

Commentary on Luke 9:18-27

Our passage begins with us witnessing Jesus praying alone with his disciples. Luke mentions Jesus praying right before big divine revelations.¹ So far in Jesus' ministry, we've seen prayer occur at His baptism (3:21-22), His calling of the Twelve (6:12) and now here in vs. 18. Luke pointing out that Jesus is praying is a teaser that something divine is about to be revealed. While Luke does not state the location where this prayer time with his disciples takes place, we learn from Mark 8:27 and Matthew 6:13 that they are in the region of Caesarea Philippi at the base of Mount Hermon. This area was known as a pagan area where frequent worship to the god Pan took place.

So, what is about to be revealed? Jesus poses his revelation through two questions to his disciples. The first question is, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" Up until this point Jesus has not posed a question of this nature because he wanted their understanding of who He is to be based not on hearsay or the word on the street, but on their actual experiences with Jesus.² The disciples respond with three possibilities which are identical to who Herod thought Jesus was (9:7-8): John the Baptist, Elijah or a prophet of old raised from the dead. Elijah was a fascinating and endearing OT personality in first century Israel because "he was bodily taken to heaven (2 Kings 2:11), whence he oversaw the deeds of mortals, comforted the faithful, helped the needy, and above all, would return as the forerunner of the great and terrible Day of the Lord. (Malachi 3:1, 4:5-6)."³ The mention of a prophet risen from the days of old was the same phrase Moses used when he foretold of a great prophet that would come (Deut. 18:15). The perceptions of the crowds that Jesus is either John the Baptist, Elijah or a prophet show us that people place Jesus in high esteem, yet none of these people adequately describe who Jesus is.

Jesus then turns the question towards the disciples, using an emphatic YOU when he asks, "Who do YOU say that I am?" This question propels whoever answers it to take a huge risk and stand alone before Jesus with his answer. Peter answers him, "You are the Christ of God." Leon Morris states, "Peter is saying that Jesus is the deliverer for whom the people of God had been looking for so long."⁴ With this confession from Peter, we have the first apostolic testimony of who Jesus is. Up until this point only God and demons have recognized Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God.

So, let's unpack what "Messiah" means. Messiah means anointed one. In the OT, there were three classes of people who received anointing: prophets, priests, and kings. Kings influenced the development of the concept of messiah in Judaism⁵ (2 Samuel 7, Psalm 2). When Israel fell to King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 586 B.C., there was an

¹ Edwards, James. The Gospel According to Luke, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 2015), p. 268

² Edwards, p. 268.

³ Edwards, p. 269.

⁴ Morris, Leon. The Gospel According to Luke, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 2002), p. 185

⁵ Edwards, p. 271.

expectation that God would raise up a new and greater king than David (Jeremiah 23:5, 30:8-11, 33:14-18; Isaiah 9:6-17, 11:1-10; Ezekiel 17:22-24, 34:23-31, 37:15-28; Micah 5:1-5; Zechariah 9:9-13).

Once Peter confesses who Jesus is, He reframes and redefines who the Messiah is. In verse 9:21-22, Jesus foretells of what the Messiah must do: suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, must be killed and on the third day rise again. (Isn't it ironic that the Jewish religious leaders who have been eagerly expecting the arrival of the Messiah, ultimately reject Him paving the way for His suffering and death?!?).

Jesus then continues to define what it means to be his disciple. So far in Chapter 9, we have seen Jesus send out the 12 with the same power and authority Jesus Himself has. He sends them out to cast out demons, heal, and teach about the Kingdom of God. We've witnessed Jesus asking them to partner with him to hand out the baskets of bread that Jesus miraculously provided. Now we see Jesus throw down the gauntlet of what it means to be his disciple.

"If anyone would come after me, let him/her deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

Jesus redefines what discipleship is.

First, he says that if you want to be a follower and disciple of Jesus you must deny yourself. The Greek word for deny is "aparneomai" which means to disown, renounce or disregard all personal interests and enjoyments.

Second, he says you must take up your cross. Roman crosses were symbols of Roman terror, dehumanization, cruelty and shame. They were designated to punish criminals and quash slave rebellions in the most public, painful and shameful way possible. In 71 B.C., Roman General Crassus defeated the slave rebel Spartacus and crucified him and 6,000 of his followers along the Apian Way. Can you imagine the violence and terror of that? Edwards states, "There are no known survivors of Roman crucifixions. The cross was thus a symbol of absoluteness and totality, and it retains both senses as used by Jesus."⁶

Third, we are to take up our crosses daily. This one qualification (daily) takes this act of the cross from the final physical act (physical death) to the first and repeated act of discipleship. We are to daily deny and die to ourselves.

Then Jesus goes on to expand on discipleship by using three statements.

The first is in the form a chiasmic structure. A chiasmic structure is a literary device used to highlight or emphasize a point. Think of a sandwich where the inside between the two pieces of bread is the good stuff. With the chiasmic structure, the important thing to understand is found in the middle. Jesus states the following in verse 9:24:

⁶ Edwards, p. 275.

A¹:Whoever wants to SAVE his life

B¹: Will LOSE it

B²: Whoever LOSES his life for ME and the Gospel

A²: Will save it

What's in the middle (B¹ and B²) of the chiasm? Losing your life. Jesus flips upside-down this whole idea of life: not just our physical life, but our personhood, our being, our souls. Life will not and cannot be found through self-preservation and self-interest but by daily dying and disregarding yourself. Discipleship in the school of Jesus' upside-down kingdom means losing your little "I" life to save your big "L" LIFE.

Second, Jesus poses the question of following Him and all of discipleship becomes the context of ultimate reality: our souls and the world. He asks the question in terms of economic gain and loss. What will it profit someone if they gain the whole world, but lose their soul? Psalm 49:6-8 captures this well: *"Those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches? No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough."*

Third, Jesus states that for those who are ashamed of His words here on earth, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when He comes into glory with His Father and the angels. When Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man, He is referring to His fulfillment of various offices, one of which is the second coming in glory and judgement. "It is the nature of Jesus, as it is of the Father, to share not only his attributes, but also his essence with those who belong to him. Among the attributes Jesus shares with the Father and the holy angels - an attribute he also imparts to his followers (John 17:22) - is his glory".⁷ Jesus is stating that your future in glory is dependent largely on what you do now. Participation in the future depends on what we do now and daily.

Finally, Jesus states that some of the disciples hearing this will not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God (9:27). This is a little confusing, but there are several thoughts on what Jesus means here. Some scholars think that Jesus is referring to the *parousia* - or the return of Christ. Another scholar notes seven possible interpretations of the words - of events the disciples standing there would possibly witness before their deaths: "the transfiguration, the resurrection and ascension, Pentecost, the spread of Christianity, the internal development of the Gospel, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the second advent."⁸ Because Jesus states, "some of you standing here" (meaning those present on that particular occasion), some scholars would rule out all but the transfiguration and the destruction of Jerusalem.

⁷ Edwards, p. 277.

⁸ Morris, p. 187.

So, what do we learn about the upside-down kingdom in this passage? First, Jesus is redefining and reconstructing the definition of who the Messiah is. He is not here to deliver them from the kingdom of Rome. The purpose and heart of His deliverance is meant for borders far beyond the world of first century Palestine and have eternal significance.

Second, Jesus is inviting his followers into a new and deeper discipleship – one which daily lays claim on all of a disciple's life and invites us to daily lay down our lives for the sake of the Gospel. Dietrich Bonhoeffer interprets Jesus' command of the cross in this way: *"The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise God-fearing and happy life, but it meets us as the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a person, he bids them come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him or it may be a death like (Martin) Luther's who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time—death of Jesus Christ, death of the old man at his call."*⁹

Jesus is turning upside-down what real life is about. It seems counterintuitive to us to lose our lives: our worldly lives, our creature comforts, and being commanders of our own destiny. And the command is to do it daily. (WHAT?!?!) Yet, in Jesus' upside-down kingdom, we see that giving up our little "I" lives is the only to gain a life that can never be taken away. Jim Elliot said, *"He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."*

Jesus is not inviting us to go anywhere that He is not leading the way. And why did Jesus lead the way? Hebrews 12:2 states: *"for the JOY set before him- he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

⁹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. (Macmillan, New York: 1966).

Discussion Questions for Luke 9:28-62

We have a lot of text to cover this week, so we are going to study it in chunks and then tie it all together at the end with some application questions.

Luke 9:28-36

1. Read over this section of the text. Write down what you observe. When did this happen? Where? Who is on the scene? What happens? What questions do you have about this scene?
2. What is the significance of Moses and Elijah appearing? Who were they?
3. How did Peter respond to what was happening (8:33)?
4. Why would Peter make this response? Why did he mention the booths/tents? Read Leviticus 23:33-44 (look closely at vs. 42-43!)
5. Look closely at 8:34-36? What happened? How did the disciples react?

Luke 9:37-43a

1. Read over this section of the text. Write down what you observe? Where is this happening? Who is on the scene? What is happening? What questions do you have about this scene?

2. How did Jesus respond? Why did Jesus call them “a faithless and twisted generation?”
3. What had Jesus given his disciples the authority and power to do in 9:1-2?

Luke 9:43b-45

1. Jesus offers up another prediction of what is to come. What does he tell his disciples?
2. Why did his disciples not perceive it?

Luke 9:46-48

1. What were the disciples arguing about?
2. How does Jesus resolve the argument? What is He trying to show His disciples?

Luke 9:49-56

1. Describe the interaction between Jesus and the disciples in 9:49-50. What did the disciples state was the issue? How did they attempt to resolve the issues? What did Jesus say in response to that?

2. Describe the scene in 9:51-56. Where are they going? What happens? How did James and John respond to this news? How did Jesus respond?

3. Where is Jesus' focus in this scene? Why? (look at vs. 51)

Luke 9:57-62

1. Jesus and his disciples are going along the road and encounter potential followers. Use the chart below to observe their responses to Jesus' call and Jesus' response to them. Leave the third column blank as we will discuss this in more detail during the teaching time.

<u>People Said</u>	<u>Jesus Responded</u>	<u>Upside-down Kingdom Implications</u> <u>(leave blank for now!)</u>
1)		
2)		
3)		

Application

1. In these verses we see a lot of different responses from the disciples. Peter responds when he witnesses the transfiguration by stating they should build booths/tents (v.33); they were afraid when the cloud appeared on the mountain (v. 34); they marvel at Jesus' authority to cast out the demon when they could not (v. 43); they are afraid to ask Jesus what he meant when he predicted his death (vs. 44); they argued about who is the greatest (v.46) they tried to stop someone from healing in Jesus' name (vs. 49); they wanted to call down judgment on Samaria (vs. 54). In what ways do you identify with the disciples' varied responses?

How are you responding to Jesus as you read these passages?

2. Look back at 9:46-50. How are you tempted to think you are the greatest? How does Jesus' teaching and responses to the disciples free you from this temptation? How is this teaching upside-down from what our culture tells us about who is the greatest?