

Ranking Jesus

You Asked For It, Part 4

Luke 9:18-22

I have in my library a book entitled, *The 100*, written by astrophysicist and author, Michael Hart.

Hart basically asked the question, “Who are the 100 most influential people in history?” He also posed the question, “Of all the human beings who have ever lived, who has had the deepest impact on our lives today?”

He went on to answer his questions by listing 100 people along with brief biographies.

But what really made the book interesting and popular was that Michael Hart actually ranked the top one hundred people by order of importance – at least in his opinion.

He created, one author wrote, the NCAA playoffs of human greatness.¹

In his list of 100 was Louis Pasteur, who ushered us into the realm of modern medicine. He made the list for having figured out how to inoculate human beings against numerous diseases. He even found a way to keep milk longer before it developed harmful microbes – a process named after him – pasteurization. Louis Pasteur was ranked number 11.

I thought it was ironic that Moses made the cut at number 15, just one slot ahead of Charles Darwin at number 16.

Martin Luther the reformer also made the list at 24 and so did George Washington, at number 25.

The Wright Brothers at number 28 and Henry Ford coming in at number 91.

And where did this author rank Jesus Christ?

Fortunately, Jesus made it on the list – in fact, He made it almost to the very top of the ranking.

He came in third, just after Isaac Newton – who was a Christian by the way.

Michael Hart wrote that Jesus was the inspiration for the most influential religion in history. He even added that, “Jesus had an extraordinarily impressive personality.”

That’s a nice compliment. But it makes you wonder if he read the whole story – they crucified Him – you call that an impressive personality?!

Anyway, Hart ranked Jesus as the third most influential person in history, just after the scientist Isaac Newton and the prophet Muhammad.

How would you rank Jesus as a person of influence in your life?

The way you answer that question will affect everything about your life. In fact, it happens to be *the* critical question of all of life.

I find it fascinating that Jesus Christ actually asked His disciples this question, recorded in Luke’s Gospel and chapter 9.

Who do you think that I really am?

I’m reading from *verse 18*. ***And it happened that while He was praying the alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, “Who do the people say that I am?” 19. They answered and said, “John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again.”***

Matthew’s Gospel informs us that they also added Jeremiah to the list.

Now, don’t miss the fact that the popular opinion on the street gives Jesus a pretty high ranking at least at first.

Some believed Jesus was the recently executed and now resurrected John the Baptist – perhaps coming to enact revenge on the government for his unjust execution.

Others said Jesus was Elijah. Elijah was one of the greatest of the Jewish prophets; in fact, he was expected as the forerunner of the coming Messiah (Malachi 4).

Many people thought he was a resurrected Jeremiah, another revered prophet of old.

In fact, the Jews believed the popular legend that Jeremiah followed God's command to hide the Ark of the Covenant and the altar of incense in a secret cave on nearby mount Pisgah. They believed that this cave would not be discovered until Jeremiah rose from the dead and brought out these long lost treasures and restored the glory of Israel's worship once again.ⁱⁱ

Jesus is being perceived as a really famous, revered person.

In fact, you can't help but notice that none of the disciples quoted anybody – especially the Jewish leaders – who thought Jesus was a blasphemer – a false teacher – a troublemaker in Israel.ⁱⁱⁱ

They only quoted the good comments. And there were evidently a lot of people who were giving Jesus some pretty high ranking . . .

“Lord, people are saying that you're one of the great ones of Israel's past glory days – the overthrowing of Rome and the kingdom glory of Israel is just ahead.”

It's interesting that Jesus doesn't correct any of these rankings – he ignores them.

What He does instead is ask them a second question – and this question is the most important one of all. **Notice verse 20; And He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”**

Isn't that the critical question in any generation and in every heart?!

In fact, to this day, the most important thing in life isn't what other people are saying about Jesus – it's what *you* say about Jesus.

And Peter answered, **verse 20, and said, [You are] The Christ of God.**

How incredibly encouraging this must have been to Jesus – as a man.

“Lord, people are saying a lot of things about you – good and bad; high ranking and in the gutter . . . but we don't believe anything they're saying about who You are – good or bad – they're actually *all* wrong.”

We know what everybody else thinks about you – but we who You are – ***you are the Christ of God.***

What does that mean?

The name “Christ” comes from the Greek noun *Christos*, which translates the Hebrew word, *mashiach* – which we transliterate into *Messiah*.^{iv}

Both Christ and Messiah mean, literally, anointed one.^v

So Peter is saying here, “Lord, you are the anointed one of the living God . . . you are *the* Messiah.”

In fact, Matthew's Gospel account adds to Peter's declaration which gives us the fullest eyewitness account – “you are the son of the Living God.”

You are one in essence – in nature – equal with eternal God.^{vi}

You are the Christ, the son of the living God – Matthew 16:16

In other words, Jesus, you are more than a resurrected prophet of Old – you are more than Elijah and John and Jeremiah – you are certainly not a false teacher or a blasphemer or a traitor – you are the anointed Messiah, in fact, more than that, you are God the Son.

What an incredible declaration of faith.

And Jesus will respond in Matthew's Gospel account that Peter was the recipient of divinely inspired insight.

In other words, Peter, you've just spoken with divine clarity. Your understanding of who I am has never been clearer.

Now notice what Jesus says next – in **verse 21**. ***But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone.***

And that was because their proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah would have led the Jews to revolt against Rome and use Jesus as their revolutionary leader.

Even the disciples didn't understand the Messiah's first coming, as prophesied by Isaiah, would not lead to a coronation, but a crucifixion.

So keep it under your hats for now, fellas . . . why??

Notice verse 22, “The Son of Man (a Messianic title from the prophet Daniel) must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.

Now Matthew fills in a critical gap that I find absolutely fascinating – and convicting.

Turn back several pages in your New Testament to **Matthew chapter 16**.

It's at this point in the narrative where **Matthew** records for us what happened; **chapter 16** and let's

back into this scene with *verse 21; From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised upon the third day. Now notice, 22. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This will never happen to You." 23. But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me (literally get away from), Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."*

One English translation reads, "*Jesus said to Peter, "You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, and not from God's."*

In other words, Peter went from declaring the truth about Christ to joining the tempter who didn't want Christ to fulfill His divine purpose of dying for our sins and rising again, victoriously.

Peter effectively changed sides!

In less than 6 verses Peter went:

- from interpreting the person of Christ to insulting the person of Christ
- from insight to indiscretion;
- from knowing exactly who Jesus was to not having a clue as to why Jesus came.

Listen, if it's possible for Peter to lose his spiritual footing in less than 6 verses, how possible is it for us to lose ours?

Let's explore what may have moved Peter from insight to indiscretion; from submission to correction.

Two words come to mind.

1) The first word is estimation

If you like longer points to your outline, we could put it this way: Believers need to guard a sanctified estimation of the person of Christ.

Notice again *Matthew 16:22. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.*

What exactly did that look like??

"Uh, Lord, could I see you after Bible Study . . . now listen – all this talk about being killed by the religious leaders, that'll never happen to you – I have insight from God, remember? I know who you are. And trust me; the will of God doesn't have anything to do with you dying. I mean, God forbid that – it'll never happen.

You see, part of Peter's problem was that He forgot Who he was talking to. Only a few verses earlier he had declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

And now he is literally correcting God.

Can you imagine getting to the point where you correct God? I have! Have you?

Lord I wouldn't do it that way if I were you

You seem to be missing some key factors

Your timing is way off

Lord, what in the world are you doing with my life?!

God forbid that this would be Your will?

Rejection . . . death . . . sorrow . . . resurrection . . . what's that all about?

If Jesus Christ were to show up and ask you, "Who do you think I am?" We would all be able, I trust, to answer with great theological conviction – You are God's anointed – You are the son of the living God, the Messiah.

You see, it's possible to know who Jesus Christ **is**, and struggle with what Jesus Christ **does**.

Daniel 4:34 and 35 declares, "God's dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"

In other words, this sovereign Lord is accountable to no one. He answers to no one – no one corrects God!

The problem is, at this particular moment, Peter forgets all that and treats Jesus like a peer – one of the guys. So, let me straighten you out.

His perspective of Christ is dangerously short-sighted – in fact, it has become satanically inspired.

Any estimation of Jesus Christ that diminishes His glory and His word and His authority and His will is aligned with Satan who hates all of the above.

That leads me to the second word that spelled danger: it is the word, expectation.

Believers not only need to guard a sanctified estimation of the person of Christ – secondly, we need to maintain a surrendered expectation toward the purposes of Christ.

This was Peter's big hang-up, at the moment.

Peter had expectations for the future. They didn't have anything to do with Jesus dying. That's

why he rebukes the Lord when the Lord begins to teach His own expectations for the future.

Jesus says, "I'm expecting to suffer, die and rise again."

And Peter's saying, "What?"

So what you have here is a battle of expectations.

You ever had one of those battles with the Lord?

- Lord, I expected You to do this –
- I really expected You to do that –
- I expected things to turn out differently –
- I didn't expect you to allow that –
- I really wasn't expecting this

You know what life is? Life is not living according to our expectations – it is responding to what we discover are the expectations of God.

Peter is expecting to see Judaism reformed.

Jesus is expecting the end of Judaism and the creation of the church.

Peter is expecting sermons on hillsides; learning from the master teacher; everything taken care of . . . even money from a fish's mouths to pay his taxes. How great was that!

Peter saw a series of miracles and a growing influence in life; the Lord saw a serpent crushed and the grave defeated in death.

Peter planned to stay faithful – there was no rooster in his expectations; there was no cross either . . . no nails; no corpse . . . no sealed tomb!

God forbid that would ever happen!

Listen, the problem with our expectations is that they are usually far too self-centered and way too small.

Peter saw little fish dinners by the sea-shore . . . Jesus Christ saw the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Peter could see houses filled with disciples; Jesus could see heaven filled with the redeemed.

What do you see?

Answer His question – Who do you say that I am?

What is your personal estimation of Jesus Christ? From all that you're learning as you grow in Christ – don't lose that – you need to know the truth *about* Him.

And what are your expectations *from* Him?

Here's the good news . . . even when we get it wrong, He's patient to teach us more.

Jesus didn't kick Peter out the group. He continued to teach Peter and Peter would spend a lifetime learning what we're all in the process of learning.

That life is not made up of our expectations coming to pass – it's made up of responding to God's expectations coming to pass.

Surrendering without rebuke to every one of His expectations; knowing that His expectations ultimately become our destination.

The last words of Peter record this balance – he writes in 2 Peter, ***but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.***

Learn all you can about Who He is!

But as you get to know Him . . . learn to trust Him too.

Because Peter adds in closing, ***for to Him belongs the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. (2 Peter 3:18).***

He's in control.

This is a sanctified estimation . . . of Who He is.

This is a surrendered expectation . . . for what He chooses to do.

Get to know Him . . . and learn to trust Him – now . . . and all the way to that day – marked eternity.

Have you ever thought about the fact that when that day comes – at the end of human history, there will be a universe wide ranking of Jesus – the redeemed and the unredeemed will have all arrived at the same truth . . . for the unredeemed who are judged, it will be too late.

Paul writes to the Philippians of this universal declaration – this ranking by all of humanity – ***Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.***

Not 10th place, or 3rd or 2nd . . . but first! He is and forever will be at the highest ranking of glory.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/24/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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- ii John Phillips, Exploring the Gospels: Matthew (Loizeaux Brothers, 1999), p. 347
- iii LeRoy Lawson, Matthew (Standard Publishing, 1986), p. 203
- iv Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on Luke (Zondervan, 2012), p. 229
- v Fritz Rienecker/Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 165
- vi John MacArthur, Matthew 16-23 (Moody Bible Institute, 1988), p. 22