad marriage, difficult financial circumstances, a wayward child. Very often people moan about these things and then say, "ah well we all have our cross to bear." Yes indeed we may all have individual burdens and difficulties to undergo; but that is not Jesus point. As Christians we all have the **same** cross to bear: death to self interest. Here Jesus takes his disciples a step further. It is not just a matter of denying self but of death to self and self interest. In the Roman world the person who picked up the cross-member and lugged it out to the place of execution had come to the end of hope. Only death was left. It was futile to plot new schemes full of self interest. And that is what Jesus means: he is talking about death to self interest, and a new commitment to himself. Every day it is a matter of putting self on the cross that Christ may be on the throne. My self will get in the way of following and serving Christ. As we were seeing last week, I can't serve two masters Him and me. Therefore I need to learn and grow in death to my self. Because paradoxically as Jesus goes on to say it is only by losing or forfeiting my self that I gain life. He came that we might have life in full abundance life with God life as it is meant to be and it is only through daily placing ourselves on the cross that Christ can rule and that under his rule we can live for God.

c. Follow me that is walk my way. Often when I'm out for a stroll as opposed to a walk I find that I walk with my hands clasped behind my back.

Why do I do that? Well I have memories of when I was young walking with my brothers in a line behind our Dad. He had his hands clasped behind his back so we did the same and I still do. Jesus is asking us to follow him his way and he is not asking of us anything that he hasn't done himself as we have already seen. But he is showing us that if we wish to claim him as Lord then we must allow him to be Lord. But what Jesus calls for is not grudging self denial but a response of love from those who seeing what he has done willingly and in love respond to Christ.

As we see these three things we are showing that Christ is Lord and showing it by recognising that his Lordship makes demands upon us. Here we see if you like the cost of discipleship. But then this is the way of Jesus. If we answer you are Saviour and Lord it has implications.

The answers we give to questions can affect the rest of our lives.

So today Jesus asks us who do you say that I am and then, if we say you are my saviour and you are my Lord, we need to hear his response, "then follow me by taking up your cross daily in self denial that you may walk my way."