

Do You Still Want to Be My Followers?
Luke 9:23-27

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Welcome This morning we continue our study in the Book of Luke by picking up where we left off chapter 9 (vs 23). Would you please turn there with me in your Bible?

Now, again, for context I will remind you that the setting for what we are about to read is the town or village of *Caesarea Philippi* in the upper Galilee region of Northern Israel. It was sparsely populated territory and the perfect place for *Jesus* to truly get away with His closest *disciples* for some alone time. You remember that He had tried to do this on other occasions, but the *crowds* kept following them. (see 9:10ff) Here in *Caesarea Philippi*, some 15 miles upland from the heavily populated area around *the Sea of Galilee*, it's pretty much a sure thing that people aren't going to trek all that way to come and find them.

This was an important time for *Jesus* and His *disciples*. His arrest and crucifixion is somewhere between 6 and 9 months away and, as I pointed out last week, *Jesus* is once again going to make a shift in His ministry focus. And so, while He will continue to minister to the masses, His focus is now primarily on His *disciples* and particularly His closest *disciples* - those that He had named as *apostles*. And, in addition to that, His focus is to make certain those closest *disciples* understand exactly Who He is and what He has come to do.

This account in *Caesarea Philippi* actually begins back in verse 18. From our study last week, you likely recall that it began with *Jesus* asking *the twelve*, *Who do crowds say that I am?*

Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"

Luke 9:18

and then following that up with the even more important question, *Who do you say that I am?*

Then He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”

Luke 9:20

Because, while it is nice to know what others think and are saying about the Lord, what will ultimately matter is Who we know Him to be.

So, **Jesus** takes the question from macro (the crowds) to micro (each one of them individually) and as we learned, **Peter**, serving as the spokesman for the group, nails it with his answer, You are **the Christ of God**.

Then He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”

Luke 9:20

The **disciples** had come to understand that **Jesus** was more than just a great religious leader - as the crowds were generally concluding - but that He was indeed **the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One** sent from God. But did they actually know what that meant? In actuality they didn't, which is why **Jesus strictly charged them and commanded them to tell no one** of the fact that He was **the Christ**.

And He strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one,

Luke 9:22

At least not yet.

There would be a time where He would send them out into all the world (remember, **apostle** means *sent one*), but that time wasn't yet. The **disciples** still shared the mindset of the masses that **Jesus** had come to overthrow their Roman oppressors and set up an earthly kingdom. That was their understanding of what it meant to be the **Christ/Messiah**. There will be a day where that day indeed comes. The Old Testament prophets clearly predicted that that day would come (*the Conquering King*). But the Old Testament prophets also predicted there would be a coming day where God's *Anointed One* would suffer

and die as a *Suffering Servant*. The Jewish people tended to ignore those *Suffering Servant* predictions and focus instead on the *Conquering King* ones. **Jesus**, in this ministry shift He is beginning, will impress upon the **disciples** that it doesn't work that way. As the expression goes, *There is no crown without the cross*. **Jesus** came first to deal with the problem of our sin individually and then He will deal with the problem of humanity's sin collectively.

And so, going back to the very beginning, He tells the **disciples**,

22 saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

Luke 9:22

Again, take note of that word **must**.

22 saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

Luke 9:22

The Son of Man must suffer many things, must be rejected, must be killed and on the third day He must rise. This was the very reason for which He had come.

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10:45

You remember on the night of **Jesus'** arrest, as He was praying in **the garden**, He prayed,

"Now is My soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.

John 12:27

As the Psalmist wrote hundreds of years earlier and quoted later in the New Testament,

5 Consequently, when Christ came into the world, He said, "Sacrifices and offerings You have not desired, but a body have You prepared for Me; 6 in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. 7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of Me in the scroll of the book.'"

Hebrews 10:5-7

This is what His *disciples* must come to know before they can go around telling others that *Jesus* is the *Messiah*. What they also need to know is that any allusions that they too were getting ready to rule and reign with Christ, were going to have to be put aside. Remember the two disciples that asked to sit on the left hand and the right hand when He came into His kingdom?

And they said to Him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

Mark 10:37

And so, after first shocking them with the news that He was about to go to *Jerusalem* and be executed, He follows that up with our text for this morning.

Beginning in verse 23, He proceeds to tell them,

23 And He said to all, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. 25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? 26 For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. 27 But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

Last week, I pointed out that while Luke doesn't record how **Peter** responded to **Jesus**' statement in verse 22, that Matthew did. Matthew, you might remember, pointed out that **Peter** vigorously protested **Jesus**' statement about going to **Jerusalem** and dying.

22 And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

Matthew 9:22

Jesus followed that up with a statement that each of them as His **disciples** needed to be prepared to die as well. He says, ***If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me***

23 And He said to all, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."

Luke 9:23

First century Jewish society knew the purpose of a **cross**. The **cross** was an implement of death - it has been suggested, the most excruciating form of execution ever invented. In fact, the word **crucifixion** and **excruciating** both come from the same Latin root words.

It's commonly held that the method of crucifixion as a form of execution was invented by the Persian Empire, but perfected by the Roman Empire. And by that we mean that they learned how to draw out the length of the time of the execution to extend the time of suffering and pain. It typically took a person days to die from crucifixion - not hours as it did with the Lord who had been beaten and brutalized so severely leading up to His being nailed to the cross. The Romans used the cross not only to execute their enemies, but also to humiliate their enemies and to discourage others from becoming enemies. Crucifixions were always public - often along the

side of roadways - so that all could see what happens if you come against the Roman government. There is a well-documented incident where the Romans once crucified 6,000 people along a 120 mile stretch of the empire. It is said that people were traveling for days along a major trade route seeing another crucified individual every 100 feet. We hang a **cross** at the front of our churches, and wear them as jewelry around our necks. The reality is, when the disciples heard **cross** they heard excruciating and humiliating pain. Any notion that they were going to **Jerusalem** to sit upon twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel should immediately be dropped from their thinking. Instead of a throne, **Jesus** was offering them a **cross**.

So when **Jesus** said, **Take up your cross**, there was no confusion as to the seriousness of the statement. Where there may have been some confusion was His addition of the word **daily**.

23 And He said to all, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

Luke 9:23

When the Romans decided to crucify a person, they would place upon the shoulder of that person the **cross** beam on which they would be crucified. The person would literally carry their own **cross** to the place where they would be executed. That is what **Jesus** is referring to when He says, **Take up your cross**.

But **Jesus** adds, **daily**. That would have been odd for the **disciples** to hear, because you took up your **cross** to go die on that **cross**. So in adding this word **daily**, **Jesus** reveals that he has something else in mind other than a literal, physical death - for no one could literally be crucified every day. This statement to **take up one's cross** was to be ready to die for **Jesus'** sake. And while it may not always come to that, there certainly was the possibility that it might come to that. Do you still want to be My followers?

But, is that all that **Jesus** meant - *If you want to follow Me you must be willing to die for Me?* I don't think it is, because sandwiched around the statement about **taking up their cross**, are the two statements, **let him deny himself** and **follow Me**.

23 And He said to all, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

Luke 9:23

Denying oneself means to live a God-centered an an others-centered life. That’s how **Jesus** lived and it is how He called His followers to live as well.

Two thoughts come to mind.

The first is the conclusion that, in making this statement that **Jesus** must be referring to people like the **apostles**. *Super Christians. It is the super Christians that must live a life of self-denial and follow Jesus.* To that, I will draw your attention to the way **Jesus** began the sentence. He says, **If anyone would come after Me**

23 And He said to all, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

Luke 9:23

Anyone! This is not an instruction for a select few, it is His instruction for all of us that have made the decision to **come after** Him. The call to **deny** ourself, to **take up our cross** and to **follow Him** is the expectation of all of us as followers of **Jesus**. The second is the idea that we do this one time and it will be good for all of time. That is, that we make a decision that we are going to **deny ourselves, take up our cross** and **follow Him** one time when we are feeling especially religious/spiritual/holy (at a church service, a retreat, some big event) and then we are good to go from that day forward. Notice, as previously pointed out, **Jesus** says **daily**.

23 And He said to all, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

This is not a one and done decision that will carry us for the rest of our days. This is a decision that must be made **daily** and, truth be told, more frequently than that.

OK. But what does that mean? Well, it means that we are going to have to get used to saying 'no' to ourselves. Our default response to self is to say 'yes' to self. We want what we want when we want it. And if it comes down to my wants vs your wants, I choose me. And even if we don't *stand up for our rights* to make sure everything goes our way, on the inside we sure are standing up - seething that the other person got what they wanted and we didn't get what we wanted. To these **disciples** that were anticipating that before long they were going to be ruling and reigning with **Christ** and snapping their fingers and have servants come running, **Jesus** instead calls them to a life of service, a life of denial of self, even to a life of death to self. Do you still want to be My followers?

This is what it means to be My disciple; these are the requirements. **Jesus** continues, by presenting the rationale. *Well, why would I want to do that?* Well, you will notice that **Jesus** begins verse 24, 25 and 26 each with the word **for**. These are the reasons why you would want to do that. And so **Jesus** says, in verse 24,

24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.

Of course, a life of self-denial seems foolish to the world; but to the Christian, it is actually a decision demonstrating great wisdom. For **Jesus** says, *For whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, but whoever will lose his life for My sake* (and that is a very important phrase) *will save it.* **Jesus** is stating that real life is found when we lay down our lives for **Christ's** sake. Real life is found when we lose our life in Him; when we submit ourselves totally to Him. It is then that we discover the real meaning and purpose of why we are alive. Why we are here. Why God created us. Why He put us in the place and circumstances that He did. It is in dying to self and living for Him that we discover the true purpose that He has for us. A person can live a life indulging their own pleasures and appetites, but in the end, in the very end, the result is that they will come to the conclusion of their days having lived a life in which they missed the true purpose of their lives and the profound spiritual pleasure that comes with living in harmony with that purpose. **Jesus** presents a second reason. *Why would I want to live a life of self-denial and death to self?* because, verse 25, **Jesus** says,

25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

Luke 9:25

Even if a person owned the whole world by the time he or she died, they would still be too poor to buy back a wasted life if indeed they had wasted their life. They would have forfeited their soul to possess something that at best they could only have for a short while. That's a terrible deal.

Now, it seems **Jesus** is anticipating three objections someone might give to living this sort of life for Him. He addressed the first in verse 24 which we might paraphrase as, I don't want to lose My life. To that, He would say, *It is in losing your life for Me that you truly find your life.* He addresses the second objection in verse 25 which we might paraphrase as, *I want a life of wealth and ease and luxury.* To that, in so many words, He simply asks, *At the cost of your soul?* And then the third objection that **Jesus** addresses is here in verse 26, which to me seems to be the fear of losing out on prestige, and notoriety, and

being thought well-of by others this side of heaven. To that, **Jesus** says,

26 *For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*

Luke 9:26

In that day, when **Jesus comes in His glory**, any shame or reproach we may have had to endure for Him will pale in comparison to the shame those will feel that denied Him this side of heaven. Loyalty to Christ will have its reward, and disloyalty will have its consequence. If we give our lives to follow Him in this world, in the next world He will point to us as one of His own. But if by our lives we have denied Him, (even if by our lips we confessed Him), the day will come when He will deny us. I'll quote the Lord Himself from *the Sermon on the Mount* who said,

21 *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many mighty works in Your name?’ 23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.’*

Matthew 7:21-23

Again, not only would **Jesus'** initial statement regarding His own betrayal and death have shocked them, but then this. Then this statement about them taking up their own **cross** too. It is not hard to imagine that they were likely pretty stunned by the whole dialogue.

Jesus then goes on to say, perhaps following a bit of a pause,

27 *But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.*

Luke 9:27

After His extreme call to follow Him even unto death if need be, **Jesus** proceeds to add a promise of significant **glory** (**seeing the kingdom of God**), or as Matthew wrote it, seeing **the Son of Man coming in His kingdom**.

28 Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Matthew 16:28

Yes, to follow Him would involve self-denial and maybe even death - certainly a daily death to self and selfishness, but **Jesus** wanted them to know that following Him wasn't all suffering and death, the end of it all wasn't death. The end of it all was **Jesus coming** in the glory of **His kingdom**.

Ok. I think I get the **Jesus coming in His glory** part, but what did **Jesus** mean when He said that **some of those standing there will not taste death until they see it**? That was nearly two thousand years ago. All of **Jesus'** first century **disciples** are dead. Was **Jesus** mistaken? Only if His statement about **coming in His kingdom** means what we tend to think it means. We tend to think of it as (at least I do) describing the event in Revelation chapter 19 which tells us,

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The One sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems, and He has a name written that no one knows but Himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which He is called is The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following Him on white horses. 15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Revelation 19:11-16

That is an event that is still future to you and I. All of those **standing** there that day with **Jesus tasted death** (that is, they died). In fact, some of us in this room will very well **taste death** before Revelation 19 occurs.

So then what is **Jesus** referring to? Well, there are a few different ideas. One view is that **Jesus** is referring to the day of Pentecost and the birth of God's Church recorded for us in Acts 2. A second view is that **Jesus** is subtly telling the **disciples** that they will not die with Him when He is crucified. The third view, and I believe the most likely view, is that **Jesus** is speaking about the event that next takes place - the event that we have come to know as *the Transfiguration of Christ*. Beginning in verse 28, we read,

28 Now about eight days after these sayings He took with Him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And as He was praying, the appearance of His face was altered, and His clothing became dazzling white. 30 And behold, two men were talking with Him, Moses and Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of His departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Luke 9:28-31

For the last three years, they had seen the power of **the kingdom of God** every time that He cast out demons, and demonstrated control over nature, and healed the sick, or even raised the dead. And not only had they seen that power, they also experienced that divine power operating through them as we saw at the start of this chapter(9:1). But what **Peter** and **John** and **James** experienced alone with the Lord there at the top of that particular **mountain** went beyond merely observing the signs that pointed to the glory of the **kingdom** - they would actually enter the glory itself. For a brief period of time, they would experience the event that more than any other event in the gospels most powerfully and dramatically demonstrated **Jesus Christ** to be the true glory of God. For just a few moments they would see the unveiled glory of the Lord. Which we will consider in greater detail

next week when we come back together again to continue our study through Luke's gospel.

Let's pray.

24 *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*
25 *Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.* **26 *If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also.***

John 12:24-26

Questions for Further Consideration

Describe the two ways that the Old Testament presents the Messiah. How was this a challenge to the Jews in their understanding of Jesus?

How would the disciples have felt about Jesus telling them they would need to take up their cross?

**What does it mean to “bear the cross” as a disciple?
What does it mean to do it daily?**

What is a typical American Christianity message?

In what ways do you believe God is calling you to deny yourself in practical ways?

How does this choice demonstrate great wisdom?

What is to be gained by living as a follower of Jesus?