

Luke 9:18-22

Sermon: **Who am I**
written by: Danijel Dragaš

2025.



INTRODUCTION

1. As I said in the previous sermon, we are returning to the book (The Gospel of Luke). Before us is the event where Jesus asks His disciples: *"Who do the crowds say that I am¹?"* A lot had happened in Jesus' ministry before He asked His disciples this question.

1.1. Let's briefly recall where all those events took place and what exactly happened. Jesus had sent out the Twelve to preach the good news to their people². After they returned from their mission trip, He told them to get into boats and cross to the other side of the lake, to a town called Bethsaida³. There Jesus fed a great crowd⁴. The next day, Jesus decided to return to Capernaum, where He preached a revolutionary message that caused many of His disciples to leave Him⁵. After that, He fed four thousand more people⁶, healed a deaf-mute from the region of Tyre⁷, faced increasing pressure from the Pharisees who tried to provoke Him with questions to make Him look foolish before the people⁸, and continued His action-packed ministry for days, maybe even weeks, without pause before deciding to go to Caesarea Philippi.

1.2. I believe the event in Capernaum was a turning point in Jesus' ministry. Why? Because for the first time, the crowd wanted to acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah.

¹ (Luke 9:18)

² (Luke 9:6)

³ (Luke 9:10)

⁴ (Luke 9:12-17)

⁵ (John 6:59-66)

⁶ (Mark 8:1-10)

⁷ (Mark 7:31-37)

⁸ (Mark 8:11-13)

1.3. After all this, Jesus decides to head north toward Caesarea Philippi. A bit about the city: Caesarea Philippi was an ancient city at the foot of Mount Hermon, near the source of the Jordan River, in what is now northern Israel, close to the Syrian and Lebanese borders. Originally known as Paneas or Baniyas because of a temple there dedicated to the Greek god Pan, the site had significant pagan importance in Hellenistic times⁹. Later, Herod Philip, son of Herod the Great, expanded and rebuilt the city around 2–3 AD and renamed it Caesarea Philippi in honor of Caesar Augustus, distinguishing it from the coastal Caesarea Maritima. The city lay about 40 km north of the Sea of Galilee, in the region known as Iturea or Paneas, famous for its springs and caves with religious significance in ancient times.

On the map, you can see the locations of the cities Jesus visited during His ministry in Galilee. Capernaum is located on the northeastern side of the Sea of Galilee, while Bethsaida is on the northwestern side. As I mentioned in previous sermons, Capernaum was under the rule of King Herod Antipas, whereas Bethsaida and Caesarea Philippi were under the rule of his brother, Herod Philip.



A NEW PHASE IN JESUS' MINISTRY

2. In **Luke 9:18–21** we read: “Once when Jesus was praying in private and His disciples were with Him, He asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say I am?’ 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.’ Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone.”

2.1. In **Matthew 16:13–20** we have a fuller account of the same event: When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied: “Some say John the Baptist; others Elijah; and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter

⁹ Hellenism is the culture, ideals, and way of life of ancient Greece, and more specifically, the spread of Greek language, art, philosophy, and political ideas to other regions—especially during the Hellenistic period after Alexander the Great’s conquests.

answered: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 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. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then He ordered His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ.

2.2. I have already spoken several times about Jesus’ prayer¹⁰, so we will go straight to His question aimed at the disciples.

2.3. In Mark, we read that while walking toward the villages of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked them: “*Who do people say I am?*”¹¹ We also know that during that same walk He asked them: “*Do you want to leave Me as well?*”¹² As I said, much had happened in the last days or weeks, and sadly, not in a positive sense—many disciples left Him, the religious leadership constantly attacked Him, and the ones who stayed were increasingly confused by the events. Instead of things becoming clearer, they were becoming less so¹³. And so, on the way to Caesarea Philippi, motivated by all that had happened, Jesus reacted like any human being in His situation: “*Will you also go away?*”

2.4. After Peter answered on behalf of all that they would not leave Him, Jesus began to teach His closest circle about the next phase of His ministry. In other words, He began to prepare them to stand firm when they would witness something no Jew could have imagined in their wildest dreams—the death of their Messiah.

WHO AM I (JESUS)

3. Let’s go to the other question Jesus asked during their walk to Caesarea Philippi: “*Who do the crowds say I am?*” Since the disciples had been among the listeners when Jesus taught, had recently been sent out to minister themselves, and had personally helped feed thousands, they had a good insight into what people were saying. The first name they mentioned was John the Baptist. We know King Herod had been told by the people that John had risen from the dead. Others said Elijah, and others still, one of the ancient prophets come back to life.

3.1. I believe the people, due to a lack of knowledge and understanding, and because of the sheer impact of Jesus’ ministry shaking Jewish life to the core, drew wrong conclusions. I don’t think they were trying to sabotage His true calling—they were simply so stirred up that they felt the need to label Him somehow.

¹⁰ I recommend that you read the text in sermon (25, § 5. – 5.2.)

¹¹ (Mark 8:27)

¹² (John 6:68)

¹³ (Matthew 16:5-12)

3.2. But we know, as they soon would, that Jesus was not John the Baptist risen from the dead.

PROPHET ELIJAH

4. Why did they specifically mention the prophet Elijah? In the Bible, the prophecy of Elijah's return is clearly mentioned in the Book of the Prophet Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament.

4.1. In **Malachi 4:5–6** it says: *"See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."* This was understood as a promise that Elijah would come before the Day of the Lord, which many Jewish and Christian theologians connect to the coming of the Messiah or the final judgment of God. In the New Testament, Jesus and the Gospel writers refer to this prophecy, saying that John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah, fulfilling that promise¹⁴.

4.2. Here's what we can conclude:

1. The people believed that Jesus' coming was announcing the imminent arrival of the Messiah who would establish God's kingdom in Jerusalem, where they, as a nation with their ruler, would be the greatest economic, political, and military power in the world.
2. Their conclusions about who Jesus was show that they had a completely different idea of what the Messiah would look like. And in a way, they weren't wrong—throughout the Old Testament, their "messiahs" (kings) were rulers with political, military, and economic power. Jesus had none of that. He was a carpenter from Nazareth, the son of Mary and Joseph, ordinary people living ordinary lives. His background and approach confused them, so they preferred to say: *"Maybe He's Elijah who is to come, or one of the ancient prophets."*

4.3. You might say: *"Didn't you just say earlier that this was a turning point in Jesus' life because, for the first time, they wanted to make Him their Messiah?"* (§ 1.2.) Yes, and that's true. But that was one of many different crowds who encountered Him. In other words, conclusions about Jesus varied depending on which crowd you asked. And we know from John 6 that some of those who wanted Him as king later decided to stop listening to Him and no longer wanted Him as king.

¹⁴ (Luke 1.17) (Matthew 11:14)

4.4. As for Elijah, although John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah—calling the people back to God—he was not Elijah. Elijah will come at Christ’s second coming as one of the two witnesses who will protect the people of Israel from their enemies: “I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth... They have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying, and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want¹⁵.”

4.5. This clearly points to Elijah—he was known for shutting the heavens so that it did not rain for three and a half years¹⁶. According to this interpretation, Elijah will return to earth as one of the witnesses in the last days, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy in Malachi. This is just one interpretation, but personally, it makes the most sense to me given the context.

ONE OF

4.6. Now that we know a bit more about the prophet Elijah, let’s move to a brief conclusion from this text. If you asked the world today who Jesus is, they’d say He is ONE OF the spiritual teachers who have come and gone throughout human history:

- **Buddha** – Siddhartha Gautama (6th–5th century BC)
Founder of Buddhism. Taught the path of liberation through understanding suffering, compassion, and meditation. Emphasized inner peace, nonviolence, and spiritual awakening.
- **Muhammad** (570–632 AD)
Prophet of Islam who, according to belief, received God’s revelation in the Qur’an. Emphasized faith in one God, solidarity, justice, and respect among people.
- **Lao Tzu** (6th century BC)
Legendary Chinese philosopher and founder of Taoism. Author of the Tao Te Ching. Taught harmony with nature, simplicity, nonviolence, and the strength of gentleness.
- **Confucius** (551–479 BC)
Chinese philosopher, teacher, and moralist. Promoted ethics, respect for family, education, and social responsibility. His thoughts shaped Chinese and East Asian culture.
- **Guru Nanak** (1469–1539 AD)
Founder of Sikhism. Taught the unity of God, equality of all people, service, and inner devotion.
- **Socrates** (470–399 BC)
Greek philosopher, founder of Western ethics and philosophy. Taught through dialogue and questioning, emphasizing truth and moral living.

¹⁵ (Revelation 11:3-6)

¹⁶ (1 Kings 17:1)

4.7. Sadly, the world puts Christ in the same category as these teachers. They'd say He is just ONE OF them. In one interview, a Hollywood actor asked a Hindu teacher if Jesus' teachings had influenced them. The teacher replied: *"Yes, they have, but people need living teachers to guide them on their spiritual path."* In other words, he was indirectly saying that human spiritual leaders are the authority people should follow first—and if they want to occasionally apply something Jesus taught, "that's fine, because they as teachers do that too."

4.8. I've seen documentaries where a famous actor, "spiritually awakened," made a project called *Spiritual Teachers Throughout History*. His aim was to show that every spiritual teacher had something wise to say during their time on earth.

4.9. And he's right about that. But Jesus cannot be put in that category—He is not ONE OF, He is THE ONLY ONE. No other book in the world teaches that a MAN—not "a god¹⁷," not "a force," not "an energy"—holds the life of everyone who has ever existed, exists now, and will ever exist in His hands... except the Bible. All other religious texts teach that the ultimate authority is some force, god, or energy. The Bible teaches that the authority to grant eternal life or not belongs to a man—Jesus.

PETER HAS THE KEY TO HEAVEN

5. Before I move on to the verses where Jesus teaches His inner circle about the new phase of His ministry, I want to briefly address the topic often promoted by today's Church—that Peter, as the first apostle, holds the keys to heaven and waits for every person crossing from this earthly life into eternal life.

5.1. I do not believe this is what Jesus had in mind when He said to Peter:

"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter (the Rock), and on this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." In previous sermons, I have spoken about the word *blessed*¹⁸ and what the biblical authors truly meant when they wrote it in their accounts—feel free to revisit those if you are interested. I believe the same principle applies here when Jesus addresses Peter.

5.2. One more thing—Jesus built His Church through the mediation of Peter. Peter was one of the main instruments in the building of the Church (the community that believes in the name of Jesus Christ). The record of this is found in the Book of Acts. Everything that came after, I am increasingly convinced, is a Church lacking apostolic teaching and, ultimately, lacking Jews

¹⁷ Although God, as the Author who is beyond reality, is the one who ultimately decides; within our reality, it is man (Jesus) who decides.

¹⁸ (Sermon 36. § 1.-1.2.)

and Gentiles dwelling together in it. And here I am speaking to all Christian denominations that exist today.

PREPARATION BEGINS

6. In **Luke 9:22** we read: **And He said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, be killed, and on the third day be raised to life.”**

6.1. Again, in **Matthew 16:21–23** we have a more detailed account: **From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, that He must be killed, and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him: “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to You!” Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”**

6.2. First, let’s talk a little about those who were the driving force behind Jesus’ death. In Jesus’ time in Jerusalem, the chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law formed the leading religious and social elite of the Jewish people. Their role was central in religious, political, and daily life. Here’s who they were and what they did:

- **Chief Priests (High Priests)**

They were the highest representatives of the priestly order, descendants of the tribe of Levi, and specifically of Aaron’s line. At the top was the High Priest, who had the most important role in the Temple, especially during the great feasts such as the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). The chief priests were responsible for overseeing the Temple in Jerusalem, supervising sacrificial rituals, ensuring proper observance of the festivals, and maintaining the nation’s religious purity. Politically, they cooperated with the Romans to maintain order and peace.

- **Elders of the People**

These were respected members of the community, usually older men with social and religious authority. Often aristocrats, heads of families, or clan leaders. They participated in councils and legal proceedings and were members of the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish legislative and judicial body. Their role was to resolve disputes, make decisions concerning law and custom, and preserve social order.

- **Teachers of the Law (Scribes)**

Educated experts in the Torah, interpreters of the Scriptures, and religious teachers. Many belonged to the Pharisaic movement, known for strict interpretation and observance of the Law. Their work included teaching the people God’s Law, copying

- and preserving the sacred texts, and engaging in theological debates. They were often advisors in the Sanhedrin.

6.3. Now that we have a clearer picture of the religious leadership of first-century Judaism, let me say this: I can imagine how this news struck the apostles—it was so repulsive to them that they couldn't bear to hear it, let alone accept it. In their minds, Jesus was their King, and sooner or later, during His ministry, He would establish God's kingdom. This was their conviction, and they clung to it firmly: *"When our Teacher finishes preaching and prepares the people, He will become our King who will defeat the Romans and drive them out of the Holy Land,"* they thought.

6.4. Peter's reaction proves my point: *"Never, Lord! This shall never happen to You!"* Let's remember—Peter had just declared to Jesus that He was the Son of God and that they would not leave Him. In other words, Peter had been tested like the others by Jesus' hard teaching in John 6, but unlike many other disciples, the apostles had chosen to stay with Him. Now, however, they were getting the deeper explanation of the CONDITION—what it truly means to believe in His name. Jesus was preparing them for the coming trial that would try to rip them away and force them to abandon their Teacher.

KNOWING HOW I WILL DIE

7. In the text we see that Jesus knew in detail how He would die and who would be the planner of His death. Let's step into Jesus' shoes: I am a Jew, I have a family. My father Joseph and my mother Mary taught me from childhood that I was chosen by God the Father to be the Messiah. As I grew up, I studied the Torah to see for myself what role God had given me. Over the course of my life, God spoke to me and told me that I would not establish His kingdom now—rather, the Father wanted me to prepare the people for its coming. That would mean being mocked, rejected, and ultimately killed by the very religious leaders who claimed to know the way the people must go to inherit God's kingdom. My God and Father described to me in detail how I would die, and He told me ahead of time that my ministry would not be widely successful among my own people.

7.1. Imagine if God revealed to you that you would have a role similar to that of Jesus Christ. Imagine if He told you exactly when you would die and by whose hands—and that it would be at the hands of those you were trying to save through your ministry. Imagine going about your service every single day fully aware of what was coming and from whom. That's the weight Jesus carried. And He did not give up, even when the odds were stacked against Him.

7.2. That's why I can say with great certainty for myself—I'm glad I live in ignorance. I'm glad I don't know when or how I will die. I'm glad I don't know who will betray me in my lifetime. I don't want to know. The only thing I want, and I pray God will bless me in this, is to be ready when that time comes. And to be ready, I must take up my cross and carry it—because that is the life I choose.