

LUKE

“Turning Point”

Luke 9:18-26

Sunday, June 3, 2018

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¹⁸ 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?” ¹⁹ And they answered, “John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.” ²⁰ Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”

²¹ And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, ²² 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.”

²³ And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ 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.” ¹

Heavenly Father, as we look into your holy word this day, may your Spirit give us unveiled eyes so that we may behold Jesus and be transformed to look more like him. We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus the Christ. AMEN.

Introduction

Our passage begins with Jesus praying (Lk. 9:18). In this Luke’s gospel, the image of Jesus praying is a signal that something is about to change; something new is about to happen in the life and ministry of Jesus (6:12; 9:18, 28–29; 11:1; cf. 22:40–41).² It is a turning point.

It has been some time now since Jesus has begun his ministry as a great teacher of Scripture and miracle worker. God is doing something big through Jesus, but what does it all mean? So Jesus poses a question to his twelve disciples: “*Who do the crowds say that I am?*”

Now, just to be clear, Jesus is not on some voyage of self-discovery. He is not trying to figure out his *Myers-Briggs* outcome or his *Enneagram* number. Nor is Jesus trying to outsource his identity. “Well Jesus, according to our marketing firm, some say you are a Boot Scooter, some say you are a Long Hauler, and some say you are a Sod Poodle. Of these options, who would you like to be?”

The crowds of people think Jesus is some type of prophet (9:19). But Jesus wants to know who the disciples think that he is (9:20). Sure the crowds have heard about and even witnessed some of the

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Lk 9:18–26.

² Robert H. Stein, [Luke](#), vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 139.

miracles of Jesus, but the disciples have seen it all. They were in the boat when Jesus commanded the wind and the waves to be still. They were there when Jesus cast the legion of demons out of the demon-possessed man. They were there when he healed the woman with the issue of blood, when he resurrected the dead little girl, and when he fed a crowd of thousands of people in the wilderness with bread. In light of all of this, are there light bulbs beginning to go on? Are the disciples able to see the real Jesus?

Because once you know the real Jesus, it changes everything. Knowing the real Jesus changes the way we look at God, the world, and ourselves.

Up until now, the hovering question in Luke's gospel has been "Who is Jesus?" Once that question is answered, the book of Luke begins to take on a new direction. Jesus begins a new journey and he begins to teach his disciples new things. That's why New Testament scholars have long viewed today's passage as the turning point in the gospel of Luke.

Our passage today contains three revelations that are at long last unveiled: **1.) The Identity of the Christ, 2.) The Suffering of the Cross, and 3.) The Cost of Following Jesus.** These revelations change everything for the disciples. And if we let them, they will change everything about us too.

Exposition

1.) The Identity of the Christ.

- Peter tells Jesus he is "*The Christ of God.*"
- Now contrary to popular opinion, the word "Christ" is not Jesus's last name.
- The word "Christ" is a title, like the words Pharaoh or King or President.
- The word "Christ" is a Greek word for the Jewish Messiah.
- What does the Christ/Messiah do?
- God's people have lived either in exile or under oppression for centuries (OT theme of exile and return; exile and return).
- They need true and ultimate and final redemption
- God promised he would send someone who would set his people free.
- The Prophet Isaiah captures this hope with this vision of a true and better King: "***Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this***" (Isaiah 9:7, ESV).
- The Messiah is the anointed one. He is the liberator king. He is long-awaited deliverer that God has sent to his people.
- So when Peter uses the word "Christ," he is meaning something like the "Promised One."
- He is saying, "Jesus, the crowds think you are a prophet. But we see that you are something more. You are the one we have been praying would come for centuries. You are the culmination of all of our hope!"
- Is there a long-term hope in your life that isn't Jesus?
- To acknowledge Jesus as the Christ in your life is to acknowledge all other ground is sinking sand.

2.) The Suffering of the Cross.

- Interestingly, Jesus never uses the title "Christ" to refer to himself. Why?

- The Jewish people have the wrong idea of what the Christ/Messiah should look like.
- They want a king. They want a military leader who will lead them into holy war and get the job done.
- In the movie *Princess Bride* the sword-fighter Inigo Montoya says to the criminal “genius” Vizzini who keeps misusing the word “inconceivable”: “*You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.*”
- Jesus is saying something similar. Jesus is saying to Peter, “Yes I am the Christ. But when I say Christ and you say Christ, we are saying the same thing, but we don’t mean the same thing.”
- Jesus is going to have to spend the rest of the gospel of Luke deconstructing and reconstructing what it means to be the Christ/Messiah. *Jesus is going to be the Christ, but he will be a Christ who suffers. He will bring his kingdom not by conquest, but by a cross.* Jesus is going to be a Messiah who suffers, is rejected, is killed, and raised again (9:22).
- And this is so far outside of their paradigm that the disciples still have no clue what a suffering Christ would even look like. This is why he “strictly charges” the disciples to tell no one (9:21).
- Stein: “*...for to Jesus, “Christ/Messiah” meant suffering and death as God’s Anointed, whereas among the people it signified the Anointed King who would throw off the Roman yoke, smite the Gentiles, and bring political independence and greatness to Israel. Jesus had rejected such a nationalistic conception of messiahship.*”³
- Jesus is saying, “I’m not like anything you were expecting.”
- No one would have thought the Conquering King that is promised in Isaiah 9 is also the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53: “*He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not*” (Isaiah 53:3, ESV)
- No wonder in the parallel accounts Peter rebukes Jesus!
- It’s easy to see how the people of the first century missed the mark when it comes to understanding Jesus. But look at ourselves through the lens of these Scriptures, we should ask the unsettling question: do we worship a version of Jesus that is different than the real Jesus?
- We are not above this. History teaches us that the idols of a given culture can disguise themselves in Christian clothes. The Greeks turned the gospel into a philosophy. The Romans turned the gospel into an Empire. The Americans took the gospel and turned it into a business.
- In what ways might we be tempted to baptize our idols and ideologies in Jesus name?

3.) The Cost of Following Jesus.

- The expectation of the disciples is to be part of a winning team, to rule, to have significance and prestige. If Jesus is the Christ, he is about to take over the world, and the disciples think they are going to be a part of his cabinet. These expectations need to be altered.
- Jesus is saying to them, “*I’m a King, but a King going to a cross; and if you want to follow me, you’ve got to come to the cross too.*”⁴
- He then gives them three imperative commands: (1) deny yourself, (2) take up your cross daily, and (3) follow me (9:23).
- Jesus is telling his disciples and he is telling all of us that if we are to follow him we must renounce our own agenda and the agenda of the world. We must untether ourselves from the gravitational pull toward living a life based on self-interest, self-fulfillment, and self-worship,

³ Ibid., 277–278.

⁴ Timothy Keller. *King’s Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus*. (New York: Dutton, 2011), 95.

and instead embrace a life of sacrifice.⁵

- This may sound harsh and even impossible, but Jesus tells us that when we seek to make our lives about satisfying all of our little wants and building our little kingdoms, we will lose the very thing we are seeking.
- *Have you ever noticed when you constantly making life about you, those are the times you are the most depressed, the most anxious, the least satisfied, and the least fulfilled? Self-absorption is the guaranteed road toward entitlement, resentment, and alienation. The worship of self is the surest road to hell.*
- But it is when we live for something above and beyond ourselves that we will find what it means to be truly alive. When we give our lives to the call to glorify God and enjoy him forever, when we give our lives to the love our neighbors as ourselves, we discover what it means to be gloriously human.
- But make no mistake. To truly follow Jesus is a call to suffer for Jesus.
- As Sam Allberry writes, *“Every Christian is called to costly suffering. Denying yourself does not mean tweaking your behavior here or there. It is saying ‘No’ to your deepest sense of who you are, for the sake of Christ. To take up the cross is to declare your life (as you have known it) forfeit. It is laying down your life for the very reason that your life, it turns out, is not yours at all. It belongs to Jesus. He made it. And through his death he has bought it....If someone thinks that the gospel has slotted into their life quite easily, without causing any major adjustments to their lifestyle or aspirations, it is likely that they have not really started following Jesus at all.”*⁶
- Likewise, to truly follow Jesus will put us at odds with the world at times. We must give up the desire for universal approval and acclaim and instead embrace the call to be a faithful and distinct at God’s people who live in the world but are not of the world.
- We must not fear the judgment of the world, but rather fear the One who will judge the world.
- We must take up our cross daily and follow Jesus.

Conclusion

- And you may not have noticed this, but this passage is the first time the word “cross” (σταυρόν) is used. The disciples (as well as everyone in the Roman Empire) would have known exactly what cross was. The cross was an instrument of horrific death. It was a symbol of Rome’s absolute and total power. Most likely, the disciples were thinking that it was a metaphor.
- But to Jesus it wasn’t
- Jesus says he “must” (δεῖ) ⁷ suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (9:22).
- Jesus isn’t saying “I am willing to die, if need be” He is saying, “ I have to die, and I will die.”
- This is the turning point for Jesus. Jesus is the Christ, and he is beginning his march toward Jerusalem. But unlike other false Messiah’s, Jesus isn’t going to Jerusalem to fight the enemies of Caesar and Rome. As the ultimate Messiah, he marches toward Jerusalem to take on the enemies of Sin and Death.

⁵ Stein, 279.

⁶ Sam Allberry. *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality and Same-Sex Attraction*. (Croydon: The Good Book, 2013), 11-12.

⁷ “to be under necessity of happening, it is necessary, one must, one has to” William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 213–214.

- And because of this passage, we know that Jesus knows exactly what will meet him in Jerusalem – a cross.
- And because of what Jesus will do at the cross, the cross that was once a symbol of the Empire of Rome becomes the symbol for the Kingdom of God.
- The gospel of Luke turns here. History turns here. Our lives must turn here too.
- May we worship the King who conquers by a cross. And may we take up our crosses daily and follow him.
- *AMEN.*

Community Group Discussion Starters

1. *When Peter says that Jesus is “the Christ of God,” he is saying that Jesus is the culmination of centuries of hope and prayer. What are the big prayers and hopes in your life? How are those prayers and hopes answered in Christ alone?*
2. *Jesus is the long hoped for Messiah, but he is very different than what most people were expected. Most people were expecting a conquering political leader. Instead, Jesus died on the cross. In what ways does Jesus continue to defy our expectations today?*
3. *In your daily life, what does it look like to take up your cross daily and follow Jesus?*

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