

Title: Jesus Must. We Must.
Date: May 12, 2024
Subject: Following Jesus
Scripture: Luke 9:18 – 27 (Matthew 16:13 - 28; Mark 8:27 – 9:1) sections 82 - 84

A teacher asked a boy: "Suppose your mother baked a pie and there were seven of you--your parents and five children. What part of the pie would you get?" "A sixth," replied the boy. "I'm afraid you don't know your fractions," said the teacher. "Remember, there are seven of you." "Yes, teacher," said the boy, "but you don't know my mother. Mother would say she didn't want any pie."

Moms give up a lot when they have kids - uninterrupted night's sleep, free time, hobbies. The list goes on. We appreciate what moms have done and continue to do. We could say they're notorious for their self-sacrifice and selflessness. How about infamous as in more than famous? They're well known for those things.

Other people can act similarly. People restrict diets for health reasons, give up social media for a day, sleep in a tent on a building roof to raise money for cancer research. I was going to say skip coffee or have two donuts instead of the regular three, but there's no need to get ridiculous. Everybody can be sacrificial and selfless at times. But is that what Jesus has in mind for his followers, something anybody can do?

Read Luke 9:18-27

I. The matter of correct identification

Jesus conducted an informal opinion poll of the disciples: What had the crowds concluded about his identity? The top three answers. Number one: Jesus was John the Baptist come back from the dead. Herod had killed him, but if God made him alive, it'd be a great way to get back at the wicked king.

Number two: Jesus was Elijah the prophet who didn't die but was taken to heaven in a whirlwind escorted by a chariot of fire pulled by horses of fire. He was perhaps the most forceful prophet. Who could forget the confrontation between him and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel?

Number three: Jesus was one of the Old Testament prophets come back to life. An amazing miracle and a sign of things to come. Most people felt the Messiah would be a political leader, a counter revolutionary who would overthrow Rome and set up his kingdom. Interesting ideas, but none of these were accurate.

Jesus turned from the thoughts and wishes of people to ask the disciples who they thought he was. It didn't make any difference what others thought. It was up to them, as individuals to reach their own conclusions about his identity. What had the twelve men who'd spent the most time with him decided?

Peter boldly stepped up to the plate and hit an out of the park game-winning Grand Slam: "The Christ of God." Christ is Greek for Messiah. Both mean Anointed One and Deliverer. Messiah was used in the Old Testament for kings, priests and anyone specially chosen by God. They were anointed with holy oil, set apart and empowered for his service. Toward the end of the Old Testament era it came to represent the One whom God would send, the ideal king who'd deliver God's people and establish his kingdom.

Jesus accepted the disciples' declaration of who he is and their worship...but he strictly warned them to not tell anyone he is the Christ. A possible reason is they didn't have all the knowledge about who the Christ was and what he came to do. Also, the info could inflame people who were looking for a political Messiah.

It's like the popular opinions of today where most people have wrong ideas and major misconceptions about Jesus. They think he was a good man and a nice teacher but not much more than that. Maybe he was a god, but not the God. He doesn't make too many requests on people and he's okay with any way people live.

It doesn't matter what other people think, whether they have an erroneous idea or even if they're spot on - what our mom or dad believes, or grandpa or dear old aunt Maisie, or the neighbor down the street or even the pastor. It doesn't matter because the beliefs of others can't do anything for us. Each person needs to answer the question from Jesus for themselves: "Who do you say I am?" "What conclusion have you drawn?"

Who do you say Jesus is - a good man, one of many ways, or the Christ and Son of God who came to give his life so you could live forever? Our relationship to God and eternal destiny boils down to what we believe about Jesus. Mere verbal agreement isn't enough. Believing is placing the whole weight of trust in.

It's like approaching the elevator at the Empire State Building. A person can know how elevators work - step in, press button, doors close and elevator moves. Knowledge alone won't get a person to the observatory deck. The person has to get in the elevator, put their whole weight and trust in the elevator in order for it to take them up. The same is true with trust in Jesus. Place our whole weight on him so he can take us up.

There's the initial trust which is the beginning of following Jesus. There's a lot more. The 12 disciples had become convinced Jesus was the Christ. From this point on, he began to clearly communicate details of what was going to take place in the upcoming days. Jesus calls himself the "Son of Man." It's the most common way he refers to himself, used 81 times in the gospels. Nobody else uses that title for him.

The title sounds like it invokes his humanity, but it actually points to his divinity. The title is used in Daniel's vision of the end times (Daniel 7:13-14): "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." This is the first time the Messiah/Christ is called the Son of Man.

II. The big picture

A. Jesus must suffer and be rejected. The word "must" marks something that has to take place. It's not an option. There's no wiggle room. There are no ifs, ands or buts. It "must" happen. Jesus is totally aware certain things are absolutely necessary. This is the plan, always had been and would continue to be.

How did the disciples respond? It pained them. They may have thought Jesus would face suffering and rejection as the Christ, but it wasn't pleasant to think about. They couldn't linger on the thought as another train was coming down the tracks.

B. Jesus must be killed. This is the first explicit foretelling by Jesus of his death. Jesus had dropped breadcrumbs. In his teaching after the miracle of feeding the 5000, he stated he was the Bread of life, people need to eat him, he was giving his life for the world, but that could have been understood as he was totally committed and devoted to do everything in his power for people...yet not die.

Jesus unequivocally states that...he...will...die. He...must. Mark's Gospel tells us Jesus "spoke plainly about this" (Mark 8:32). The disciples couldn't misinterpret what Jesus meant.

How did the disciples respond to the shocking news? Luke's Gospel doesn't tell us. Matthew and Mark inform us that "Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him" (Matthew 16:22).

It wasn't a gentle rebuke like to a child: "Johnny. Be a good little boy and stop chasing the poor little kitty." Peter didn't say, "Now, now, Jesus. Calm down. There's no need to say such things."

He was probably loud, forceful and emphatic: "Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!" (Matthew 16:22). The original for "Never, Lord" is "God be merciful to you" which is equivalent to "God forbid." Peter is thinking, if not saying: "There's no way this is going to happen to you. It can't be the plan. I mean - you, the Messiah, the Son of God. Isn't that what I just acknowledged you were? This is crazy talk."

Scripture says Peter *began* to rebuke Jesus. It seems like Jesus cut him off, extending mercy to Peter.

Some say Peter missed the part about Jesus being raised. Or he may have heard it and not understood what it was. Either way, he was really hung up on that second part about Jesus dying. If the death of the Messiah was a new concept, then the resurrection was from a different planet.

C. Jesus must be raised to life. The "must" is implied. If the Son of Man isn't raised, then he isn't the Christ. No need to waste any time on him. But, if he is raised, that's a whole new ball game. It's time for the band to play the song of victory, throw a parade all the way to heaven, celebrate.

Jesus invites the crowd to join. He has something to say to anyone who would come after him, be his disciple, follow him. It's again a three-part message and Jesus uses the word "must."

III. Elements of following Jesus

A. Deny self. That sounds harsh in a world that wraps itself in self: self-love, self-assertion, self-seeking, self-promotion. Many people approach life with a sense of entitlement. The world revolves around them. Their mind is the most brilliant one. They're the star. It's disrespectful to disagree with them. They have their own truth. They don't want to be controlled by any person and certainly not by an unseen being.

The focus of every person who has ever been born is on self. The problem isn't just out there with those who don't know Christ. Denying self isn't limited to a person denying that they can provide salvation by themselves but need the way provided by Jesus. It's a constant battle in the Christian life as self keeps raising its ugly head as we live with a sin nature.

The Lord calls us to deny ourselves. Definitions and descriptions would be helpful: "cease to make self the object of his life and actions" (NIV Study Bible note, Mark 8:34). Ellicott's Commentary (Matthew 16:24): "The man is to deny his whole self, all his natural motives and impulses, so far as they come into conflict with

the claims of Christ.” Pulpit Commentary (Matthew 16:24): “If a man follows Jesus, it must be by his own free will, and he must voluntarily renounce everything that might hinder his discipleship, denying himself even in things lawful that he may approach the likeness of his Master.” It means to disown, disavow and reject.

It’s not about bettering self, making us feel good, but for Christ. For instance, denying ourselves from our favorite hobby of putting puzzles together and devoting that time so we can read the Bible or pray.

Karen Gustafson served the Lord as a single, unmarried missionary in Argentina. It wasn't what she had planned. Growing up she had her life laid out - graduate from high school, graduate from college, get married, go to seminary, have a boy named Joseph David and a girl named Katherine.

Things changed after high school. She followed the Lord's leading into training for missions. She said “Joseph David's father never showed up.” She gave up her will, plans and priorities to the Lord.

Followers of Christ deny self as being the one in control. We give it to God. We no longer try to determine what is right and wrong but operate according to God's standards and principles. Deny self as the guide for life, as the one knows best. Jesus is the one who has the authority.

I found Paul David Tripp to be helpful: “You have called me to say no. Not no to you or no to others, but no to myself. I must say no to selfish desires, wrong thoughts and dangerous emotions. I must say no to the world's values, sin’s temptations and my desire to control what only God can rule. But left to myself, I have little desire or power to say no. So you have given me exactly what I need. It's the only thing that will solve my problem. You have given me your Spirit. So, when necessary, I am able to say no” (New Morning Mercies, November 7 devotional). Tripp also addresses our next topic. It’s on the back of the sermon notes.

B. Take up cross. The people of Jesus’ time were very familiar with crosses. The Roman government utilized them to execute criminals and those who opposed the empire. People knew it was a cruel means of death. The last act of the condemned was to carry the cross beam to his execution. Jesus puts the image before his followers. They need to be committed to the point of death, to have that willingness, surrender.

Roman Emperor Constantine granted tolerance to Christianity in 320 AD. However, the Eastern half of the empire continued to suppress Christianity. Every soldier was commanded to sacrifice to the Roman gods. All did except for 40 Christians in the “Thundering Legion.” Their general had them whipped, beaten and imprisoned. The 40 remained steadfast in their refusal to worship anyone but Jesus Christ. The general pronounced the death sentence. The 40 were stripped and marched to the middle of a frozen lake.

The general informed them they could choose to turn from Jesus and come to shore where they’d be welcomed back. Warm baths were prepared to entice them to give up their allegiance to Christ. The soldiers stationed on shore could hear the 40 singing of their loyalty to Christ. Sometime during the night, one of the 40 had a change of heart. He came back to shore and dove into the warm bath. He went into shock and died.

The singing changed to 39 brave soldiers for Christ. A guard who’d witnessed it all was profoundly moved. His heart was changed to receive Christ. He tore off his clothes, ran out on the ice. The group again sang of 40 brave soldiers for Christ! They were willing to give their lives for Jesus their Savior and they did.

Most people won't be called upon to die for Christ and people can only die once physically. For this reason Luke adds the word "daily." This is to be our attitude...except when we don't feel like it or if we're really pressed into a corner. That's what people hope. Jesus speaks of cross carrying as a way of life.

Roy Irving: "To take up our cross today, means daily readiness to put to death everything that dishonors or denies Christ, everything that hinders our spiritual welfare. That includes our whole self-nature, which is hostile toward God. To take up the cross means more than patiently enduring our trials; it signifies crucifixion of self, the old nature. Whenever our flesh wants us to go one way and God wants us to go another, we are to say a firm "no" to self" (Scripture Press teaching manual on Mark, P. 66).

All people, whether those who've placed their trust in Christ or those who haven't, can be brave and courageous during difficulty and hardship. Followers of Christ are at a different level. Christ's commands refer to hardships and difficulties that happen to us because we follow him. Be completely dedicated to him.

C. Follow him. Jesus is saying, "Do as I have done and am going to do. I'm not asking you to do anything that I'm not going to do." Jesus was obedient to the end and is looking for willing obedience.

The aftermath of the feeding of the 5000 revealed the many people who were kind of, sort of disciples who left when Jesus talked about hard things. They're the kind who say, "Don't tell me what I should do. Don't ask me to give up my bad habits or sins. Don't ruffle my feathers. Just let me be a Christian the way I want to be a Christian. Don't make demands on my life."

Jesus has high demands and expectations for those who would attach his name to them.

IV. What's at stake

A. The person who wants to keep control of his life will lose it. The person who loses his life for Jesus, gives control to him, will save it. This saying of Jesus must be important as it's in all four gospels and receives more attention than anything else he spoke (Matt 10:39; 16:25; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24; 14:26; 17:33; Jn 12:25).

B. Gaining the wealth of entire world is meaningless if a person forfeits their soul which is their most precious possession and is the part capable of knowing God.

C. Ashamed. The Son of Man will be ashamed of those who are ashamed of him, whether this is telling people to depart from him because he never knew them though they claimed to do things for him, or it speaks to having lesser rewards for the Christians who don't fully follow him.

C.E. Graham Swift summarizes the passage: "For the follower it means precisely what it meant for the Lord; not mere inconvenience or discomfort, but death...He will accept the last consequences of obedience and take the last risk. In relation to himself his attitude will be that of self-denial, which means the complete dethronement of self that the life may be Christ-centered. In relation to his Lord, he will follow in submission to his will. Paradoxically, such surrender and submission is the surest and most abiding gain; Whereas the self-realization and self-expression so dear to the modern mind is to lose one's own soul... But lest such stern doctrine should utterly discourage, Jesus went on to speak of his coming and his kingdom" (New Bible Commentary, Mark 8:34 – 9:1).