

FOLLOWING CHRIST

Text: Luke 9:18-26

Readings: Malachi 2:17-3:5; 4:1-6; Luke 9:1-9

Theme: After Peter's confession about Christ Jesus foretold his suffering and explained what it means to follow him.

Purpose: To call you believe in Jesus as the suffering Messiah and to follow him.

Sometimes people play a game called, "Who am I?" The person leading will begin by giving some information about a person and will continue to add more information until someone recognises who they are talking about. To know the right answer you need a certain amount of information about the person, some facts and details about his life.

One day when Jesus was alone with his disciples he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?" He was not playing a game; it was a serious question about his identity, and it led them into a conversation, not only about **his identity**, but also about **his suffering** and **his call** to them.

By this point in his gospel Luke has described who Jesus is and is now going to develop what it means to follow Jesus. These are crucial matters; who is Jesus, why did he suffer and what does it mean to follow Christ?

1. HIS IDENTITY (V 18-20)

a. When Jesus asked his disciples this question he was well into his ministry. The Jewish crowds had listened to his preaching and teaching and had seen his miracles. The twelve disciples had recently returned from a preaching and healing ministry in Galilee and had heard many things about Jesus.

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do the crowds say I am?" The people of Galilee had a variety of ideas about who he was.

i. Some said he was *John the Baptist*. John was related to Jesus and had prepared the way for his ministry with a strong message of warning and judgment. He had spoken out against King Herod who had put him in prison; later Herod had John beheaded. Some were saying that Jesus was John come back to life.

ii. Others were saying that Jesus was *Elijah*. This idea came from the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. Through Malachi God had promised to send "the prophet Elijah before that great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (Mal 4:5). The angel Gabriel had told Zechariah that John would "go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17).. The Jewish scribes expected Elijah to come but they did not realize that these prophecies had been fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist.

iii. Still others said, "*One of the prophets* of long ago has come back to life." The Jews admired many of the great prophets of earlier days - Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel. Maybe Jesus was another great prophet whom God had sent?

b. Jesus did not ask this question because he was ignorant of what the crowds were saying, but rather because he was preparing his disciples for another question; "But what about you? **Who do you say I am?**"

Peter, speaking on behalf of the other disciples, answered with a remarkable statement of faith. He expressed what they had come to believe about Jesus, answering, "The Christ of God." There were many things about Jesus that Peter did not know and much that he had to learn; but he knew that Jesus was the promised Christ.

Luke, writing in Greek, uses the Greek word, *Christos*, or Christ. The Hebrew word is Messiah. Both words mean "the Anointed One".

Anointing meant to pour oil on someone to set them aside for a special task - to be a prophet, priest or king. Jesus came as the Messiah, the Christ, and he was anointed by the Holy Spirit to be our prophet, priest and king. In theology we call these "the offices of Christ".

But confessing Christ is not merely a matter of theology; it is a matter for all of life! To know Jesus as the Christ, as the Messiah, is the most vital relationship you can enter into.

If Jesus is your prophet you are to listen to him.

If he is your priest you are to accept that he is your only mediator between you and God who offered himself as the ultimate sacrifice for your sin.

If he is your king you are to submit to him and serve him.

c. The Holy Spirit addresses this question to each one of us; what do you think of Jesus? **Who do you say he is?**

Maybe you haven't even thought about this question; maybe you don't care about Jesus at all!

Perhaps you are too busy with all sorts of other things to ponder this question.

But that is a grave mistake. This is the most important question you can ask and answer. What do you think of Jesus? Who is he to you?

Some have thought about this and they see him as one of the world's great moral teachers, like Confucius; or as a powerful leader, like Churchill; or as a good person, like Mother Theresa. But this is to say *too little* about Jesus; this is to think of him merely as a man.

C S Lewis has pointed out that no one can say that Jesus was a good man and a fine teacher when he made such outrageous claims for himself, like being the Son of God! Jesus was either a very clever liar, or he was a raving lunatic, or he was the person he claimed to be. There are really only these three alternatives. He is either a liar, a lunatic or he is Lord!

Who is he to you?

We have considered his identity.

2. HIS SUFFERING (v 21-22)

a. Having heard Peter's wonderful confession "Jesus strictly warned them **not to tell this to anyone.**" (v 21)

He did this because he knew that many people had wrong ideas about who he was. Many saw him as a political messiah who would liberate them from the oppression of the Romans. He knew they would expect him to lead an army and set up a Jewish kingdom. But that is not why he had come.

This is why he told his disciples to keep his identity quiet; he needed time to teach the people about who he was and what he had come to do.

b. He went on to tell his disciples that he "must **suffer** many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law."

Jesus was rejected by the three major groups that made up the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, the very people who knew the Scriptures and who ought to have recognized who he was.

This is what the prophet Isaiah had foretold; "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with grief." (Is 53:3)

c. Jesus said that he "**must**" suffer many things and be killed. That word can also be translated as "necessary"; it was necessary that Jesus suffer and die because this was what the triune God had decided before the creation of the world. He had to suffer and die to fulfil all the prophecies and types of the Old Testament; it was necessary that he be killed to save his people; he had to be the perfect sacrifice for sin. He was a suffering Messiah.

d. But he is also a **risen** Messiah! If Jesus had been killed and remained in the grave we would not be here today. "If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.... But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!" (1 Cor 15:17,20)

This is the gospel, the good news about Jesus. This is why we are here this morning. Yes, we remember that Jesus died, but also that he was raised and that he is in heaven, and that he will come again! We believe in a *risen* Christ!

Who do you say Jesus is? Do you believe that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried? Do you believe that on the third day he rose again?

These are the most important questions you can ask and answer. Your answer will determine where you will spend all eternity. Be sure you consider them. Be sure you believe in Jesus.

But it is not enough to consider his identity and his suffering. We must also hear

3. HIS CALL to follow him (vs 23-26)

“Then he said to them all: ‘If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’”

a. Jesus lists **three requirements** of disciples.

i. You must *deny yourself*.

Many people persuade themselves that they are Christians and think they are doing very well because they attend worship occasionally, they try to do good works and they give some money to charities. They think they are denying themselves. This is not what Jesus had in mind.

Rather he called for a *life* of self-denial, of putting yourself and your own interests in second, third and fourth place.

He called for a life focused on serving him and seeking first his kingdom and righteousness.

ii. You must *take up your cross*. The people of Jesus day knew what that looked like. The Roman soldiers made a man carry his own cross bar to the place of execution.

So Jesus was not talking about bearing the sorrows, trials and disappointments that come to each one of us in the course of our lives.

No, he was describing the persecution and suffering that comes to us because of a deliberate choice to follow Jesus and to do his will.

He calls us to put to death our sinful nature with its selfishness, self-interest, self-satisfaction and pride.

He calls us to be prepared to sacrifice what is comfortable, familiar and well-known so that we can follow Jesus in new paths of service.

Notice that Jesus says, take up your cross *daily*.. No day is excluded or excepted. Jesus doesn't let you off the hook because you are having a bad day or you are short of sleep or the children are cranky. Each day you are to die to self and live for Jesus.

Notice also that Jesus addressed this to “them *all*”. (vs 23) He includes everyone and anyone. If you want to come after Jesus you must be prepared to deny yourself and take up your cross daily.

iii. And then you must *follow him* in a life of service.

Are you ready to do this? Are you doing so in this church? Are you ready to serve as a teacher in Sunday School, or to help with cadets, or to cook a meal, or visit someone who is housebound or lonely or in prison? Are you prepared to deny yourself so as to serve Christ?

b. Jesus follows these three requirements with a further **explanation**. Verse 24: “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”

Some people want to have a good time here and now. They want to live it up and enjoy themselves - to live for the moment and for the fleeting pleasures of life. They want to collect and enjoy as many

toys as they can; they want to accumulate as many possessions as they can afford. They are like the rich fool in a parable Jesus told - they store up more and more for their retirement, gathering more shares and bonds and houses and art.

"What good is it", says Jesus, in a magnificent overstatement, "for a man to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" (Verse 25) What's the use of that in the eternal scheme of things? All you have gathered will be worthless on the day of judgment.

If you are a true disciple of Jesus you will have your mind set on serving the Lord Jesus and seeking first his kingdom, you will be laying up treasure in heaven and investing in an eternal future. Someone has said; You can't take your money with you but you can send it on ahead of you.

c. Jesus closes this with **a warning**; "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." (v 26)

Sadly, some Christians are ashamed of Jesus. This can be true of new Christians but also of those who have professed faith in Jesus for a long time.

You are ashamed of Jesus when you don't speak up when his name is blasphemed.

You are ashamed of Jesus when you fail to declare your faith when you have an opportunity.

You are ashamed of Jesus when you don't let people know you love him and his people.

All of us have to admit that there have been times when we have been ashamed of Jesus and his words. We have had to confess this to God and ask for his forgiveness.

Rather than being ashamed resolve that you will be bold and courageous, that you will make use of every opportunity to speak about him in your place of study or work.

Jesus concluded by speaking about **his glory** because this is what awaited him after his suffering. The transfiguration that follows this discussion anticipated the glory Jesus would enter into after his ascension. First came his suffering and the cross, and then his glory.

It is the same for us; first comes self-denial, cross-bearing and following Christ, and then comes glory! Jesus mentions this as an incentive and motivation for us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross daily, and to follow him, knowing that beyond this suffering lies an eternity of glory!

Amen