

On two recent pastoral visits. Before the visit was possible. I had to correctly answer a number of important questions. Flu injection - yes. Travelled overseas - no. Cough – no. Tested for the coronavirus – yes. Result – negative. My answers mattered. Important public health questions. A more important question. Spiritual health question. Eternal consequence question. Who is Jesus? The question at the heart of Dr Luke’s gospel. Luke carefully investigates the evidence. So his readers can rightly answer and respond to the question. This question exercising the hearts and minds of people with whom Jesus has contact. Today’s passage brings the participants and readers to a crossroad. Question put. Answers given. Implications drawn. **(read passage here)** As the passage begins, its importance revealed in the opening words, *‘Once when Jesus was praying in private’ v18* Luke only highlights Jesus’ prayer at turning points in his ministry. His baptism, choosing the twelve apostles, the transfiguration, in the garden of Gethsemane before his arrest. And here. Something really matters about this Q&A episode. It matters because Jesus initiates the Q&A. Asking the key question. *“Who do the crowds say I am?” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” v18,20*, For Jesus the time is right to ask the question. The evidence is there in the works and words of Jesus for the question to be answered correctly. Brothers and sisters, we have all the evidence about the identity of Jesus to make an informed decision. We have God’s written word. There will be no new revelation from God about his Son. If you know anyone who claims they need more evidence about Jesus, invite them to read a gospel with you. This Q&A matters in light of what follows. In **9:51** we read, *‘As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.’* With single-minded determination Jesus walks to the cross. His disciples need to know and confess who Jesus is as they continue to follow him. This Q&A central in determining the authenticity of Christian faith. This Q&A reveals Jesus as the one God promised to send. The one Jews are waiting for; who fulfils Old Testament promises; the seed of the woman who will crush Satan; the descendent of Abraham through whom the peoples of the earth will be blessed; the descendent of David who will establish an eternal kingdom; the one Isaiah spoke about. *‘For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no*

end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.' **Isaiah 9:6-7** This Q&A confirms Jesus is the one he claims to be. Through Jesus promise becomes fulfilment; the Kingdom of God is present. Like any meaningful Q and A session a range of answers emerge. *'They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "God's Messiah."* **v19-20** A common thread in the answers of eyewitnesses to Jesus life. He is more than just another moral, upright teacher of God's law. Somehow, he is connected to God's revelation and purposes. Like John the Baptist, Elijah. The people recognise there is a touch of beyond the normal about Jesus.. One who came back to life centuries after death. People putting the jigsaw pieces together. For most the picture not yet complete. Sisters and brothers, the response of the crowds useful for our engagement with not yet Christians. Today, the cop out answer about Jesus is that he is a good man. Eyewitnesses know he is much more than just a good man. He cannot possibly be a good man. If his claims about himself are not true. He's either liar or lunatic. Claiming to forgive sins, calm storms, raise people from the dead. If his claims are true, and they are, he is the Lord he claims to be. Now there's a good conversation starter. Peter's answer nails it. Jesus is the Messiah. Matthew's gospel reminds us, Peter's answer only possible by divine revelation. In **Matthew 16:17**, *Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.* Brothers and sisters, prayer a vital part of our evangelism. Prayer that God will reveal Jesus to those we are witnessing to. Peter's answer loaded with perceptions and understandings about the Messiah. He is the anointed one they are waiting for; the powerful one who will overthrow their enemies, regather God's people, make Jerusalem centre of the world again, establish the perfect reign of God on earth. Jesus accepts Peter's answer. But adds explosive and shocking details about the Messiah. Shattering the understandings and expectations of Israel. *And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."* **v22** The Messiah sent by God will not make Israel great again. He will suffer and die, then come back to life. Jesus is the Messiah. Sisters and brothers, everything changes with this self-revelation of Jesus' identity. As God's

anointed one, his central purpose is to suffer and die. For your sins and mine. Breaking the power of sin and death by being raised to life. Ruling the world as the resurrected Son of God. The explosive implications of this captured in **v23-26**. These verses so important for our Christian lives they are worth hearing again. *Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.* Are you a disciple of Jesus? Well follow in the footsteps of your Lord. Live a crucified life of self-denial. Abdicate the throne of your life and place the Lord Jesus on it. Taking up your cross is not putting up with some burden in life. It is walking the way of the cross like Jesus. The glory and triumph of resurrection comes via the way of the cross. Through a life of suffering service unashamed of the one we serve. This is fulness of life. This is victorious Christian living. As we will see next Sunday, this is truly the means by which we see the Kingdom of God in all its power and glory. Jesus' identity, Jesus' teaching explodes the popular myth that fulness of life comes through self-discovery and self-gain. Brothers and sisters, this Q&A exposes us and challenges us. Who do you say Jesus is? What needs to change in your life for you to walk in the footsteps of Jesus? What are your strategies for finding fulness of life? Are they working? Are you in danger of losing your soul because your quest for fulness has no place for the Lordship of Jesus? Sisters and brothers, be clear about this important truth. If Jesus is the Messiah, fulness of life is only found in following him to the cross and then to glory. As Kent Hughes wrote, *'If you confess Jesus as Christ you must cling to his bloody cross as your only hope.'*