

Identifying and Following Jesus: Part 2

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I don't know what it is about supplemental insurance companies, but those guys sure know how to make great commercials. I'm pretty entertained by both Aflac and Geico commercials. Geico has these *it's what you do* commercials, right? Here's one of my favorites (CLIP).

The premise of these kinds of commercials oddly matches the passage we're studying in Luke. We're talking about following Jesus. And we learned last week from our passage (and we'll be reminded of that when we read the text again in a few moments) that identity determines direction. Just like that Geico commercial implies; when you see and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the One promised by God, you follow... it's what you do. That's what we saw and studied last week. We recounted all the times and all the ways Luke has been showing us that Jesus of Nazareth is more than a carpenter's son from a small village in Galilee; he's performing all these miracles and exercising all this power over sickness and storms, teaching with authority and offering forgiveness to sinners demonstrating that he is the Christ of God. He is the Chosen One, the Promised One.

But that doesn't mean we're done; identifying Jesus as the Christ is just the first step. The abundant grace and joy, life and love of God isn't ushered into our lives just because we can see and acknowledge that reality. We know from the scriptures, even from the stories found in Luke that we've already read, even demons can see and acknowledge that Jesus is the Holy One of God. Big deal. Life comes when we *follow Jesus*. When we thoroughly embrace him as the only one who can satisfy our greatest needs and desires do we experience his benefits and gifts.

And what Luke shows in chapter 9 is that identification precedes discipleship. When you identify Jesus as the Christ you follow... it's what you do. And if that is the case, then the inverse is also true. If you don't follow Jesus then you don't quite see and understand that he is the One like you ought. They go together. So, Luke has identified Jesus as the Christ for us. In this pivotal chapter which culminates later in the amazing transfiguration moment, Luke shows us conclusively that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Do you believe that? If you do, then you will follow.

But our following takes a certain shape. We don't follow Jesus anyway that we choose. It's kind of like saving for retirement according to the rules of the IRS; you can't just save for retirement anyway you choose and still get the tax benefits prescribed by the IRS. Jesus establishes the terms of what it means to follow him; you have to follow him the way he tells you to follow him. We learn that picture today (READ Luke 9:18-27).

Here's what I want to do: I want to spend the majority of our time this morning looking at and talking about the requirements of following Jesus. I don't want to just skim that; this is where the rubber meets the road. But Jesus gives us a context, too. So, let's briefly touch on that context, almost in bullet-point fashion. And then once that's done, we'll dig deeper into what following Jesus looks like.

There are 3 points of information you need to know to frame the call. You need to know:

- Jesus' Method
- The Reward
- The Warning

We learn Jesus' method in vs. 21-22. His method is primarily suffering and death, isn't it? This is important to remember because it has implications on what we should expect ourselves. Remember, Peter just said correctly that Jesus is the Christ of God. The King that was promised. The savior promised. The ruler promised. The victor promised. So, what would you expect to see? A winner! I love the song *See the Conqueror*; we sang it last week. It starts with these lyrics: See the Conqueror mounts in triumph / See the King in royal state / Riding on his clouds his chariot / To his heavenly palace gate. That's all true. The choirs are singing his praise; his people lifting up his name. But that's not all there is; in vs. 2 we remind ourselves that this king suffered to gain the victory. But that's not something you'd guess; that Jesus wins by suffering. That's not intuitive. That's why Jesus tells his disciples not to spread the news about him being the Christ because the crowds didn't understand this part yet. Soon Jesus would have his church spread this news far and wide that the victory he would win is through his suffering. But until then, that suffering will just look weak and ineffective to the lost sheep of Israel.

And it still looks weak today to those who don't know God. 1 Cor. 1 says the ways and wisdom of God that highlights the suffering of Jesus and his people looks weak and feeble. It's foolish; it's stupid. It's the kind of stuff politicians will run from. It's the kind of stuff you and I will run from, too, if we don't understand the mystery. What's that mystery? That the means by which God saves the world is through the suffering and death of his only son and also the suffering and sacrifice that his son's followers are willing to endure as well. That's the method; suffering, sacrifice and even death for the cause. Why would anybody sign up for this? That leads to our next bullet point.

The Reward. The reward for following Jesus is nothing short than saving your life. Look at vs. 24, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." Jesus highlights the cost again in this verse; you have to lose your life. You have to let your life go. You can't try and save and hang onto your life yourself as if you can provide the life and salvation you need. Let it go. Die. And the good news is (good news; that feels like an understatement) that's how you actually save your life. That's how you find life; that's how you get saved.

Friends, God litters his word with reminders of his great rewards because he wants to keep encouraging and motivating our obedience to his way. When you read your Bibles, look for the rewards. Pay special attention when God tells you what he will do for you just like he does in vs. 24. If you give up your life for me, you'll find it! The road may be costly and sacrificial, but it's worth it. Following Jesus is worth some laughs at school from some of the cool kids. Following Jesus is worth not having every weekend free to do whatever you want; those kids you are teaching in SS or in Awana will be the gift you offer Jesus when you see him in heaven. The money you give to orphanages in Nepal, church planting in the Czech Republic, Muslim work in Ghana is being used by God to enlarge His family so you have more brothers and sisters joining you in praise to our great God. It's all worth it. Always keep the reward in the front of your mind.

But Jesus also motivates with a warning. Let's look at some of those warnings. Vs. 24, "if you try and save your own life [on your own] you will lose it." Vs. 25, "what does it profit a man or a woman if he gains the whole world [popularity, acclaim, comfort and ease] and loses or forfeits himself?" Vs. 26, "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed." The shame that Jesus is talking about here I don't believe is merely an internal feeling. Don't be afraid, my dear brothers and sisters, if there's been times when you've failed a test of being a bold witness for Jesus because you were embarrassed about your faith. That has happened to all of us. Confess that sin (it is sin), but also remember Jesus died to save you of that sin just like he died to save Peter of his sins of being afraid to give witness to Jesus. The shame that Jesus is warning about is the shame that actually leads you away from Jesus. So, here's an example: when we are embarrassed for our faith, a true follower of Jesus confesses that sin, acknowledges it, but learns from it and is resolved to grow deeper in faith and conviction so that when it happens again he or she will stand with boldness for Jesus. A pretend follower of Jesus is ashamed for Jesus, but instead of repenting or turning from sin and towards Jesus, he or she turns away from Jesus to keep receiving the praise and acceptance of men. That's a big difference. So, hear the warning, FBC.

Now that we've learned that context, let's look at the specifics of authentic discipleship; what does true faith in Jesus look like? That's in vs. 23 (READ). There are 3 components to discipleship. There is a positive command (do this) and two negative commands. First, the positive command in vs. 23 is the last one; *follow me*. People with authentic faith in Jesus, people who embrace Jesus and the life he has for them *follow him*. But what does that mean? What does it mean to follow Jesus? That's kind of a nebulous command, isn't it? How do you know whether you are following him or not? I actually think he's answered this part of the discipleship (the new stuff is what we are going to talk about next). Following Jesus has everything to do with following or obeying his word. Just in the last chapter Jesus defined faith as (8:15), "hold[ing] it [the word of Jesus] fast in an honest and good heart, and bear[ing] fruit with patience." That's the kind of following we need to have. Likewise in Luke 6:46 Jesus said, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do what I tell you?" Notice how closely Jesus links following him to keeping his word. From these two verses and many others in the scriptures it's clear that to truly follow Jesus you must keep his word. Will you do this perfectly? Of course not! That's the reality of our sin. But disciples of Jesus follow him by seeking him in the word, loving

what he says, agreeing with him. You can't follow Jesus (or call yourself a follower of Jesus) and disagree with him, ignore what he says or just disobey him over and over again. But this shouldn't be too surprising to you if you've been with us so far in Luke.

The new information is in the first two commands. Those two are "deny yourself" and "take up your cross daily." That's really one command, in my view. It's two, but it's aiming at the same thing. If you deny yourself the way that's required to be a disciples of Jesus, you'll need to take up your cross daily. Why do I call this "new?" It's new information in that Jesus hasn't specified his path to victory through suffering so clearly before. And if Jesus' path to victory is through suffering and sacrificing, his followers can expect the same path, too. So, let's look these commands.

Jesus first says *deny yourself*. To deny oneself simply means to put off or to walk away from your natural desires. You have them, don't you? So do I. We all have worldly, earthly desires. Even if you are born again, you have them. But now being born again we see these earthly, natural desires for what they are: temporary (vs. eternal); addictive (vs. freeing); insignificant or small (in comparison to the exceeding joys of heaven). But they are there. The Bible calls them the desires of the flesh. And to walk with Jesus, to be his disciple, you must deny them.

Do you know why you must deny them? Maybe you're thinking, "Why can't we have the best of both world? God's love. Forgiveness of sin. The power of the Holy Spirit as well as acceptance from others. All the creature comforts. Keeping all of my hard-earned money to buy all the cool stuff I like. Why can't I have it all?" God answers that question very directly a variety of ways; one clear way is 1 John 2:15-17, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life - is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." Why does Jesus say later in Luke 14:26 (it will be awhile until we are here), "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple?" You can't love the world; you can't even love your own family like you love Jesus. Why? Why do I have to deny myself all of these things? These are good things, right? Yes, but they compete for our allegiance and loyalty. Jesus isn't actually saying we have to have hatred for our family or other good things that he himself has given us. He's saying that his disciples must have complete and total allegiance to him and his kingdom. He alone must reign supreme. But the things of this world, the things that we desire, nudge Jesus off the throne of our hearts. That's why we must deny them.

How can that actually happen? How can we actually do this; deny ourselves? I think this is where the second command comes in. He says, "take up your cross daily." That's how you can live a life of self-denial. When a man would be sentenced to death by crucifixion, it was customary to require him to carry the beam of his cross to his execution. It's exactly what they

made Jesus do, right? He carried his own cross. Jesus is turning this image into a metaphor. We know that because he says this is something we need to do daily. *Daily* take up your cross. That means every day you are to consider yourself dead to yourself and alive to God. When you consider yourself dead, you will be able to deny yourself of the earthly desires that tempt you. Why? Because you're dead! You're dead to your own desires. You're dead to your own dreams (yes, your own dreams! I said it). You're dead to the desires and expectations of your family or friends. When you consider yourself dead you are able to deny yourself.

Isn't that what Paul is getting at with these verses?

- Gal. 2:20 ~ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
- Acts 20:24 ~ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Where would the Apostle Paul get these ideas? He know longer lives, but Christ lives inside of him? He doesn't count his life as valuable or precious? He got it from Jesus, friends, who said if anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. To follow Jesus, friends, means you have to lay your life down. You can't follow him, obey him, trust his words and join him on his mission while you hang onto your own life. You need to let it go.

How do you do that? You've got to believe three things in the very depths of your being. 1) You've got to believe that the path towards life is forged in death. You have to believe that the more you try to find and save and keep your life the more you will lose it. That's nothing more than what Jesus said, right? 2) You have to believe the reward (the life) that Jesus is prepared to give you when you deny yourself and follow him is better. 3) And finally, you have to believe that Jesus is the Christ. Remember, identity determines direction. If Jesus really is the Christ then he really has all the answers, he really has all the wisdom, grace and joy. That mean's he's really king, he's really in control; that all the pleasures we were made for are in his mighty hand for us to have if we would just follow him. And if that's true, friends, then follow him.

Key vs. Luke 9:23

Questions for the week

- What's important about seeing identity determines direction? How can you use that in assessing your life?
- How do the rewards and warnings motivate you? Is one more influential than the other?
- What are some ways you need to deny yourself or die daily to enhance your discipleship of Jesus?

