Making a Messiah: Section 3 - Closing Arguments
1: Who do you say I am? / March 3, 2019

Key Text: Luke 9.18-27
Key Words: Right questions; Right answers; Christ; Messiah; Must; Agenda; Love; Debt
Summary: Jesus asks the biggest question anyone will have to answer - Who do you think he is? And then he redefines what it means to be the Messiah of God, and what it means to follow him.

Sometimes we ask the wrong questions. I guess there was this missionary down in South America. It was flat out hot, and it was getting hotter, and the missionary wanted to swim in the river to cool off. So he asked the people there, “Are there piranhas in the river; will I be in danger from the piranhas?” And they told him, “No, piranhas are only dangerous when they are in schools, and they are never in schools in this part of the river.” So every afternoon the missionary would cool off in the river. Till one day he heard about a guy who fell out of a boat nearby, and he just disappeared. So he asked them, “Was he eaten by piranhas?” “No, there are no schools of piranhas around here. They never swim in schools where there are so many alligators around.”

You have to ask the right questions! And sometimes it’s not just about asking the right questions, sometimes it’s all about having the right answers. Okay, guys: It’s one of the greatest films of all time - “Monte Python and the Holy Grail.” How many of you guys have seen it? How many of you guys can quote it? I know some of you guys don’t think it’s funny, but you are just weird! Did you know that it was selected as the second best comedy of our time in the ABC Special: Best in Film? They had Airplane as #1; I think #1 should have been the Princess Bride.

Anyway, famous scene: King Arthur and his men have to cross the Bridge of Death in their quest for the holy grail, but it is protected by this vile troll. To cross, they must each answer three questions. Answer any question wrong, you die. So, as they approach, the troll says, “Who approaches the bridge of death must answer me these questions 3, ere the other side he see.”

• Lancelot, the bravest and the noblest of the knights goes first.
o The bridgekeeper says, “What is your name?” … “Sir Lancelot, of Camelot.”
o “What is your quest?” … “To seek the holy grail.”
o “What is your favorite color?” … “Blue.” … “Right, off you go.”
• And Lancelot crosses the bridge.

• Well, Sir Robin, the not so brave is next. But he’s excited, because the questions seem easy, right?
o “What is your name?” … “Sir Robin of Camelot.”
o “What is your quest?” … “To seek the holy grail.”
o “What is the capital of Assyria?” … “I don’t know that!”
• Wrong answer: so off he goes into the ravine below.

• Noble Sir Galahad is next.
o “What is your name?” … “Sir Galahad of Camelot.”
o “What is your quest?” … “To seek the holy grail.”
o “What is your favorite color?” … “Blue … No …”
• Wrong answer, so off he goes into the ravine below.

• Next is King Arthur.
o “What is your name?” … “It is Arthur, King of the Britons.”
o “What is your quest?” … “To seek the holy grail.”
o “What is the air-speed velocity of an unladen swallow?” …
“What do you mean? An African or an European Swallow?” …
“What? What?! I don’t know that!”
• Wrong answer, so off the troll goes into the ravine below.

Now, if you don’t find that scene funny, you need to watch the movie. If you still don’t find it funny, we’ll lay hands on you and pray for you. If you still don’t find it funny, it’s quite possible you are simply cursed by God. … Listen: sometimes it’s not enough just to know the right questions. Sometimes you have to know the right answers - you have to know the right answers -- to get where you want to go.

For the last two months we’ve been making a case for Jesus the Messiah: The Making of a Messiah. What are the evidences to support his claims? We started by looking at his godlike power. If Jesus really did the stuff the eyewitnesses say he did, the way they say he did it … he’s way more than a man! Then last month we looked at his words, the kind of things Jesus said, the godlike authority with which he spoke. If he really said that stuff, Jesus was either the most sinister liar of all time, the craziest lunatic of all time, or he really was … God’s Messiah.
This month we’ll be digging into what we’re going to call the “closing arguments.” Up to this point Jesus has been dropping all these breadcrumbs. Now he just flat out says it. Now he just throws it in your face - “Make a call! Choose! Who do you think I am? I’m telling you, I am the Messiah, I am the Son of God. I have come into this world to save you! Are you going to let me?” He’s getting close to the end of his time on earth, so he starts pressing for a decision, and for some mind-blowing reason, he accepts whatever decision we make ... although the decision you make about Jesus will have consequences - you might end up in the ravine below.

We’re going to start out where Jesus kind of turns the corner and just ... lays it out there. Big questions; huge questions. We’re going to start off with the biggest question ever asked by anybody. And guys, he will have our answer; and only one answer will get us where we want to go. So here we go. If you have a Bible or a Bible app on your phone or tablet, find Luke chapter 9. We’re going to jump in at verse 18. If you don’t have a Bible app yet, try out the YouVersion Bible app. It’s free from your App Store, and it is amazing. Luke 9, starting with verse 18.

Luke says, “One day Jesus left the crowds to pray alone. Only his disciples were with him, and he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” (Who do your friends say I am, your family, your neighbors ... the people you listen to? Who do they say I am?) “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other ancient prophets risen from the dead.” ... Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?” Peter replied, “You are the Messiah (you are the Christ, you are the anointed one. That’s what Messiah means: it means Christ, anointed, chosen by God. You are the Messiah, you are the one) sent from God!” (Luke 9.18-21)

So Jesus actually asks two questions: One big question is -- Who do those around you think I am? And then he asks the biggest question ever: Who do you think I am? Now if you think about it, these are weird questions, aren’t they? If Jesus really is the Messiah of God, the Son of God, the embodiment of God on earth, doesn’t he already know? Didn’t he already know - back then -- what people were saying about him? And don’t you think he already knows - right now -- what your friends think
about him? Don’t you think he knows what the people you are listening to are saying about him?

Or is it that he just wants us to be aware, to open our eyes, to really listen? What if Jesus asked you that question? I’m serious! What do your friends think about Jesus? The people you hang with, the people you listen to. How about the people you look up to: your teachers, the people whose lives you follow on TV or on YouTube, the people whose music you listen to, whose books you read? What do the people you surround yourself with think about Jesus? Do you know?

- Maybe they are like: “He was good guy, obviously. He preached about love and all that. But I’m not going to obsess over him.”
- Or maybe they are like: “He was obviously incredibly smart, and great with words. He had to be if we’re still quoting him 2000 years later. But that’s all he was. He wasn’t like … God, or anything!”
- Or maybe the people you listen to are like: “I guess he really did lead people to God. And you can follow him if you want, and get to God. But there are other ways to be spiritual, too.”
- Or maybe they are like: “Jesus? He was a charlatan, a hack, a predator on the weak minded. He was a man with delusions of grandeur on steroids!”
- Or maybe – we hear this one a lot: “He was just a guy who was morphed into a God by his delusional and desperate followers. Maybe you are pathetic enough to need a Jesus, but I don’t!”
- Or maybe most pf the people around you really don’t care. “Jesus? What does it really matter? Who cares? That’s grandma stuff, anyway. That’s quaint, that’s old, that’s regressive, even. He simply doesn’t matter to me!”

Well, what do the people you surround yourself with, what do the people you listen to think about Jesus? Or maybe this is a bigger question: Do you know … what they think … about Jesus? Have you ever really listened to what they say about him? Have you ever really wanted to know? Have you ever asked them? … Why not? Does it matter to you?

And maybe this is even a bigger question: What would your friends, your neighbors, your family even … what would they say you think about
Jesus? What would they conclude you think about Jesus by watching you, listening to you? Would they actually know where you stand?

Because that’s where Jesus goes next, with another really weird question. He says, “Who do you say I am?” ... Doesn’t he already know? I mean, if Jesus really is the Messiah, the Son of God, the embodiment of God on earth, doesn’t he already know what every one of us thinks about him? Guys: he knows, but sometimes we need to sort it out. So was he just wanting them to say it out loud? Maybe he saw the waffling, the wavering, the equivocating, the prevaricating inside them, and he just wants them to take a stand. Maybe he sees the waffling, the wavering, the vacillating inside us and he just wants us to take a stand. To quit playing games, and take a stand! Quit trying to have it both ways, and take a stand! Who do you think he is? Do the people around you know, without a doubt, where you stand?

And Peter the Bold (with one abysmal exception) ... Peter the Bold (kind of like Lancelot of old - the boldest and bravest) puts into words what they’ve all been thinking. “You are the Messiah, (you have been) sent from God.” Right answer!

Is that your answer? Do you agree with Peter? Let me ask a few of you ... Will you take a stand, in front of these, your church family? (elders and staff)

• _____ ... “He is the Messiah, sent from God; and he is my Savior and my Lord.” ...

How about the rest of you guys? And are you willing to take that stand out there, too, outside the safety of these walls? You see, it’s a really big deal: taking a stand for Jesus, confessing Christ before men. That’s part of what baptism is all about - taking a public stand. And that’s why when people join our church family we ask them to say it, out loud: “I believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, my Savior, and my Lord.” Take a stand! Let’s keep going.

You see, what Jesus says next blew their minds. He is the Messiah, sent from God. It’s finally out there. We get that. He finally admitted it, out loud. So what he says next just sounds so weird! Luke says, “Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone who he was.” Really?! Why?!
Because ... ‘The Son of Man must - he must, he has to -- suffer many terrible things,’ he must, he said. ‘He (must) will be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He (must) will be killed, but on the third day he will be raised from the dead.’” (Luke 9.21-22) Which creates so many huge questions! He says ... Don’t tell anyone I am the messiah yet ... really?! Because I must do what no one expects a Messiah to do!

You see, they were all expecting a Messiah back then, but no one expected a Messiah like Jesus! They expected a winner! A hero! A conqueror! They expected someone who would make things right in the world. They expected someone who would clean out the swamp in their Washington, someone who would clean up their courts, who would clean up their Wall Street, who would clean up the streets, and smack down the bullies, and provide perfect health care for all. That’s what they expected their Messiah to do. Well, they were wrong!

When Jesus finally pulls off his mask and calls himself God’s Messiah, then he says ... “Now it’s time to suffer ... and now it’s time to ... die.” Huh?! He says, “I have to. I must.” Well, why must he?! And we’re still that way, all the time. A lot of us say, “Jesus is the Messiah, he was sent from God; he is my Savior, and my Lord.” Which means he’s supposed to make my life easier, right?

He’s God: We want him to recognize our needs, and to fix them. If we are poor, we want money. If we are sick, we want to be healed, now. If we are in trouble, we want him to find an easy way out. If we are depressed, we want peace, now. If we are powerless, we want power. If we are lonely, we want him to find us a friend. If we feel strong desires, we want him to find a way for us to indulge them. We want him to fix things for us. But fixing those ... little things ... simple wasn’t high on his priority list. He came to suffer, and to die, and to rise again, to fix things way bigger than the littler things we obsess over.

I think a lot of us want to call him Christ, but we want to be the ones to determine his agenda. If we are poor, we want him to punish the rich. If we are republicans, we want him to judge the democrats. If we are passionate about prejudice, we want him to eradicate racism. If we like hymns, we want him to fix (or smite) those who like choruses. If we like
a praise band, we want him to open the minds of the twits who still like organs. We want to be Christ followers, but we want to him to follow us, right? And he won’t play! Because Jesus seems to have an agenda of his own.

Jesus won’t accept our agenda, because he has one of his own. What we think we need from God is far different from what God thinks we need. We think God should help us deal with our problems in this world. He is more interested in preparing us for an eternity. We want him to heal our bodies, he is more interested in healing our souls. We want him to take care of our checkbook, he is more interested in breaking our greed. We are concerned with things that disrupt our peace, he is concerned with our sin.

You see, we want too little. Jesus’ mission was far more grand. His purposes are far greater than ours. So often we don’t see our real problems, we don’t understand our greatest needs. We miss how horrific it is to be a sinner and separated from God. We have no notion of what is means to be at war with God, to face the possibility of separation from him for an eternity. Our kind of messiah leads to a throne, we think -- God’s led to a cross. And he will not permit us to change his agenda.

“The Son of Man must suffer many terrible things,” Jesus said. “He must be rejected; he must die!” Well, why ... must he? I’m just going to suggest two reasons, there are more. Here’s the first. Guys, Jesus had to die because there is a hole in our heart that only he can fill. Everyone one of us has this itch we can’t scratch - and no one around you can scratch it either. I have this need beyond what any of you can meet. Here it is: We want someone to love us completely, just the way we are. Even if they know everything about us, even if we can’t love them back so unconditionally, we ache for someone to love us, just the way we are. We ache to be purely and passionately loved.

• You’ve seen it in your kids, that hunger: your kids mess up, and there is this hunger in their eyes as they look at you. Do you still love me? Do you?!
• You’ve seen it in the eyes of a prodigal. Do you still love me?
• We just passed Valentine’s Day, maybe the most desperate and lonely holiday of the year. Most people watch the movies, and the
commercials, and down inside they are thinking, “I wish someone loved me like that.”

• It never goes away. Married for 30, 40, 50 years, and still desperate to find a love that is absolutely pure and unconditional. It’s one of our most basic needs, guys - and no human being can sate it.

You see, it’s so hard for any of us to love the way we want to be loved; actually it’s impossible. Whenever we love someone, there is always this piece of “what’s in it for me.” We love each other because there is some return, there’s something we get back. So our love for each other is always, at a least a little, conditional: I’ll love you as long as I am getting something back; and if you don’t love me back, eventually, my love will fade ... right? And our love is never completely vulnerable: I hold a little bit back, so that I can protect myself when you hurt me. You see, human love is always a little bit needy, a little bit self-centered - and we ache for something more.

And, conditional love won’t fill that hole in your heart. The only love that can is so pure, so raw - absolutely unconditional, and unendingly vulnerable. You love me just as I am. You love me even when I don’t love you back. You spend yourself for me, you give yourself to me, because your greatest joy is my joy. Unconditional: even when I am not giving back. Radically vulnerable: spend everything, hold nothing back, giving it all away - even when we hurt you.

Guys, that’s how we want to be loved, but it’s a love so pure, so raw, that no person has ever really loved us that way ... perfectly. We need to be loved like we need air. But when my needy love, intersects with your needy love, we are both left ... empty, sometimes. In the end we are all alike: groping for true love, and incapable of fully giving it. So there is this hole in us that no human can fill. We want someone to love us radically, unconditionally, vulnerably. Someone who loves us just as we are, just for our sake. Now can you imagine how life-changing it would be to be loved like that? Can you imagine how valued you’d feel to be loved like that?

And here’s the deal, guys. That’s exactly how God loves you. You see, God doesn’t need to be loved by you back. He doesn’t need your love at all. The Father, and the Son, and the Spirit have been knowing and
loving each other perfectly forever. Within himself God has all the love he could possibly need. He doesn’t need our love. So why did he create us, and why did he send his Son to redeem us when we turned our backs on him? There’s just one reason, guys. It’s a different kind of love. He loves us, not the way we love each other, not the way we love him back. He loves us perfectly, he loves us unconditionally - just the way we are. He loves us vulnerably -- spending everything, holding nothing back, giving it all away. Raw love, pure, unadulterated, uncut love.

You see, guys, Jesus had to suffer, he had to die, because the God who doesn’t need us, loves us that big, that much. He had to suffer and die to show us the only kind of love that can fill that hole in your heart; he’s the only one who can scratch that itch you’ve felt your whole life. And when you get it, when you experience it, the shallowness of your own love starts to fade.

Jesus had to die, because there is a hole in your heart that only he can fill. That’s one reason. Here’s the second: he had to die, because there is a debt we owe that only he can pay. Listen: there’s a debt we owe that only he can pay. Let me show you what I mean. Whenever someone does you wrong, there is a debt someone has to pay. Now it’s easy to see how this works when we’re talking money. Let’s say you drop my iPad, and it breaks. Either you have to pay for what you broke, or I have to take the hit. I can make you pay, or I can forgive the debt, and I absorb the cost. Someone is going to suffer. By the way, if you break my iPad I’ll probably try to make you suffer.

Now, this idea works with other things too. Someone hurts you: you can either hurt them back, or you can absorb what they owe you. Someone tells a lie about you and ruins your reputation: you can you can either make them pay, or you can absorb what they owe you. Someone robs you of an opportunity, someone steals your happiness, they take away something you can never get back. They owe you, there is a debt someone has to pay. You either make them pay (which usually never really settles the debt), or you forgive them, and you absorb the cost. And guys, that’s not just. That’s not right … it seems.

And here’s the deal, listen: Whenever we sin we incur a debt, with God. It’s kind of like we owe God. And either he makes us pay, or he forgives
you, and absorbs the cost. The debt doesn’t go away. Someone’s going
to pays: either you pay, or he does. And when we get that, all of a
sudden what Jesus said makes sense. He says, “The Son of Man, the
Messiah, the King of Kings, the one who will make everything right, he
must suffer, and he must die … because there’s a debt you owe God that
you can’t pay.” Guys, the forgiver always suffers, and Jesus came to
forgive all our sins … all of them. So here’s what he’s telling us. He
says, “The only way I can forgive all your sins is to suffer in your place.
Either you pay for your sin … which will cost way more than you can give,
or I will.” Wow! … …

So … There are these biggest of all questions, and how you answer them
will define you. And God will have an answer from you!
• Who do think Jesus is, really? And are you willing to take a stand,
  no matter what those around you think?
• And what kind of Messiah is he? Are you willing to let him be the
  kind of Messiah who must suffer, and must die, because his agenda
  is way bigger than ours? Are you willing to follow him even if he’s
  not the kind of God you think he ought to be? Are you willing to
  trust him?
• And are you willing to follow him … anywhere?

Jesus closes the scene by turning to the crowds that were always
following him. He says to them, “If any of you wants to be my follower,
you must give up your own way (are you willing?), (you must) take up
your cross daily (because it’s going to cost you!), and (you must) follow
me (not try to lead, but follow me). If you try to hang on to your life,
you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.
And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost
or destroyed?”

Are you willing to follow him … however, wherever, whatever it costs? It
will make you better! And it will make you way better at life!