

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Him (Luke 9:10-27)

Sunday school January 29, 2017

I want to call your attention to **READ v. Luke 9:10-17**. As I mentioned last week, I'm not going to say a lot about this text because Pastor exhausted it a few months ago. If I wanted to be really lazy I could just write down what he said and be done with this Sunday's lesson in about 45 minutes, but I didn't do that. Instead, I just want to recall for you a couple of key points from this event. They are the two capital letters under III. on your outlines from last week. First,...

IIIA. Jesus' Hospitality As we covered last week, when Jesus sent His disciples to preach the gospel, He told them to rely on the hospitality of others rather than bring things for their own support. Now the tables are turned: the "others" are travelling, and He shows them hospitality by providing them bread and fish to eat. On the other hand, His disciples, who had relied on that hospitality, want to send them away (verse 12). So we see the disciples' faith at this point is hit and miss. It was hit when He sent them with no supplies back in verse 2 and it will be hit again in the next block of text, but it's kind of miss here. They lacked nothing when they took no bread or money for their journey back in verses 1-6, so why would they lack anything now? That makes sense if you look at it logically, but it's hard to think like that in the moment.

Transition: The other thing I want you to notice is...

IIIB. Jesus' Divinity A couple of weeks ago when I was out on the trail in south Alabama I stopped to have a snack. I pulled out a granola bar from my pack, but I only had one granola bar. I was about 6 miles into the hike, a little tired and hungry, so I thought: I wish I could make this one granola bar into two. I thought a little more, and realized: I can make this one granola bar into two. (break the granola bar in half) That didn't help my hunger though. Only God can make something *ex nihilo*, which is Latin for "out of nothing." In II Kings 4:42-44 Elisha feeds 100 people with 20 loaves of barley and a few ears of corn, but He does it "at the word of the Lord" is the language used there. It was God's power that did it, He just used Elisha to carry it out. So once again Jesus shows that He is God.

Transition: With that text dispatched, I want to move on to what I really want to focus on today, which is verses 18-27. **HAND OUT OUTLINES.** The next block of text gives a sequence that describes the disciples being taught on some level who Jesus is, what He has come to do, and what they should do as a result. So let's start with...

I. Who Jesus Is: the Christ of God READ v. 18-20 This passage starts with Jesus praying. As I've mentioned several times in this study, Jesus prayed a lot during His earthly ministry. He prayed at His baptism; He prayed after healing the leper and other people in chapter 5. He has prayed a few other times, and here He prays again. This time the 12 disciples are here also, and He asks them, "Whom say the people (or the crowd) that I am?" The answers He gets in verse 19 are the same ones Herod got when he asked that same question back in verses 7-9. So it was well-known what the crowd thought of Jesus. Herod wasn't satisfied with those answers; he wanted to meet Jesus himself. Jesus isn't satisfied either, because He asks the follow-up question in verse 20: "But *implying contrast* whom say ye that I am?" There's a good reason they weren't satisfied with those answers: all of the answers in verse 19 are RONG (wrong) or at least incomplete. Jesus was a prophet, but He was much more than a prophet.

The correct answer is the one Peter gives on behalf of the disciples in verse 20: "The Christ of God." That's a clear, straight to the point, emphatic statement about who He is. On some level, they were starting to figure it out. They didn't understand everything about Him or everything He is about to tell them in the rest of this passage, but they understood something. It's comforting to know that you don't have to understand everything about Jesus to be saved, to believe in who He is. I don't understand everything about Jesus. I want to, but I don't. I've learned more about Him preparing the lessons for this study and listening to Pastor preach through John. It seems I learn something new about Him every time I read the Bible. I know He was God in the flesh, and I know He paid the price for my sins. I know a few more things, but in terms of salvation, that's what I really need to know: who He is and what He did.

In the context of Luke's gospel, Peter's confession here seems to come out of nowhere. Just one chapter ago, when Jesus calmed the wind storm on the Sea of Galilee, their response was in Luke 8:25: "What manner of man is this!" That statement bears no resemblance to this kind of understanding. Similarly, in the next scene, which is Jesus' transfiguration, which we'll study in detail next week, Peter wants to build three tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Elijah, and one for Moses, thus making Jesus equal to Elijah and Moses. That's basically the same mistake the crowd was making, thinking Jesus was just a prophet. In the middle of all of this doubt and uncertainty, you have this clear emphatic statement "You are the Christ of God." In the parallel passage in Matthew, Matthew 16:17, Jesus attributes this enlightening to God the Father. He says, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." So He says you didn't figure this out on your own; God the Father helped you. It's nice to know that God helps our faith when we need it: He sends the right person or right thought (usually through His word but sometimes through the Holy Spirit) at the right time.

There is a similar confession by Peter in John chapter 6. In John chapter 6, the crowds forsake Jesus after He does some teaching that is unpopular, and He asks the disciples, “Will ye also go away?” John 6:68 and 69 say, “Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” Once you realize who Jesus is, you don’t have to go anywhere else to get any spiritual thing you need. You don’t really need guidance counsellors. They can help, but the best council comes from Him. You don’t need controlling substances; you need His control. There’s the issue of putting that understanding into practice, which we’ll get to in a few verses, but it all starts by realizing who He is: the Christ of God.

Transition: Next point...

II. What Jesus Did: the Cross READ v. 21-22 There are a couple of important firsts in these verses. It is the first time Jesus explicitly predicts His death. His death is predicted by the Old Testament prophets, and it’s hinted at in the angel’s announcement to Mary and in a few other places, but this is the first time Jesus Himself explicitly predicts it. This is also the first mention of the elders and chief priests, the elite Jewish leaders in Jerusalem as opposed to the Pharisees who were scattered throughout Israel. He says that the Jewish elites will reject Him, unlike the crowds and disciples who at this point gladly receive Him. In verse 21, He gives the disciples the same instructions He gave to Jairus’ family at the end of the previous chapter: tell no man that He is the Christ. That instruction is for the same reason I mentioned back in chapter 8: the crowd had a lot of misconceptions about the Christ that needed to be corrected through teaching. As we find out later in this chapter when the disciples start arguing among themselves who should be greatest, so did His disciples. Their faith was hit and miss, but they were starting to figure out at least on some level who He was and what He was here to do.

Transition: So we have who Jesus is and what Jesus did (or at this point in history was going to do), and that leads to...

III. What We Should do: Follow Jesus READ v. 23 It’s not an accident that this instruction to follow Jesus comes after the confession of who Jesus is and the prediction of what Jesus was going to do. The order is exactly the same in both of the parallel passages in other gospels, Matthew 16 and Mark 8. When you start a relationship with Jesus, you have to first realize who He is and what He has done for you, and then as a consequence of that realization you start following Him. One of the hot phrases used in evangelism today when speaking to lost people is “become a Christ follower.” That’s verse 23 language. It’s a very good thing to be a Christ follower. I want myself and all of you to be Christ followers. But the best reasons for being a Christ follower are who He is and what He has done. So those things have to come first. Sometimes modern evangelism puts the cart before the horse.

Verse 23 contains some very vivid, almost graphic, imagery that is kind of lost on us partly because we don't execute capital punishment by hanging perpetrators on crosses any more. It would not have been lost on the disciples: they saw criminals hung on crosses regularly. In those days, the perpetrator who was to be hung on the cross had to physically carry his cross from the place of sentencing to the place of execution. That's the cultural background for the phrase "take up his cross" in verse 23. Today we might say "hook up the wires to your own electric chair." That's the closest analogy we have today.

Of course, He doesn't mean to physically kill yourself like the state would kill a criminal. It's a metaphor for how we should live, a physical picture of what it means to deny ourselves and follow Him. If I'm following Him, what I want gets put in the electric chair to die like a criminal does. What matters is what He wants. In His Gethsemane prayer, Luke 22:42, Jesus says that He wanted the sin cup He was going to have to drink to pass from Him, but what mattered was what the Father wanted. That's what it means to deny myself: put's God's way and God's will ahead of my own. It's important to notice that this denying ourselves and taking up our cross is something that needs to happen daily. Every day I have to choose to do what He wants as opposed to what I want. An application is Romans 6:6-7, which says we are dead to sin. Our sin nature, or old man, or flesh...whatever metaphor you want to use, who we were before we trusted Christ...has to be put in the electric chair daily. That's part of denying ourselves and following Him.

Transition: Verses 24-27 all start with the word "for." That's a transition word that implies an explanation: what comes after explains what came before. So verses 24-27 are an explanation of why denying ourselves to follow Him is so important. I've listed three reasons, the three capital letters in your outline. The first one is...

IIIA. Saving a Spiritually Productive Life READ v. 24 If we don't die to our own desires daily, we will never do anything for Him. So the opportunities we have to do things for Him in this life are lost, that is, we lose our life. On the other hand, if we die to ourselves and follow Him (that is, lose our lives for His sake), we will save those opportunities.

Transition: Next reason...

IIIB. Gaining Eternal Rewards READ v. 25 The rewards we gain in this world, after we die, don't matter. Supposedly I will be up for promotion down at University later this year. Higher rank and higher salary are nice things to gain, but in the context of eternity they don't matter. What matters are the gold, silver, and precious stones as I Corinthians 3 calls them that we build on the foundation He has laid for us. Those are the eternal rewards He gives us because we deny ourselves, follow Him, and faithfully serve Him.

Transition: The last reason following Him is so important is...

IIIC. Avoiding Shame from God READ v. 26-27 Some people misinterpret verse 26 to mean that we can lose our salvation if we become ashamed of Him, but the context is verse 23 because this is an explanation of verse 23. So the context is not salvation (that's verses 18-22, believing who He is and what He has done); the context is following Him, discipleship, as given in verse 23. If I don't follow Him, He will be ashamed of me (that is, ashamed of the way I am following or not following Him, and I'll lose the joy and rewards I get from following Him), but He won't go back on His promise of eternal life. He's God; He can't lie.

Because we have the completed word of God, we understand the "coming in His glory" in verse 26 to refer to His still future second coming. The disciples probably did not fully understand that at this point, but they understood from what Jesus said that there would come a future time when God's view would be vindicated. Even if He was rejected now, and He predicted in verse 22 that He would be, sin was going to be judged, and the followers of Him were going to get rewarded. So likewise as followers of Him even if they are rejected now, and many of them would be, there will come a time when God's view would be vindicated. So don't be ashamed to stand up for God's view. Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ...." Don't be ashamed to identify as a follower of Christ.

Conclusion

As a closing thought, there is a great effort in our society today to call the abnormal normal and the deviant from God's will and creation good and healthy. To use Bible language, many in our culture want to call evil good and good evil. In this culture, don't be ashamed to stand up for the way God actually views it. They will probably reject you, because they rejected Him, but God's view will be vindicated in the end. That last verse, verse 27, implies that the end whenever it is will come sooner than we think. Don't be ashamed to follow Him and stand up for Him.