

Review

The focus of our study of the Gospels has centered on Jesus’ question to Simon Peter, which really is a question addressed to all people: *“Who do you say I am?”* (Matthew 16:15). Last fall as we studied the first part of Jesus’ ministry, we paid close attention to the reactions of those who encountered Jesus and their responses to him. As we discovered through the course of our study, very few answered Jesus’ question as did Simon Peter who proclaimed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” (v.16). In preparation for our upcoming study we will review some of the perceptions and expectations people had of who they thought or wanted Jesus to be compared with who he presented himself as.

The people of Israel were anticipating a messiah in the type of Moses or King David. They were waiting for a political leader who would rise up and lead Israel in a military revolution against the Romans to restore sovereignty to the nation of Israel. This is the only kind of messiah, or deliverer, they knew of from historical experience. The history of Israel is a succession of divinely appointed leaders and/or prophets from the time of Moses onward. Moses freed the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and led them through the desert unifying the tribes of Jacob into a nation. Joshua led the Israelites out of the desert to conquer the land of Canaan. Samuel, the last of the Judges, ruled Israel before anointing Saul and then David as the first kings of Israel ushering in the Monarchy. David unified all the tribes into one nation, built up that nation to stand against the Philistines, their enemy for centuries, and expanded the territory of Israel beyond its original borders ushering in Israel’s golden age. Elijah restored the nation of Israel to God’s favor in destroying the false religion that had grown up under King Ahab’s reign. Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem when the people of Israel returned after the Babylonian Exile. Judah Maccabee restored sovereignty to Israel after years of subjugation by the Greeks in 160 BC when he and his forces wrested control of Israel from the Seleucid Empire upon the death of Antiochus IV. Sadly sovereignty only lasted for about 100 years when Israel would come under Roman Rule in 63 BC. The severe oppression of the Jews under Roman oppression rekindled a flame of nationalism in the hearts of the people as they dreamed and hoped for the day when God would send a messiah to rescue and restore the nation. Their hopes were set on a military/political figure who would rise up and lead the people against the Romans, and many thought Jesus was this messiah.

Deliverer

The Feeding of 5000 (Mark 6:30-44)¹ feeds the imagination of those who are seeking a military hero. Jesus had to withdraw himself from the crowds because they wanted to make him king (John 6:14-15). In this episode the people gathered saw Jesus mobilize the thousands of men, women, and children gathered in military order. They saw Jesus provide food enough for an army. And from previous experience they knew he could heal and restore life to the sick and injured insuring an insurmountable number of soldiers. This was the *perception* of many in the crowd. This is not what Jesus was *teaching* through the miracle of the feeding of the 5000, but it was what many came to believe about Jesus.

Through the feeding of the 5000, Jesus reveals himself as a *spiritual* leader. He is the manna from heaven. He is the “*man shall not live by bread alone but every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*”. He is the Word. He is the Bread of Life. The miraculous manna provided by God for the whole world. Consuming this bread, this Word, accepting, believing Jesus is the Word in flesh is the gift of eternal life. Just as the manna in the desert was provision that allowed Israel to survive in the desert wanderings before entering the promise land, Jesus is the miraculous bread of life that allows us to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Unfortunately this was not the message many received in the gathered crowd.

The people of Israel had a problem of perspective. Jesus offered eternal hope and deliverance. He was offering deliverance to the Kingdom of God, the spiritual Promise Land. What people wanted was deliverance from a temporal oppressive regime. They were focused on immediate political freedom from Rome. Jesus offered eternal freedom; the people sought deliverance in the here and now, in the temporal world. Many could not conceive of the eternal kingdom he offered.

Prophet of God

Jesus is despised by religious authorities who make him out to be a false prophet leading Israel astray. The miracles Jesus performs reveal him as God’s Messiah, yet instead of recognizing the power of God manifest in Jesus, the religious authorities accuse him of being a false prophet with too much sway over the people of Israel and a threat to the status quo. They fear the following he has gathered will destabilize the delicate balance of power structures in Jerusalem and Israel bringing the wrath of Rome down upon them all. They refuse to recognize him as the one sent from God despite fulfillment after fulfillment of prophecy and eventually accuse him of being an agent of Satan.

¹ See Session 7 Notes: *Loaves and Fishes*

In every instance when Jesus comes in conflict with the religious authorities he points out their selfish ways of seeking to retain their power, authority, and position while using those privileges to further increase their own situation at the expense of shepherding Israel, their God given responsibility. Jesus condemns the Pharisaic traditions upheld by the Pharisees who place their traditions above God's Law, emphasizing obedience over compassion. They make a show of adhering to the law in order to earn the respect and high opinion of man, while at the same time putting their own reputation a head of showing mercy, love, and compassion. In Mark 7:8 Jesus accuses the Pharisees, *"You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."*

In Matthew 12² a trap is set by the Pharisees: if Jesus heals the crippled man on the Sabbath, he is not righteous by pharisaic standards because the healing is considered as work on the Sabbath and therefore in violation of Sabbath Law. If Jesus heals the man, he breaks the law of keeping the Sabbath Holy. Jesus says that having compassion and healing the man, even on the Sabbath, is the greater priority. Mercy above sacrifice is what God requires, and places God's law above Pharisaic tradition. They have been bested again by this man from Galilee. Instead of acknowledging the error of their ways they instead seek to silence the truth. This passage ends with Jesus healing the crippled man and the Pharisees revealing their spiritual blindness, *"But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus"* (v.14). The Pharisees refusal to acknowledge the power of God manifested in Jesus leads them to assign that power to Satan (v.24) instead. Proclaiming that Jesus is an agent of Satan ultimately aligns them against God. Jesus brings home this point in John 8:40-44 *"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."*

Shepherd King

The image of the Shepherd King³ goes back to the roots of Israel's faith as a metaphor of the type of ruler God wants over Israel, and points to the way in which Messiah will care for Israel. Sadly there were times when the appointed shepherd became more of a wolf, turning away from God and doing as he pleased with the power and authority bestowed upon him. The image of a shepherd tending his flock is an easily understood metaphor for the people to whom it was used to convey this message. Israel was a farming community. Tending flocks of goats and sheep was common. Everyone

² See Session 6 Lesson Notes: *A Turning Point*

³ See Session 8 Lesson Notes: *The Good Shepherd*

*“Who Do You Say I Am?”:
A Study of Jesus, Part 2*

understood and was familiar with the work, demands, and dangers a shepherd faced. It was hard, lonely, lowly work. Every level of society could understand the image even if they did not tend flocks themselves. It was a prevalent part of their culture. Numbers 27:15-17 is the first biblical example of this image:

Moses said to the Lord, “May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”

In Chapter 34 of Ezekiel God speaks through Ezekiel the prophet, judging against Israel’s leaders because they have greatly distorted and misused the power and authority entrusted to them. Throughout this passage the shepherd image is used to illustrate the behavior of Israel’s false shepherds and the coming of the true shepherd of Israel.⁴ In 1 Samuel 16:1, 10-13 King David is the embodiment of this metaphor and an archetype, or precursor, of Messiah. He is a living example of the Shepherd King illustrating the way in which Messiah will watch over Israel. Psalm 78:70-72 tell us the characteristics of the shepherd king: protector, guardian, humble in authority, willing to sacrifice himself for the good of his flock. And finally Jesus reveals himself as the Good Shepherd of those who are part of the Kingdom of God through comparisons of how a shepherd watches and keeps his flock (John 10:1-18).

Suffering Servant

Jesus presents himself as the suffering servant⁵ prepared to offer even his life to restore Israel (and all mankind) to the Father. John 6:39-46 tell us that Jesus was sent by the Father. All he says and does comes from the father. He obediently does the work set for him to do by the Father. He seeks not his own glory, but glorifies the father (v. 50-54). The work set for Jesus to do leads to the cross and his death, where Jesus knowingly and obediently goes.⁶ Isaiah 52:13-53:12⁷ prophetically describe the suffering servant Messiah which would be lived in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

⁴ An amazing passage I highly recommend reading at least verses 1-24.

⁵ See also commentary from Lesson 8 Homework: *Messiah: Jesus Predicts His Death and Jesus Predicts his Death a Second and Third Time*

⁶ Mark 8:31-9:1; Matthew 17:22-23; 20:17-19.

⁷ Another important passage to be familiar with!

Son of Man

Jesus reveals himself as Daniel's Son of Man at the Transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-13.⁸ Jesus consistently viewed His life and mission as fulfilling the role of the "Son of Man", "a title drawn from Dan. 7:13,14 where it stands for God's Representative on earth who suffers out of loyalty to the truth and is at length rewarded by being promoted to share the throne of God."⁹ In a vision Daniel is led into the throne room of the Ancient of Days – God almighty. This appears to be the scene of Jesus' coronation where the Son of Man is given authority, dominion and sovereign power (Daniel 7:13-14). This Son of Man appears again in Daniel 10:1-19 where Daniel describes a vision wherein he interacts with someone that he describes as being "like a man". This may be a christophany – a vision of the pre-incarnate Christ. Daniel describes the "one like a Son of Man":

I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. (Daniel 10:5-6)

Turning to Luke's description of the transfiguration, focus on Jesus' appearance:

*About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. **As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. (Luke 9:28-31, emphasis mine.)***

Next read Mark's description of the same event:

*³ His clothes became **dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.** ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. (Mark 9:3-4, emphasis mine)*

The disciple John, and witness to the transfiguration, would later have a vision too of the glorified Jesus:

*I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was **someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a***

⁸ See commentary in Lesson 8 Homework: *Messiah: The Transfiguration*

⁹ Holman Bible Dictionary

furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. (Revelation 1:12-16, emphasis mine)

If John didn't recognize Jesus, the Son of Man in this vision from his experience of the transfiguration, Jesus' words in the next verse should have brought some enlightenment as to who stood before him:

*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “**Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.**”*

Now imagine what the disciples were seeing at the transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-13. The Disciples must see him as the Divine Son of God, deserving worship. Look at the disciples' reaction in verse 6: They fell facedown to the ground, terrified. They couldn't look at Jesus. In that instant they are confronted with his divinity and their unrighteousness, and they are terrified. What does Jesus do? He touches them and restores their strength and relieves their fear, just as the one like a son of man does in Daniel 10:18-19. This revelation of who Jesus is – the Son of Man must have been seared into their hearts and minds. As we will see, they don't fully comprehend its meaning, but they cannot possibly doubt his divinity.

Messiah, God's Anointed

Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles proclaims himself as Messiah three times.¹⁰ This is the feast celebrating God's provision in the wilderness wanderings as well as his presence. Just as the Jews in Jesus' day looked back and remembered the miraculous events of their forefathers' desert wanderings with God, they look forward to the coming Messiah to deliver them again, this time in hopes of immediate deliverance from Rome. They were looking for Messiah to present himself to Israel during the Feast Days.

1. Living Water (John 7: 37-52)

On the last and greatest day of the feast we have Jesus in the courts for the *Hoshanna Rabbah* (Great Hosanna) Ceremony. Every morning just after dawn the high priest, accompanied by a joyful procession of musicians and worshipers would make their way down to the Pool of Siloam. The high priest carried a golden pitcher (that would hold

¹⁰ See Session 9 Lesson Notes: *The Feast of Tabernacles* and commentary from Lesson 9 Homework: *The Last Day of the Feast*

about a quart of water) and would fill the pitcher from the pool and bring it back to the Temple.

While this was going on, another procession would depart from the Temple and go down to a location just south of Jerusalem where willows of the brook grew in great abundance. Willow branches were gathered and brought back to the Temple where they were placed on the sides of the altar so they formed a canopy of branches over the altar.

The High Priest, returning from the Pool of Siloam, would come to the Temple through the south gate (also known as the Water Gate because of this ceremony). As he entered through the gate, 3 sets of 7 blasts of the ram's horn would be heard and the priests all would shout together: "Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isa 12:3). As he approached the altar, the High Priest would make 7 circuits around the altar holding up the pitcher of water for all to see. The High Priest would approach the altar in the Inner court of the Temple, ascend up the right side of the ramp. There were two silver basins reserved for drink offerings, one for wine and the other for water libations for this feast. As the High Priest poured the water before the Lord an offering of wine was poured as well into the other silver basin. As this happened 3 more sets of 7 blasts of the ram horn would indicate the start of the Temple music and the Levite choir would sing the Hallel (the praise psalms 113-118).

"Lord, save us!

Lord, grant us success!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

From the house of the Lord we bless you.

The Lord is God,

and he has made his light shine on us.

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession

upto the horns of the altar.

(Psalm 118:25-27).

Psalm 118 was viewed as a messianic psalm and gave the feast and ceremony a messianic emphasis. It was widely believed that Messiah would make himself known to the people of Israel during this week-long Feast. Verse 25 is where our Hosanna comes from: "*Hosanna in the Highest, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" as we sing together in mass.

John 7:37-38, describes the conclusion of this ceremony: "*On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."*

Just as all are watching the High Priest pour a single stream of water from the pitcher into the basin, Jesus calls out his promise for flowing streams of water. The messianic message is that the streams of living water are an out pouring of the holy

spirit promised to come with Messiah. Jesus’ words quote Isaiah 55:1, “*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters*”. The offer of living water alludes to a messianic theme of the prophets, particularly Isaiah, wherein the living water is associated with the blessings of Messiah and the Holy Spirit. By promising the living waters Jesus was doing something only the Messiah could do: offer the Holy Spirit to all who would believe. Messiah ushers in the Holy Spirit, the blessings of living water gushing forth from the hearts of all who will believe. The people of Israel are the dry and parched land of Isaiah’s prophecy. Jesus was boldly claiming to be the Messiah in the midst of the Great Hosanna Ceremony.

2. Light of the World (John 8:12)

Jesus is teaching in the temple court, the court of women where the offerings were put (we know this because it tells us in v. 20). Just the night before, and each preceding night for the week of the feast, there had been the lighting ceremony held in this court.

The light ceremony was the highlight of the week of festivities of the Feast of Tabernacles. The entire temple court was illuminated by four great menorahs of the temple. Each menorah had four branches of oil lamps. Each branch required its own ladder for a Levite to climb up and refill the lamps throughout the night. In the court yard the priests and Levites would sing and dance with torches while the Levite choir played music. The entire temple mount was a glow with light, music and worshipping, while all of Jerusalem was lit by the full autumn moon. Everything was glowing with the glory of God reminding the people of Israel of how the pillar of fire accompanied the Israelites through the desert wanderings every night, and looked forward to the return of Messiah who would return to the temple in his glory as described by the prophet Ezekiel 43:1-5:¹¹

The Glory Returns to the Temple

¹ Then the man brought me to the gate facing east, ² and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. ³ The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown. ⁴ The glory of the LORD entered the temple through the gate facing east. ⁵ Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

¹¹ Notice the description of the voice “like the roar of rushing waters”. V3 references a previous vision recorded in Ezekiel 1:1, 26-28. This appears to be another theophany, a vision of the pre-incarnate Christ, as we studied in the Son of Man section.

The next day Jesus appeared in the courts and proclaimed in John 8:12, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* After the events of the previous evening, everyone gathered in the courtyard would understand what he meant by claiming to be "the light of the world". It was a proclamation of messiahship. He was claiming to be the Messiah. Then he makes another astounding pronouncement, that all who would follow him would not walk in darkness, but would have the light – the light of God.

3. Sight for the Blind (John 9)

The healing of the blind man is the third time in the Feast of Tabernacles pericope wherein Jesus reveals himself as the awaited messiah. I'm not going to go in depth in this passage at this time as it comes up in our homework this week and will be the subject of our session next week. This event occurs right after the Feast of Tabernacles concludes and the city is still filled with many pilgrims. Jesus heals a man known to be blind from birth and causes a great stir among the religious leaders in Jerusalem. It is an event that fulfills the prophecy of Messiah returning sight to the blind, both physically and spiritually. It follows along with the theme of light and dark which we will also explore in this week's homework and next week's session.

*"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;
I will take hold of your hand.
I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles,
7 to open eyes that are blind,
to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.
Isaiah 42:6-7 (NIV)*

Conclusion

Through the first part of our study we followed Jesus along with his disciples as eyewitnesses to his teachings and miracles. We were given the same testimony as to the identity of Jesus as those who were present at the time of Jesus' ministry. We were given scriptural proofs of his identity, as well as proofs manifested in his power through miracles. As we discussed in Part 1, those eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry and miracles responded by either rejecting Jesus because he was not the messiah they were looking for; or followed him because he was more than what they anticipated. It is up to each one of us to come to our own decision of who Jesus is. In the Part Two of our study, "Who Do You Say I Am?" we will continue to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, alongside his disciples. By the end of our study we will have no choice but to answer Jesus'

question. We will have had all the evidence given to us to come to that all important answer; and we will have reached a place where an answer will be required of us. I look forward to continuing this journey with you!

Final Comments

As we are about to embark on the second half of our journey together following in Jesus' footsteps, I think it important to examine what Jesus said once more lest we miss an important detail. In the last scripture passage we looked at above, Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever **follows** me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* (John 8:12, *emphasis mine*). What does Jesus mean by “follow”? Let us to spend a few moments on this word “follow”. In Greek it is the word *akoloutheō* which comes from the word *keleuthos*, meaning a *road*; *akoloutheo* means, “to be in the same way with, i.e. to *accompany* (**specially as a disciple**) :- follow, reach.”¹² (*Emphasis mine.*) This same word is used over and over again in the gospels. Jesus is calling anyone who will come with him to follow as his disciple. It is more than just following him out of the temple, or down a road. It requires commitment on the part of the follower, it requires adhering to his teachings, dedicating one's life to his teachings, and his way. Jesus is offering to lead any who will follow into the light of a life with God and out of darkness, the oppression of sin and separation from his and our Father. Come with me and we will follow together where he leads.

¹² Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary