

“The Way of Self-Denial”

Luke 9:18-27



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This is one of the most crucial moments in the life of Jesus. At this point in the life of Jesus he was practically turning towards Jerusalem and ultimately towards his crucifixion. When he asked Peter this question, the answer would make all the difference in the world to Jesus. If Peter truly knew who Jesus was, then Jesus would know that he had effectively communicated the Father’s message to his children. He knew that even if Peter didn’t fully comprehend what it meant to be the Christ, Jesus knew that he had put a flame in the hearts of the people that would never be extinguished.

I think that you need to put yourself in the place of Peter right now. We need to have a definitive life in Christ, everyday. We need to be able to have the answer to the ultimate question whenever it is asked. You can go to church all your life.

You can read every book on Jesus and Christianity. You can know every explanation of the Bible but if you cannot answer the question that was asked of Peter, then the reality is that you do not know Christ. This question-and-answer session was no theological discussion, nor was it prompted by simply curiosity. The question of who Jesus was had already been asked twice before: once by the disciples when Jesus calmed the storm and again by Herod when he asked, “Who, then, is this I hear such things about?” Today Jesus is asking this same question of you. “Who do YOU say I am?” Jesus ultimately asked Peter about his opinion, his thoughts, and his belief. Even though Jesus wanted to know what the other people were saying, Jesus had a personal interest in Peter’s response. Why? Because Peter was supposed to be living his life for God have his belief in God. Therefore his response was a better test than those who had no belief.

(better to not know and sin than to know and sin.)

So today, while Jesus is concerned with what others say about him, he is particularly concerned with what you say about him. It matters not in your life what I have said about him. It matters not in your life what your parents said about him. It matters not in your life what the disciples even said about him. It only matters in your life what you say about him.

Then there is an even greater requirement of your response: How do you follow him.

We most often look at God through our own filtering devices. We all see God in different ways because of many different reasons. We have different value systems. We have different backgrounds. We have different Christian and secular educations. We grew up in different worlds, in different churches and denominations. We all have different views about most things in our lives but we have to realize one thing, that God calls us unto himself for one purpose: to serve him and in return he gives us eternal life that is free from the slavery of sin and death.

Christ calls us to run the race that he has set before us. We don’t get to choose the race people, but we do get to chose how we run it. And while God chooses the race, he also gives us examples and measures to run it by. We are called to serve Christ and here is how: we must deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily and follow Him.

You see, one of Jesus' greatest challenges was to get people to believe that he was the Messiah. People of that day believed that the messiah would be coming but had not yet come. Many believed that John the Baptist was announcing that coming and some believed that Jesus was announcing that coming but most did not believe that had come. I bet every preacher of the day had a sermon "When the messiah comes." There was so much misery going on around people that they had their hope in the fact the messiah would come and change it all and save them. That message could hold every dream and every ideal condition that they believed would be coming with the Messiah. But by saying the Messiah was among them and still have the suffering and the world along side him was a hard sell. **The Messiah has come.** If the messiah has come then we can no longer shape him to fit our dreams and our hopes. We can no longer make him to fit our life. If the messiah has come and now lives among us and people continue to suffer, marriages continue to crumble, children continue to stray, wars continue to happen, politics continue to fracture us, hurricanes and tsunamis continue to wipe our coastal regions of our world then that could only mean one thing: we have to shape ourselves to fit into his life, not the other way around. No wonder Jesus is not as popular as we want him to be. To be a servant is to devote your whole life to it. There is a difference between volunteers and servants. Volunteers choose to do individual acts of service periodically. Servants live a serving lifestyle daily. A volunteer still controls their own calendar; they serve at the convenience of their own schedule. Servants serve at the directive of the Spirit. One of the most important words in the New Testament that Jesus used is the word "immediately." Notice how many times this word appears. "Jesus called them and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him." Their boat was their business. For volunteers, business takes on a higher priority. "Their father" was family. For volunteers, family takes on a higher priority. If you know me, my family has a high priority. But my family comes after the directive of the Holy Spirit of God. Another verse: "Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side while he dismissed the crowd." Volunteers would say, "I can't do it on Tuesday, Jesus, but catch me next Saturday." A volunteer chooses at their own convenience; a servant immediately responds to the directive of the Spirit. Another time, Jesus reached a spot in the road, looked up and said, 'Zacheus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' To say that a messiah will come and change the world one day is much easier than to say that he is here, now, immediately and you have to choose right now to follow.

But what about this word "cross"? What does it mean to take them up daily? You might think that our crosses are those troubles and problems that plague us each and every day. You might be making a long list of your crosses right now and thinking to yourself that you have plenty. A difficult career, too many bills, difficult children, or difficult parents. Sickness and illness are often stated as a persons cross to bear. But I think that methodology of looking at the evils and sins of this world as our crosses is false or incorrect. These are certainly not beyond the touch of our compassionate Lord. But they are not the crosses he speaks of here. Taking up your cross daily is to lead a life of self-denial and working in the service of God. A cross is not pursued after but rather symbolic of the service to God and meeting the needs others. Crosses are the prices that are paid through self-denial and service to others because along the path of service there are pains, heartache, and hurt to be endured and accepted. Jesus tells us we will have trouble in this world but it is how we live through the trouble that is the testimony of our faith.

Look at vs. 24: It shows that self-centeredness is counter-productive and destructive. Self-centeredness cuts us off from the God who gives us life.

Look at vs. 25: It shows that greed and the desire to be self-sufficient is just placing our heads on the chopping block because greed keeps us from a Godly relationship.

Look at vs. 26: Simply stated, it show that the one whom you are ashamed of today will be your judge tomorrow.

All of these truths are so counter culture in our world that it seems almost ridiculous to even try to speak and teach them today. Following this call is not a call to a “successful” life but a call to a life of discipleship. To follow Christ, is to live life without thinking of yourself and to think of others everyday. How do you do that? You have to work, but what do you do with the fruits of your labor? You have love in your life, or will, and you have family but how do you live your life with your family (how does your family as a whole live life)? Do you serve others or do you serve yourselves? I hate to tell you this, but just giving money to the church does not fulfill your obligation to pick up your cross daily to follow Jesus. When you become a part of this congregation you promise to uphold the church (God’s work) with your prayers, your presence your gifts and your service. You promise to uphold the church (God’s work) with your whole being.

Wow, it costs a lot to follow Jesus doesn’t it? But remember what he promises us in return; whole and abundant life! Finally, I will tell you there is a balance in all of this. While the people in Jesus day were always looking to the future and not to the present right in front of them, I think all too often we look to much in the present and never to the future. What I mean by that is this: While I stand here and tell you that you have to live in the here and now, taking up your cross daily, and serving our risen Lord and serving his people here on earth with sacrificial love, I also want to tell you about what else He will do in the future. The future holds in store for us a day when Jesus will come again.

Read Revelation 19:11-16 and 21:1-7

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ He said to me: ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.’”

The Way of Self-Denial:

- 1) Serve, not volunteer
- 2) It’s not about you, rather God
- 3) Let Go and Let God
- 4) Claim the name without shame

Folks we have to live for Christ today with the hope for tomorrow or our lives will be lived in vain.

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”