

## Following the Way of the Cross

### Luke Series #28

Luke 9:18-62

Dan Leeper

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If you are visiting or haven't been here recently, you need to know we are about eight months into a series going through the Gospel according to Luke. One of the themes Luke has been weaving into these first nine chapters is the question of Who Jesus is. This question is stated just that way several times, "Who is Jesus?," "Who is this man?" or "Who is He?"

As Luke begins his Gospel, He introduces the theme that there is something different about Jesus. He says Jesus is a man born of Mary who was a virgin. Luke jumps forward to telling of Jesus' baptism when He was 30. We hear a voice from heaven saying, "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased*" (Luke 3:22). Jesus is then led into the desert to be tempted. He is different from every other human who ever existed in that He stood righteous in the face of temptation. He begins His ministry by speaking astonishing words and reports about Him begin to spread throughout the whole region. Then He began to do miraculous things. As the people observe Him and rumors spread, they begin to ask, "Who is this Jesus?"

In Luke 5:21, the Pharisees question Jesus' claim to forgive sins by saying, "*Who is this who speaks blasphemies?*" In Luke 7:49, those who are seated around the table say, "*Who is this, who even forgives sins?*" In Luke 8:25, Jesus' disciples question: "*Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?*" In our chapter for this sermon, Herod asks, "*...who is this about whom I hear such things?*" (Luke 9:9). This question has come up over and over again in the first nine chapters. Luke is presenting us with a story about Who Jesus is.

That question reaches a climactic crescendo in Luke 9:18-62 as Jesus Himself asks, "*Who do the crowds say that I am?*" (verse 18). Let us prepare ourselves to look at a long section of Scripture. I think it would be helpful to follow along in your Bible because I will be reading a lot of verses.

At first glance, this section might seem to contain many unrelated stories. We're going to consider two questions in order to bring unity to this section:

1. **Who is Jesus?** We will see how this question receives a full explanation in Luke 9.
2. **What does it mean and look like to follow Jesus?** In this chapter, Luke is transitioning from raising the question of Who Jesus is to showing what it looks like to follow Him.

## Who is Jesus?

<sup>18</sup> 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?" <sup>19</sup> And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen."

There are a lot of rumors, opinions and speculation about Who Jesus is which lean toward giving Him a special status—an old prophet raised from the dead. Jesus turns to His followers and asks them this eternally significant question: "Then he said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'" (verse 20). They have been with Him and seen Him give sight to the blind, cause lame men to walk and raise the widow's son. They have listened to the claims He has made, seen Him cast out demons and heard Him say He is forgiving sins. Now He asks them: "...Who do you say that I am?' And Peter answered, 'The Christ of God.'"

For those of us who have grown up reading these accounts, Peter's statement might not strike us as very profound. However, in this time in history this is a very big moment. This is only the second time in Luke's Gospel where someone calls Jesus 'the Christ.' Luke calls Jesus the Christ a few times in his narration as he references some background. But the only other time Jesus is called 'the Christ' in these first nine chapters is by an angel. We often read these words from Luke 2:11 around Christmastime: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

According to John's account, this thought has surfaced previously in the disciples' minds. We read of Jesus calling disciples to Himself. Andrew runs to his brother Peter and says, "'We have found the Messiah' (which means Christ)" (John 1:41). Yet there is no record of the disciples calling Jesus 'the Christ' for some time after this point.

Matthew also has an account of Jesus asking His disciples this question. "'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven'" (Matthew 16:15-17). This is a big moment when Peter calls Jesus the Christ. The word 'Christ' is the same as the Old Testament word for 'Messiah,' meaning the 'Promised One' Who will answer the problems of this world, rescue this world from sin and make all things new. Peter answers rightly although he does not fully understand all that we do when we say 'Christ.'

Jesus does something in Luke 9:21 that seems to be the opposite of what He should do. "And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one." We would think Jesus would say, "You are right, Peter. I am the Christ. Now go tell everyone that the Messiah is here." He is not expressing false

humility, downplaying it or saying, “You are right, but let’s not make a big deal of it.” He gives them a strict, stern command to not tell anyone. Why wouldn’t Jesus want this word to spread? Isn’t that the reason He was here?

What the disciples meant by calling Jesus ‘the Christ’ was not a complete picture. Peter was missing the sole purpose of the first coming of Jesus Christ when he called Him “*Messiah*.” Jesus tells the Jews and disciples very plainly several times that He is there to die. But their understanding of ‘the Christ’ —‘the Messiah’—was of One Who would come, overthrow Roman rule, set them free and start reigning, ruling and establishing His Kingdom. Jesus said, “*...tell this to no one*” because they did not yet understand the purpose for His coming.

Peter was right in answering the question of Who Jesus is by saying He is ‘the Christ.’ However, Christ gives a fuller picture of what that means in Luke 9:22. “*“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.”*” Jesus just gave them a version of the gospel—the good news. First Corinthians 15:3-4 says, “*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*” Jesus just said, “Don’t tell everyone I am the Messiah because I am not here to establish My Kingdom and reign here on earth, overthrow governments and judge and rule. I must first suffer for My path to glory is through the cross. I’m here to die for the sins of the world—to purchase salvation for those who turn from sin and trust in Me.”

Now we see answers to the question of what it looks like to follow Jesus. The kind of Messiah He is tells us something about how we follow Him. The way they wanted to follow Jesus was not right because they didn’t fully understand Who He was. Look what He says to them next:

*<sup>23</sup> And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup> 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.*

So Jesus says He must suffer, be rejected and killed. He follows this with the words, “*“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). For those of us who have ears to hear this good news of Jesus Christ, the message of the gospel—Christ dying for our sins on the cross—the cross doesn’t sound the same to us as it would have to them. They would likely have seen crucifixion—a tortuous punishment of death reserved for the

worst of the worst. Jesus has said He would suffer and die, now He says that if any would come after Him they must take up their cross and also be willing to suffer.

He is looking at men who would give their lives for Him. This is not a triumphal march into Jerusalem with Jesus overthrowing and reigning, rather Jesus' path is to the cross. If you are coming after Him, it will cost. It means being willing to say, "No" to self and "Yes" to Jesus and suffering for His sake. He is not talking in this passage about all suffering, but saying, "...*whoever loses his life for my sake will save it*" (verse 24). He is saying you will suffer and feel the cost if you follow Him but it is worth it. To follow Jesus means turning from everything else to trust in Him.

He is not talking about earning our way to Him or earning His salvation and favor. Ephesians 2:8 says, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith...*" Jesus is describing what that faith costs and means. It is not merely adding Jesus to our otherwise normal, comfortable lives or adding something to do on Sunday mornings. Rather, it is a reorientation of our lives—a turning away from everything else to follow and trust Him alone. He says it is worth it. Verse 25 says, "*For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?*" What gain is there if you have 120 years here on this earth and gain everything this world has to offer yet lose your soul?

He goes on in verse 27 to say, "*But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.*" Considering the context, it is likely this refers to the event which happened eight days later. Three men standing with Jesus are going to see something that most men have never seen. They will see the Kingdom of God with their own eyes.

We are beginning to answer and build on the question of Who Jesus is. In this account of the transfiguration, God the Father is going to answer that question for us.

<sup>28</sup> *Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.* <sup>29</sup> *And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. [For a moment, Jesus' glory is being revealed as the veil of His human flesh is overshadowed by His glory.]* <sup>30</sup> *And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah,* <sup>31</sup> *who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*

Think of what Luke was saying throughout this chapter: "Jesus is the Messiah Who will come to die for the sins of the world." Now He is standing with these prophets of old who have come in glory and speaking with them of His coming departure at Jerusalem. This is becoming more and more prominent in Jesus' mind as He approaches His mission and begins to prepare for His death.

<sup>32</sup> *Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.* <sup>33</sup> *And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to*

*Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents [places of worship], one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said.*

Peter is offering to do something good after He sees something amazing that would leave most of us speechless. But he puts Jesus on equal footing with Moses and Elijah, showing that he is missing Who Jesus is. God the Father is now going to speak to the question of Who Jesus is.

<sup>34</sup> *As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them [in the Old Testament, God's glory is often seen in this cloud as He led the children of Israel in the Wilderness; as Moses and Elijah were on a mountain, this cloud passed by], and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son [very similar to what God said as Jesus was baptized], my Chosen One; listen to him!" <sup>36</sup> And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.*

## **What Does It Mean & Look Like to Follow Jesus?**

Who is Jesus and what does it mean to follow Him? He is preoccupied here with being the suffering Messiah Who had come to die for the sins of the world and is talking about that with Moses and Elijah. We have seen that Jesus is the Son of God, not just another prophet. What does it look like to follow Him? God says to Peter, James and John "*Listen to him!*"

<sup>37</sup> *On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. <sup>38</sup> And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. <sup>39</sup> And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. <sup>40</sup> And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." <sup>41</sup> Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." <sup>42</sup> While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. <sup>43</sup> And all were astonished at the majesty of God.*

If we didn't have verse 41, this would be very similar to other accounts which we have already read. We have seen that Jesus has full authority over sickness, physical problems, the elements of the physical world and the spiritual world. This is another astonishing example of His Lordship over all things. Verse 41 ties this passage to the theme we have seen of Jesus' preoccupation with His coming death. "*Jesus answered, 'O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?'*" Here we get a glimpse into the mind of Christ and His inner struggle of being with us. His mind is

still focused on His departure and path to glory through the cross. In calling people to follow Him He rebukes them for their lack of faith.

Look at the end of verse 43. While they were marveling at what He had just done, Jesus did not say to His disciples, “Look at the power I have over demons and the ability I have to rule all things.” He could have said this but His mind was fixed on something else.

*But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples,<sup>44</sup> “Let these words sink into your ears [they did not sink in the first time]: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men [be betrayed].”<sup>45</sup> But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.*

From the perspective of time, Jesus still has much to do and teach. Yet in His mind He is fixed on the cross and wants to prepare and teach them how to follow this kind of Messiah. He tells them He will be delivered into the hands of men and betrayed, but they do not understand. The very next thing they do shows they do not understand what Jesus is saying.

As we read through the Gospel of Luke, we see that the disciples do not fully understand until after Jesus’ resurrection. They are confused about what Jesus means as He talks about His death and departing. When He dies, their world is shattered and shaken and they hide. So much of their world is upside down because they do not understand what Jesus is teaching them. Look at the way they are seeking to follow Jesus. Remember this is right after He tells them about His death and betrayal.

“An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest” (Luke 9:46). They argue about which disciple is the best, the most liked by Jesus, doing the best things or going to be seated closest to Jesus as He is ruling and reigning. I don’t know what criteria they used to evaluate each other as they were walking this road with Jesus, but Jesus perceived their hearts and knew what they were discussing.

*<sup>47</sup> But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side<sup>48</sup> and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”*

Jesus doesn’t reveal who is the greatest or play into this mindset of comparison. He is saying, “To follow Me is not about position, prestige and being the greatest. It is about humility, making yourself the least, desiring to serve others, receiving this child and receiving Me.”

John still does not get it. Look at 9:49-50: “John answered, ‘Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you.’ John seems to be thinking: “We are

better because we are with Christ, roaming with Him, watching Him do miracles, having Him send us to cast out demons. We came across someone else who was trying to do good things in Jesus' name, but surely we are better than him because we are the ones supposed to be doing Christ's work."

In His response to John, Jesus is not saying that anyone who does nice things in His name is fine or telling us to downplay the importance of following Him. However, this person casting out demons in Jesus' name was following Jesus. Yet the disciples were still more concerned with their own position.

Most commentators say Luke 9:51 is one of the key verses and turning points in Luke. Everything else that follows must be read through the lens of this verse. *"When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."* This phrase comes up several other times in chapters 9-19. That is why this verse is called such a key transition. Jesus' betrayal, suffering, rejection, death and resurrection are waiting for Him at Jerusalem. Jesus' eyes are now fixed on the cross; thus everything we read and study in the following weeks must be read under this shadow of the cross that looms large over Jesus as He sets His face toward Jerusalem. We are going to read now about how He works His way toward Jerusalem.

*<sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. <sup>53</sup> But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup> And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" <sup>55</sup> But he turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup> And they went on to another village.*

Jesus is fixed toward the cross and Jerusalem because His focus is there as He prepares to die. He goes to preach the gospel to the Samaritans and when they reject Him, His disciples are ready to take over and kill anyone who isn't following. They want to start fresh and set up a new rule by calling down fire from heaven because the Samaritans did not understand Jesus. But Jesus is not here simply to judge and begin His Kingdom but to spread the gospel, preach the good news of the Kingdom and begin a spiritual Kingdom on earth that will spread. The message is that we are sinners but Christ died for our sins and we need to turn and believe in Him.

His disciples would soon understand this. In Acts 8 we see this same Apostle John preaching the gospel to the Samaritans. They would one day understand that Jesus' first coming was about dying for the sins of the world to save a people for Himself. At this point, however, they did not understand.

In the final section of this passage, Jesus again highlights the cost of following Him.

*<sup>57</sup> As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." <sup>58</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." <sup>59</sup> To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first*

*go and bury my father.”<sup>60</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”<sup>61</sup> Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”<sup>62</sup> Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”*

These are very strong claims about the cost of following Jesus. He does not call all His followers to be homeless, although He said He did not have anywhere to call home. Do you want to follow that? He is calling us to put Him first. This might mean great sacrifice or giving things up and it comes at a high cost. We must be willing to follow Him in this.

We have two other examples of the high cost of following Christ. Note that the things Jesus addresses are not bad. He is not emphasizing repentance from sin—giving up idolatry or indulgence in sinful pleasures. He lists some fine, good things that must not come before Him. If you follow Christ, there can be nothing in your life that you hold with a closed fist. You cannot say, “God, I will follow You as long as You stay away from my family, give me a good career or hang out with anyone I want to without them thinking I am weird. As long as I only need to add something to my Sunday mornings, I will follow You.” Jesus is emphasizing that following Him means renouncing everything else and seeing Him alone as first.

I want to conclude by giving two examples of men who lived different lives. One is in the book of Ecclesiastes. I went through this with the teens on Wednesday night. We saw how Solomon describes his life on this earth. He actually says, “*And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them*” (Ecclesiastes 2:10). Most of us do not have the option of having anything we could possibly want but Solomon did. God gave him supernatural wisdom that surpassed anyone before him and maybe everyone after him.

Solomon looked for satisfaction in wisdom and found vanity, emptiness and meaninglessness. He then looked for satisfaction in his labors. He said the harder he worked and toiled, the more his work seemed empty and unsatisfying. He talks about his possessions and how he had anything he wanted—gardens, pools, homes and servants. One of the things Solomon desired was women and he had about 1,000 wives and concubines. Anything he thought would bring satisfaction he took. He had everything he wanted but said, “In the end, it all seems empty.” “*For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?*” (Luke 9:25).

There is another story that many of you may have heard about a man named William Borden. He was heir to the Borden dairy farm fortune and had enormous wealth to access if he wanted it. He was in line for that inheritance but God was working in his heart and gave him the desire to go into foreign

missions in China. Many told him he was being foolish or said, “Look what God has given you. You can use this wealth, multiply it and give toward many good things.” There are many people who do that and those are good things but that was not what God had for William.

To abbreviate the story, as He went to China, he began writing two-word phrases in the back of his Bible. He wrote the words, “No reserves.” He was not going to hold on to family reserves so he could fall on them to get back to his good life. He also wrote, “No retreat.” There was no going back, for this is what he was going toward. He has had a ministry, gone to seminary and now desires to go to China. He stopped in Egypt to prepare himself and there contracted cerebral meningitis and died at the age of 25. He never made it to his desired mission field. They found his Bible and another phrase he had written in it sometime before his death: “No regrets.” This was the life God had called him to and he had given himself toward it. He had lived and known Luke 9:23 and knew that to live for Jesus was to “*...deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me* [Jesus].”

The calling of a foreign missionary is not for everyone but the calling to deny self and take up the cross is for everyone. It does not mean we all need to go die in Egypt, leave our country or sell all our possessions. It means that in whatever life God has called us to, there will be a difference when Jesus is radically central and supreme. It might mean that in your job you do not progress through lies, cheating and backstabbing as someone who doesn't follow Christ might. It might mean that as a mom you faithfully choose to deny self and raise your children in times when it seems like it would be so much easier to give up. It might mean God is working in your heart to speak the good news of Jesus Christ to someone who may reject you. Your relationship might not be good anymore because they despise and mock you for talking about the love of God and what it means to follow Him.

We are all called to deny ourselves and follow Jesus. Jesus' eyes were fixed on the cross and our eyes must be also, not because we are going there to die but because He already did. Now He is central in our lives and nothing else is as important as Him. We are willing to give up anything for Jesus.

This is what it means for us to understand Jesus as Lord of all—the Messiah Who came and gave His life for us, to die in our place and take the wrath we deserved. That shapes what it means to follow Him, for we in return should want to give everything we have to live for Him and follow Him.

Let's pray.

God, I pray that those who have never taken that first step in following You would turn from everything else and trust You. Draw them to Yourself that they would say, “Yes” to You, trust that You alone are their hope and believe that You came into this world on a mission to die for their sins. I pray they would desire to trust wholly in You.

I pray for those of us who have already done that and are yet tempted to look back and cling to the things of this world. Grip us anew with an understanding of the cross and our salvation, that we like Jesus would set our faces toward the cross, fix our eyes on You and follow You. I pray this in Jesus' name.  
Amen.

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## **New Covenant Bible Church**

[4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175](http://www.newcbc.org)

(630) 584-2611 ♦ [www.newcbc.org](http://www.newcbc.org)

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