

## **Christ or the World?**

Luke 9:18-27 (08-11-19)

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Our series in Luke takes us to the end of what's called the Greater Galilean ministry of Jesus. We're into His last six months on earth leading up to the cross. Of course, no one at that time knows anything about the suffering and crucifixion coming in the near future; not even His disciples. That's the shocker in this passage. Jesus now begins to define exactly what it means to follow Him as a true believer.

His teaching here is for all believers. This isn't higher-life teaching or special counsel to folks who think first you become a believer and then later on a disciple. No, there's only one tier of Christians. All believers are disciples and all disciples are believers. We're saved by faith alone, not by works.

But what does true faith look like? That's what Christ is teaching us here. He's not teaching discipleship as different from being a believer. In the great commission He sends us out to make disciples, or believers. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you are His disciple and follower. Christ now gives us three characteristics of true believers: they know Me, they follow Me, they confess Me.

### **First, you've got to know exactly who Jesus Christ is.**

Jesus is about 30 miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee, in Caesarea Philippi, near the Mount Hermon. Luke skips some things the other Gospels include. That's okay; he has his reasons.

*Luke 9:18-19, And it happened that while He was praying 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."*

While He was praying alone, the disciples were with him. Mark says there was a crowd of people hanging around, too. But Jesus is mainly focused on His disciples. He's praying about His coming ordeal in Jerusalem, but probably more so for these disciples. He knows they are in for a rude awakening when He begins to tell them what the future looks like. So while He was praying He questions them. You may have experience this too. As you're praying or others, concerns about them come to mind. I have found some of my best thoughts come while I am praying. I use our FBC directory to pray for our congregation. Often I can't get very far when I have to jot down notes. Hmm...I haven't seen them for a while. I need to text that guy. I wonder how their surgery went. How are those children doing? Just try to pray through one page of the directory and you'll discover lots of things to do for your church family.

So while Jesus is praying, He asks them this question, "Who do people say I am?" They've been out and among the people and so they have heard people talking. Some said He could be John the Baptist, Elijah, or an Old Testament prophet resurrected. Of course, this is what happens when you try to learn truth from a poll or questionnaire. We don't determine truth by a majority vote or group consensus while sitting around giving opinions.

Think of all the answers to this question. All false religions and cults have answered it wrongly. Islam's answer is that Jesus was a great prophet who never died. They say he ascended to Allah's side and will come back some time at Damascus in yellow robes as a great Moslem and preach Islam. Then he'll die and be buried beside Mohammed. Atheists say he was a historical person maybe and a good man. Cults deny His deity and equality with the Father and the Spirit. Church history is filled with false views about Jesus. A god, but not God. A great teacher, but not God. C. S. Lewis famously shot that theory full of holes as he wrote in Mere Christianity, "Either this man was, and is, the son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call Him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. That's the one thing we cannot say." That's the Liar, Lunatic, or Lord trilemma most of us have heard.

Then Jesus looks His men right in the eyeballs and asks them directly.

*Luke 9:20-22, And He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God." 21 But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, 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 be raised up on the third day."*

It's one thing to know what the popular views of Jesus are, but it really doesn't matter what other people, like your parents or grandfather, or teacher, or professor, or scientists, or anthropologists say Jesus is. The real issue is this, "Who do *you* say that I am?" You personally have to decide. Of course, Peter, the most talkative kid in the class, pipes up without blinking an eye, "The Christ of God." Bingo. Peter, you are right. Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament who has been sent from God to fulfill all the prophecies.

Now Peter's confession is absolute truth, but isn't all the truth. And they are all in for the shock of their lives as Jesus drops a thunderbolt on them in verses 21-22. Jesus now for the first time explains what's coming, and it isn't pretty. First, we're not going to broadcast this right now. In John 6 the people were all jazzed up about making Him King. All the Jews, including the disciples, believed the Messiah would conquer the Romans and restore the glory of the Davidic and Solomonic kingdom in Jerusalem and rule the entire world. That's what they expected, but their timing was wrong. Now Jesus unfolds for them what they will really face. Instead of glory days and thrones, they are looking at much suffering and even death. And the shocker of all shockers, the suffering will not come from the Romans but by their own Jewish leaders. How can this possibly be? The Jews are going to have Him killed? "You're our Messiah and you're going to be murdered? Impossible." In Matthew 16 Peter got in Jesus' face and said, "No way. We're not going to let that happen." That's when Jesus said, "Get behind Me Satan. You're thinking man's way, not God's way."

By the way, did you notice those eight little words at the end of verse 22 – "and be raised up on the third day?" The disciples never seemed to hear that, even up to and after the crucifixion.

"Who do you think that I am?" You must know exactly who Jesus is. Peter got it right, but not all of it. If Jesus asked you, "So who do you say I am?" I know you would say, "You are truly God and truly Man, two natures in One Person in hypostatic union." And you'd be right. But what does this mean for your life? Once you really and truly know who He is, your life can never be the same.

### **Second, you've got to follow Him exactly as He tells you – vs. 23**

*Luke 9:23, And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."*

Now we all need to memorize this verse. Question: Is this for believers or unbelievers? Answer? Yes! This is what believing in Christ looks like. Faith isn't just knowing facts or even agreeing the facts are true. There's that third part to faith – *fiducia*, trusting, committing. When God gives you the gift of repentance and faith, your life will show evidence. Verse 23 tells us how it works out in your life. Christ is saying to them all, if *anyone*. This is universal, no matter who you are or where you live on this planet. Anyone. Individually. This is the person whom God draws to Himself. It's all by grace, but this is what grace looks like in your heart and life.

First, you deny yourself. This doesn't mean you quit eating bacon or like Simon Stylites you decide to run away from the world so you go sit on a 60 foot pole for 37 years with no room at the top to lie down and there you are, denying yourself. It's not taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. It's not severe treatment of the body or any kind of asceticism. This is denying your *self*, your own life, your own way, your own agenda, your own ego, your own pride, your own arrogance and selfishness and self-ruling. When you come to Christ, it's the end of the road for King Self. Before Christ, you ruled yourself and were going your own way. Now you're going Christ's way. You are no longer in the driver's seat. You are set free from that sinful, self-seeking, self-approving, self-promoting, self-demanding, self-pleasing Self. Your

Self is your biggest enemy. He's extremely selfish. As Pogo Possum declared, "We have met the enemy, and he is us." But how do you deny yourself?

You take up your cross daily. The cross here is a metaphor of death. These people knew perfectly what a cross meant. They'd seen plenty of crucifixions. When a man is headed out of town carrying his cross, he's not coming back. It is the end of the road for his old life. It's full surrender. Following Christ doesn't mean you draw up terms of surrender. "I'll take you for my salvation and to change a few parts of my life, but I still want control – control, that's it – I still want control of this other part of my life. I want forgiveness and a free pass to heaven but I still want to sleep with my girlfriend, or watch a little porn occasionally. I don't want my Christian life to be too radical."

The cross doesn't tolerate self. The cross doesn't make concessions or terms. Paul put it like this in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live. Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Your cross is not your mother-in-law or you're aching back or your rebellious child. Your cross is God's instrument to free you from your self life, your sinful habits, your slavery to yourself, and to give you freedom to love Christ and follow Him.

Jesus adds that word "daily." That's important. This isn't something you do once for all. We're talking about progressive sanctification here; learning to be more like Christ each day. Self wants to rule your heart every day. Every day that deposed King Self is going to raise its head to flood you with selfishness, jealousy or anger or arrogance or pride or gluttony, hatred, hurt feelings, bitterness. When Self wants to rule, we must remember God's words and say no to our selfish attitudes and replace them with thanksgiving to our precious Savior who has freed us from sin's control. Take up your cross daily.

Third, "follow Me." This is a present active command. Keep on following Me! Not a philosophy or a set of rules or a moral code, or a do it yourself improvement system. No, your Christian life is following a real, living Person, your Shepherd, Lover, Redeemer. You are following Him, going in the same direction, walking behind Him, going wherever He goes. It won't be easy, it's not a cakewalk. Some follow Him into persecution and even death. But follow Him in your personal life, in your dating and engagement, in your marriage, in your education, in your career, in your business, in your friendships, every day. This includes your entire life, for every day.

This is Christ's call to true faith, true discipleship. Deny your mad pursuit of your self-life. How? By taking up your cross every day, saying no to selfish desires. How? By following the second person of the Godhead, Christ your Savior and Lord and doing what pleases Him. He determines your path through His counsel, His Word given in the Bible. He leads you on a path of freedom from self and sin so you may have joy and peace. What a parade of millions of human beings who have followed Him through the centuries and are following Him today, all ethnicities, various colors and cultural distinctives, every one of them carrying a cross of selflessness. Sometimes we stumble along the way, but He is our good Shepherd and picks us up, dusts us off, and sets us back on that path. Some suffer more than others, but all His children follow Him.

### **Third, you've got to confess Christ openly and unashamedly.**

I'll simply divide this section of promises and warnings into its four parts.

*Luke 9:2, "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."*

First, if you want to keep on living for yourself, save it, love yourself, worship yourself, be your own person, live for your own agenda and rules – you're going to lose your life. That's Jesus way of saying that living for yourself will lead to death and eternal punishment.

Second, if you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Christ, you will save your life and spend eternity with Him. We know God gives the faith to follow. He calls us to follow Him and it leads to heaven. He's the only way to heaven.

Luke 9:2, *For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?*

Third, if you do spend your entire life heaping up your own treasures, you'll be a sad loser. Say I spend all my life trying to amass the 19 million dollars I need to purchase the latest and greatest Bugatti, *La Voiture Noire*, and I finally get it, and then I die with my hands on the steering wheel, then what? "How much did he leave behind?" Paul Tripp in his book *A Quest for More* wrote, "What could be more horrible than to get everything I want and miss the one thing I was made for?"

Luke 9:26, *"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."*

Fourth, following Christ is a public following. You can't be ashamed of Christ or His words. He died unashamed on that cross for you. Are you ashamed of Him? He is going to come in a blaze of glory, and the Father's glory, and the angels at His second coming. Are you ashamed of Him? Paul told Timothy, "Don't be ashamed of the testimony of Christ." Let's pray we will never deny our Lord or be ashamed to speak up for His name or for His truth. Really, everyone who knows you ought to know that you are an unashamed witness for our Lord. It may cost you your reputation, maybe your life. So what? Follow Christ. Jesus talks to His disciples knowing He is heading to the cross, but then to the resurrection, and ultimately the glory of His great kingdom!

In fact, Jesus is going to take three of His men up on Mt. Hermon and they are going to get a sneak peek at something of the glory of the coming kingdom. It will be worth it all. Listen to this.

Luke 9:2, *"But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."*

Do you get it?

Know Me.

Do you know exactly who He is? No one can answer that question for you.

Follow Me.

Are you following Him exactly how He has taught us?

Confess Me.

Do you treasure Him and confess Him openly and unashamedly in your life? It may be hard, but He will give us all the grace and power we need to live for Him in this world.