

## **Lessons on Discipleship (Part 2)**

### **Luke 9:18-27**

We're right in between Thanksgiving and Christmas, and the holiday season brings great joy and gladness to many – it's fun to get together with family and friends and go to special occasions! But it can also be very hard because it reminds us of our losses – we remember the good times of old that are no more, loved ones that aren't with us, families that have fallen apart, homes or possessions that are gone, health that has diminished. The memories can bring grief and sorrow as much as they bring joy and happiness.

In some cases, we realize these losses have come from our own bad decisions or sinfulness, but many times they happen because of things outside our control. We've made good choices, we've been obedient to God, but we've still experienced loss and suffering, and that can be hard to swallow because we realize that God didn't stop it. We assume that to some degree following Christ should alleviate our pain and suffering. It's not that we think we should be immune to it, but we should get some kind of break. He's the King of the Universe and he's good and loves us, it only makes sense that if we're part of his family, we should have an easier road and get a few get-out-of-pain-free passes.

But we still suffer. We still experience deep pain. We still have heavy losses. And in those situations we begin to wonder, "Why should I keep following Christ if he keeps letting these terrible things happen? Is it worth it?" We doubt. We get confused. We feel betrayed or abandoned. We become bitter. And the tendency is to begin to think about turning away from Christ and going our own way. What good is it to be a Christian?

This morning we're going to look at one of the most difficult conversations Jesus had with his disciples that had to do with how much they would suffer if they followed him. The road before them wouldn't be easy and he didn't hide that fact. It would be filled with pain and loss and they would have a choice to make: Continue to follow? Or turn away and try to find a life that would be easier?

If following Christ results in so much pain and suffering – why should we keep trusting and following him? We're going to see what Jesus said to his disciples and

why he urged them to continue to follow, and his words will speak directly to us as well.

We are working our way through the book of Luke, continuing to look at Jesus' life and ministry in order that we might grow as his disciples. We will take a break the next couple weeks for Christmas and New Year's but then we'll settle back into Luke again after that. Last week we began to look at several lessons on discipleship in Luke 9 that Jesus taught his disciples about two years into their ministry training when Jesus was wrapping up his first ministry tour in Galilee. (see map) Today we're going to dig into the third lesson which is a conversation that had to do with his ultimate mission as the Messiah and what that would mean for his disciples if they continued to follow him. This interaction takes place up near Caesarea Philippi (see map) several weeks after the feeding of the 5,000 which we looked at last week.

Read Luke 9:18-20.

*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."<sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."*

It doesn't say what led up to this conversation, but you can see Jesus asked them about who the people thought he was, and we learn that at that point the crowds were speculating – maybe he was John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the OT prophets raised back to life? They weren't considering him to be the Messiah yet, probably because he didn't quite fit the mold of what they were expecting the Messiah to do. So they were more considering him to be some kind of prophet.

But his disciples were different, as Peter expressed. Ever since they started following Jesus, they believed him to be "the Christ," or Messiah. John 1:41 says that on the first day they met him, Andrew found his brother Peter and said "'We have found the Messiah' (which means Christ)." And this was very exciting for them. Their beliefs about the Messiah had been shaped by the prominent beliefs of their day – that he would be Israel's political and military savior. He would unite the Jews, overthrow the Romans, and establish an everlasting kingdom on

earth. Those in his inner circle would naturally rule with him and have positions of power, prosperity and influence alongside him.

So you can imagine what they had in mind as they thought about their future and the way things would go with Jesus. He had been doing signs and wonders and gathering a huge following, and it was only a matter of time before he would make his move, establish his throne, and restore his kingdom, and they'd be along for the exhilarating ride to the top. Goodbye suffering and loss; hello to the good life...

This is what they were expecting. But their views and expectations were way off. In fact they were quite the opposite of what Jesus came to do and he had to break the news to them.

Read Luke 9:21-22.

*<sup>21</sup> And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, <sup>22</sup> saying, "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."*

This is one of many times that Jesus told people not to spread the news that he was the Messiah. Leon Morris points out that everyone had faulty expectations of the Messiah that were political and military in nature, so if he publicly declared himself to be the Messiah, people would completely miss what he was teaching them. So he told his disciples to keep quiet. And then he taught them the true nature of his mission. Rather than rising to political power and military might, he would go to Jerusalem to suffer and die at the hands of the religious leaders and be raised on the third day.

This would have hit them like a ton of bricks and they detested it quite strongly. Matthew 16:22-23 records that Peter actually rebuked him for saying such things. But Jesus rebuked him right back, saying *"Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

Peter and the rest of the disciples totally misunderstood the Messiah and the nature of Christ's mission. Satan had spread a lie and they were believing it. Their hopes were set on an earthly kingdom where they would rise to power and rule

alongside Christ, but that wasn't what Jesus was setting out to do. He was going to suffer and die.

What would that mean for them? That's where Jesus goes next.

Read Luke 9:23.

*<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."*

He was heading to Jerusalem where he would face hostility and persecution from the governing authorities and anyone that went with him would encounter the same thing. There would be suffering, loss, and even death if they followed him. Therefore, if they were going to continue as his disciples, they would have to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. That meant they'd have to give up their dreams of worldly power and riches in this life and be willing to suffer to the point of death. Following him would cost them everything, and he wasn't going to save them from it. This is what it meant to follow him and this was the only option if they were going to be his disciples.

This was earth-shaking news for them. Not only was Jesus going to suffer and die, but they were too. How could that be? They had seen Jesus do all kinds of miracles, healings, even raising the dead back to life. He could do anything – shouldn't he just rescue them from danger and protect them from suffering and death? Why would anyone want to follow Christ if it meant going through those things? What good is it to be a Christian?

Here's what Jesus told his disciples.

Read Luke 9:24-27.

*<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. <sup>27</sup> But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."*

So he tells them about his future kingdom that would take place at a later time when he would come in glory. And he tells them about two eternal outcomes that would go along with their decision to follow him or not in this life. If they chose to deny him and go their own way in order to try to save their present lives, they would lose everything. Not only would they lose whatever they gained in this world, they would also forfeit the eternal glory and joy of his heavenly kingdom. He says if they were ashamed of him, he would be ashamed of them when he returned in his glory and in the glory of his Father and the holy angels.

But if they chose to follow him and lose their life for his sake, he says they would actually save it. Those who chose to follow him and were willing to suffer for him, would partake in the second life and all its glory. They would receive their eternal reward and participate in the unending joy of the Father. Their reward will be glorious and go on forever and ever – far greater than anything this life has to offer.

So there were far greater things at stake than just what they would experience in this world. Far greater joys, and far greater sufferings that they must take into account. And he asks them to consider: “What good is it if you gain the whole world and lose or forfeit yourself?” Don’t throw away eternal glory for a few decades of worldly safety and ease!

The New Testament shows us that 11 of his disciples listened, believed, and continued to follow, and it cost them everything in this life – they suffered and died for the sake of Christ. But then they entered into the joy of eternal salvation. 1 did not. One chose to deny Christ and save his life. He was rewarded with 30 pieces of silver, which he used to buy a field where he hung himself. He lost everything and threw away his soul – probably the greatest tragedy in the Bible.

Why should we keep following Christ if we’re still going to go through pain and loss in this life? Because this life isn’t the end – in fact it’s only a vapor compared to the life that is to come. When Christ returns in glory to usher in his eternal kingdom on earth there will be great joy and gladness that will increase more and more and more. At that time there will be no more suffering and loss, no more crying or pain, no more death and brokenness. All will be made new and will go on forever and ever.

In a later conversation with the disciples, it says this in Matthew 19:27-29: *“Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?”<sup>28</sup> Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>29</sup> And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.”*

The Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: *“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.<sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,<sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”*

Don't throw it all away because of the suffering and loss you experience in this life. Keep following Christ. That's what Jesus told his disciples and that's what he wants us to hear this morning. This life will be hard – really hard at times. And for many people it will actually be harder because of persecution for following Christ. But don't give up. Don't lose heart. Hold firm to the promise of his everlasting kingdom and rejoice that you have been counted as worthy to suffer for him.

May the Lord shape our thinking to become more like Paul's in Philippians 3:7-11: *“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—<sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,<sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”*