

WHO IS JESUS? Luke 9:18-20

Jesus is without a doubt, one of the most important and influential person who ever lived in this world. Even mankind's history is divided into (B.C.) "Before Christ" and (A.C) "After Christ." His teachings and his exemplary life have affected man's thinking, the forms of government in many countries, and how people live in this world. Whether a person is Christian or not, Jesus is considered one of the greatest men in history, and for many, Jesus is the greatest one of all. The Bible teaches us that Jesus was more than a man or a teacher.

1—Jesus is God, the Creator of all things.

Colossians 1:15-17 says, "The Son is the image of the invisible God... For in him all things were created...He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

It is also through the scripture in Revelations 4:11 that we see his majesty, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

All this makes us understand that we as human beings depend completely on God. We owe our existence to him. Jesus, being God, created us for His glory and praise, to enjoy His presence and fellowship with Him. All we are revolves around Jesus and we will never be complete and satisfied until He is the center of our lives.

2—Jesus became Man.

But the Bible also tells us that although Jesus is God, He took our human nature. Philippians 2: 5-8 tells us that Jesus is stripped of his glory and divinity, and put on our humanity, to be like us. The creator of the whole universe, God, decided to limit himself to live as one of His creatures.

As a human being, Jesus had to rely on other human beings, was also obedient to the authorities, suffered pain, he was rejected, he was hungry, tired, and was hated by many people. Certainly Jesus not only knows us because He created us, but also knows us because He lived through what all human beings live through in this life.

3—The story of Jesus goes far beyond.

Being a man, and after many miracles and good deeds in the multitude of people, Jesus was condemned to die as a criminal, in the most appalling and shameful death of his time: the crucifixion (Eph 2:8). We were created to enjoy the presence of God; however, we took our own path away from God, and by rejecting God, rejected life, because God is life. Yet, Jesus never sinned or did anything wrong, and therefore did not deserve to die, he took our place and died for our sins and errors, so now if we do die then we are able to have the opportunity of eternal life (Rom. 5:8).

Conclusion

Jesus said it himself that he was God. There are only two possibilities: Jesus was telling the truth, or Jesus lied. If Jesus really believed that He was the Son of God, but actually it was not, then Jesus would be mad crazy, or a liar, because no sane person would be willing to die for a lie. Therefore, anything He said should be taken seriously. If Jesus spoke the truth, and He truly is the Son of God, then all we can do is surrender to Him and give all we have as long to have Him as the center of our existence. If we give our lives to Him, Jesus will transform us forever.

The decision is yours.

WHO ARE WE? Genesis 1:27

It is very sure that sometime in our life, we have asked ourselves who are we? Why are we in this world? What will happen after death? We also often wonder why the world is as it is. Though we know it is a beautiful place, full of amazing things and places, good and great people, yet it is also full of evil, disease and poverty.

All religions and most philosophies of the world agree that humans have a serious problem, a disease possibly, that makes us destroy ourselves.

1—God created us.

According to the Bible, God is the creator of the whole universe, and all that is in it; and among all His creation, God gave human beings a privileged place.

Genesis 1:27 says that God created us in his image. This means that human beings have attributes of God that not any other creature has, humans can reason, we can create complex societies, able to learn new things, and ability to appreciate art and music. But more important than this is the fact that God created us so that we could have a close relationship with Him.

God made us with reasoning so that we might be aware that he exists, and could enjoy his love, his presence, his kindness, and his blessings. We were created to live in harmony with God, in harmony with those around us, and in harmony with the world in which we live in.

2—A broken relationship

Everything was designed to be perfect; God was in charge in creating everything for our good. What was man suppose to do? Trust, obey and let God be their greatest desire. However, Genesis 3:10 tells us that humans decided to disobey and seek our identity outside the presence of God. Instead of giving God the place He deserves, we decided to make our own decisions, and by doing this, we rejected God.

By rejecting God, we lost our harmony with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world in which we live in. Finally, Romans 6:23 says that, “the wages of sin is death.” In rejecting God, we reject life, because God is life. Living away from God is a process in which we lose the image of God in us, until the point where there is nothing more of God in us.

3—The Solution

Worst of all, is that there is nothing we can do on our own to change our situation. Romans 3:23 says: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Our imperfection prevents us from getting closer to perfection; our unrighteousness prevents us from approaching his righteousness.

But this is where the story changes. God loves us so much that he decided to send his Son, Jesus, to live like us, do what we can not do, and ultimately it is He who dies in our place, so that we can now approach God, not by our own strength, but because of what Jesus did for us.

Finally, the Bible teaches us that God’s plan is to make everything be the same again.

God will dwell with us again and take away our tears and our pain (Rev. 21:3-4 *paraphrased*). Everything will return to the perfection that God designed so from the beginning.

John 3:16 tells us that God loved us so much that he gave his Son, that whoever believes in Him, might be saved and have eternal life.

We must believe that Jesus is our only solution, our only hope, that there is nothing we can do on our own; we must believe that He is God, and make him Lord and Master of our lives. It is only through Jesus that can we truly live again.

THE REASON OF THE CROSS Romans 5:6-8

The cross is probably the most significant symbol of Christianity. We all know that Jesus died on a cross, and with two thieves. We have often heard that Jesus died for our love or in our place; but very few people actually understand the reasons that led Jesus, the Son of God, to give his life on a cross.

God created us for His glory and delight, and has surrounded us with every blessing possible. He gave us the privilege of knowing Him, like no other creature knows Him and yet we took another route away from Him.

1—God's Justice.

God is just, and in His righteousness he has to give humans the consequences to their sins, which is death; and when we say death, we mean more than just our physical death; we mean a spiritual death. This is what separates us from God for eternity. However, God in His love desires to forgive us, revive us, and restore that relationship that we lost in the beginning.

2—Jesus's Life.

It is then that Jesus, the Son of God, is stripped of his divinity, takes our human nature, born in a poor village in Israel, and grows and lives like us.

Jesus went through all stages of being a human, living difficulties and struggles; hated, abused, rejected, and even when Satan tried to destroy the world by destroying Him, Jesus showed that He was perfect in the eyes of God.

Hebrews 4:15 tells us that He was tempted in every way, yet did not sin.

And because he didn't sin at all, Jesus did not deserve to die. But this is where everything changes. Although Jesus did not deserve it, he ends up being sentenced to death.

Although, "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." (1 Peter 2:22 NIV) Jesus ends up nailed to a cross, surrounded by thieves.

3—Jesus's Cross.

The death by cross was the most shameful way of dying during Jesus's lifetime. So shameful is our sin in the sight of God; however, God the Father bore all our sins on His Son Jesus Christ. "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him" (John 3:14-15 NIV).

On a cross, Jesus took our place. On a cross, Jesus meets the justice of God, and at the same time shows His love, giving us undeservedly life (Eph 2: 4-5; Isaiah 53:10). God's will was to break His Son Jesus, so that we might have life.

Conclusion

Jesus died for us, not because we deserve it, but because he loves us (Romans 5: 6-8). Jesus himself said that there is no greater love than to give his life for his friends (Jn 15:13).

Jesus, God, our Creator, the person whom we have offended, is the same person who absorbed the payment of our sins to give us his life, while taking away our death.

Jesus takes our unrighteousness, so that we can take his righteousness; Jesus took our place on the cross, so that we can take a place next to God the Father. Jesus takes our weakness, so we can take His strength; Jesus takes our failures and defeats, so we can take His eternal victory.

What Jesus asks you today is to believe in Him, that you give your life, to entrust in Him, and let Him take your sin and death, so that you can take His eternal life.

Ask people to read Isaiah 53 in their spare time.

BE BORN AGAIN

John 3:1-15

The Bible tells us that Nicodemus was a pharisee. Pharisees were considered to be the most noble, wise, obedient, and closest people to God. They were the standard by which everyone's morality was measured. On top of that, Nicodemus was also a chief among the Pharisees.

More than likely he had a great family, was well educated, had a lot of money, a nice house, and a high social status. Nevertheless, Nicodemus felt drawn to visit Jesus. Nicodemus knew that Jesus was different to any other men he had met before. While speaking with Jesus, the Lord told Nicodemus: "You must be born again" (John 3:3). But, what did this mean?

1- To be born again means to start over.

When Jesus tells Nicodemus that he needs to be born again, he is practically telling him that everything that he is, his social status, his knowledge, his reputation, his money, and everything that makes up his life and identity is of no use to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Isaiah 64:4 says that our good works are like dirty rags before God. Usually, we tend to think that we are good people, because we are always comparing ourselves to other people, who are just or worse than us.

But God doesn't judge based on our own justice, or that of other people, but based on his own justice; and when we are compared to God's justice, we are bound to lose.

In order to be born again, we must first realize that there is nothing we can do to earn God's forgiveness, or his presence, or heaven. We must humble ourselves and accept that without God we are lost, and that He is our only hope for everlasting life.

2 - Repentance.

Then, in order to be saved, the only thing that we can possibly do is to surrender our will to God. This act of submitting our will to God, the Bible calls "repentance".

Repentance literally means to walk in an opposite direction to the one we were pursuing.

Repentance leads us to abandon everything we are and have done, and surrender ourselves to God.

To be born again is more than repenting from our "bad works; to repent is not the same as making a list of the things that we think we've done wrong, and ask for forgiveness. Actually, repenting means to recognize before God that all the bad we have done, as well as the good things that we believe we have done, have no merit before God in order to receive his forgiveness. The Bible teaches as that before the eyes of the Lord, there is not even one good person in the world, not even one! (Romans 3:10-12)

3 - Born as children of God

If there is nothing we can do on our own, and if all we can do is repent of everything we are and have done, how then can we be born again and thus be saved?

John 1:12 says that those who believe in Jesus, are then transformed into God's children by God Himself.

Jesus told Nicodemus that what he needed to do was to believe in Him (John 3:14-15)

To believe in Jesus means to believe in his word, and receive him as our Only and Sufficient Savior; that He may be our Lord, and allow him to reign and take control over our entire life.

Conclusion.

The new birth is a fatal strike against human pride, and our idea of morality. The new birth teaches us that we are all the same before God's eyes.

The new birth teaches us that we are all separated from God, and that we all need to start over.

Making the decision of humbling ourselves before God, and confessing our sins before Him may seem difficult; but when we do humble ourselves and confess our sins, we are born from God, we become his children, and thus enjoy his blessings; but more important still, we now enjoy a close relationship with Him, the Father of our lives. God makes all things new.

WHY ARE WE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD? Romans 8:15-18

We human beings are God's creation; but when we receive our Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts, our status changes from mere creatures to being children. John 1:12 says: "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to be called children of God."

To be children of God is the greatest privilege that we can have; to be called children of the God and Creator of the whole universe.

From here on, this is our identity and reality, and any time that we look at ourselves in the mirror, we must understand what God has done with us.

To be children of God entails many things; we want to share 3 of them:

1- We enjoy intimacy with Him. (Romans 8:15)

"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry "Abba, Father!"

Through the Spirit that God has given us, we can call to him "Abba, Father".

"Abba" is an Aramaic word that little children would use to call upon their fathers, and it was also used by young people and adults, when they had a really close relationship with their fathers.

In our times, "Abba" could mean "daddy" or "papa", but in the most respectful, affectionate, and innocent form possible.

What this all means is that we can now approach the most incredible being in the Universe, and know that He loves us with eternal love, but that He also allows us to love him deeply, and we can say "Abba, Father!"

Our relationship with God is more than a list of do's and don'ts; our relationship with God is something that we can enjoy in heart and soul; it is something that brings joy, peace, contentment, and security to our lives.

2- We are heirs of God. (Romans 8:16, 17)

"The Spirit himself bears witness that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."

This means that all the richness of God are at our hand, because He is the Creator of the whole universe; of the things seen and unseen; and if all belongs to Him, then all belongs to us as well. This does not mean that will be necessarily millionaires, because God's blessings go beyond material things. Nevertheless, we rest assured that with God, we will never lack anything. In Psalms 27:10, David says "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in."

His unconditional love takes care of us, our families, and our dreams. God will always provide for all of our needs; but we must also understand that as a good Father, he will not give us anything we ask, but only those things that will do us good, and specially, those that bring us closer to him.

3- We must look like Him. (Romans 8:28-29)

This verse says that for those who love God, all things work together for good; but it also says that God's desire is for us to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Our primary goal in life should not be the one of being famous, rich, or to receive the acceptance of the crowd; our utmost desire in life must be that of being just like Jesus.

Jesus is God's most amazing gift to us, and his purpose is that we can become just like him. Therefore we must live to imitate Jesus' love, compassion, mercy, faith in the Father, and his obedience to the Father at all times.

Conclusion.

We will make many mistakes along the way, to the point of failure; we will fail God because we are imperfect, but the Bible teaches us that over and over again, God's love for us will bring us back to Him, and embrace us.

Ask your group to read Luke 15:11-32 in their own time.

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR YOUR LIFE (Ephesians 2:10)

The God of Heaven and Earth created us to his image, so that we could enjoy him and live for him. But we decided to ignore his will and run away from his presence; this led us to physical and spiritual death.

We deserved to be condemned by God's justice, but instead, God sent his only Son, who became human just like us, and took our place, our sins, our guilt, and died in our place on the cross. If we believe in Jesus, and allow him to be our Lord and Savior, God makes us his children, and we can once again enjoy his presence. But besides being God's children, he has many plans for our lives.

1- God's Poem.

Ephesians 2:10 says that we are "his workmanship", and that we have been created for good works. We now live for him, to fulfill his dreams, and to be his voice to a world that needs to know God.

The word "workmanship", found in Ephesians, comes from the greek "poeima", which literally translates to "poem" in English. In other words, we are now God's poem, art, and song to our generation. God wants to communicate his love, purposes, justice, and everything that he is to this world through us.

In the same way that Jesus demonstrated God's character to us, we are now transformed to show this world the character and personality of God; this is what it means to be a christian (little Christ). God's desire is that people will see Jesus reflected in our lives, and thus get to know Him.

2- Followers of Jesus

This can only take place when we completely surrender ourselves to God, and allow Him to guide our lives. Jesus told his disciples "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me." (Matthew 16:24).

The only way to be true Christians and true children of God, is if we decide to no longer live for ourselves, but rather tell God "From now on, I will live for you only."

God wants us to reflect his glory in our jobs, schools, with our friends, family, and community.

3- The Church

In order to accomplish this, God formed the "Church". Church is not a temple, place or building; neither is it a religion or belief system.

In the Bible, the Church is the group of people that have repented from their sins and have thus decided to live for God.

The Church is a home, a community of people that help each other out; The Church comes together to worship God, and share with one another. The Church shall be the family in which we find help, comfort, peace, and God's presence (Acts 2:43-47)

The Church often acts in ways that it should not; nevertheless, our job is not that of criticizing or becoming angry towards the Church, but rather do our job, so that the Church can be what God's heart intends it to be. You and I are the Church, and we need each other.

Conclusion.

We are not perfect, but God is molding us each day, transforming us into the image of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Just like God has loved us and saved us, He also wants to use us to tell our friends and our cities that God loves them and wants to save them.

Jesus will soon come for us, and will take us to his presence; He will take away all pain; every problem will disappear, and we will be able to enjoy God's presence once again, just as He designed it from the beginning.

But meanwhile, we must be like Jesus, study his Word, seek his presence, fall in love with him, surrender our lives to him, and allow him to move through us in everything we do.

We are God's poem to this generation.