**The Gospel of Luke**

**Lesson 23** Luke 9:18-27 Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me!

**Questions:**

1. What important truth did you learn from the lecture and how does it apply to your life?
2. Read Wiersbe pages 121-124.
   1. Explain what it means to be a disciple? What does Jesus say is required of   
      his disciples?
3. Read Luke 9:18-20. “The Christ of God!”

The great question Luke has set before his readers is: Who is Jesus? And he has done it with remarkable premeditation and skill. The first phrasing of the question came from Herod the tetrarch in response to the people's speculations: “Herod said, 'John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?'” (9:9). This was implicitly answered by Christ's feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. Literally tons of barley cakes and fish came from his hands (cf. v. 16). Who is Jesus? Lord of creation!

Luke then skips over seven important events in Christ’s life (recorded in Mark's Gospel,   
6:45-8:26) before presenting the question a second time, thus eliciting the disciples' famous confession of who Jesus is. The question will be further answered by the subsequent section, which records Jesus' transfiguration.

Why is there such a pronounced emphasis as to who Jesus is in Luke? Because Jesus’ Galilean ministry was over, and he now resolutely set his sights on Jerusalem, where he would be betrayed and flogged and would endure the bloody cross (cf. 9:51). In sum, because of the coming crises it was imperative that the apostles understand and confess who Jesus is.

Jesus clearly saw their confession as vitally important because he preceded it with prayer. Jesus had prayed at his baptism and before choosing the Twelve, and he would do so as a prelude to his transfiguration, and he prayed now as well (cf. Mark 3:12-15; 9:28). Very likely he prayed for guidance in asking just the right question, so his disciples’ dense minds would be enlightened, and their weakness would turn to steadfastness.[[1]](#endnote-1)

1. Why did the crowds say that Jesus was either John the Baptist or Elijah or one of   
   the prophets from long ago? (See Deuteronomy 18:15; Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 5:4-6; John 1:21-25)
2. In verse 20, Jesus asked Peter, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?”   
   Peter answered, “The Christ (Messiah) of God.” Explain Peter’s answer.
3. Read Luke 24:25-27 along with the following article ‘*Is Jesus the Messiah*?’ In a   
   few sentences, state how you would explain to a skeptic why you believe Jesus is   
   the fulfillment of the OT prophecies and why this is relevant to who Jesus really is.

Is Jesus the Messiah?

Jesus is called the Messiah in Matthew 1:16. In fact, every time someone says, “Jesus Christ,” he is referring to Jesus as the Messiah, since *Christ* means “Messiah” or “Anointed One.” The Old Testament predicts the Messiah, and the New Testament reveals the Messiah to be Jesus of Nazareth.  
  
There are several things that the Jewish people who anticipated the Messiah expected Him   
to be, based on Old Testament prophecies. The Messiah would be a Hebrew man (Isaiah 9:6) born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), a prophet akin to Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18), a priest in the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4), a king (Isaiah 11:1–4), and the Son of David (Matthew 22:42) who suffered before entering His glory (Isaiah 53). Jesus met each of these messianic requirements.  
  
Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the Messiah in that He was a Hebrew of the tribe of Judah (Luke 3:30), and He was born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:4–7) to a virgin (Luke 1:26–27).  
  
Another proof that Jesus was the Messiah is the fact that He was a prophet like Moses. Both Moses and Jesus were prophets “whom the LORD knew face to face” (Deuteronomy 34:10; cf. John 8:38). But Jesus is an even greater prophet than Moses in that, while Moses delivered Israel from slavery, Jesus frees us from the bondage of death and sin. Unlike Moses, Jesus didn’t just represent God—He is God (John 10:30). Jesus doesn’t just lead us   
to the Promised Land; He takes us up to heaven for eternity (John 14:1–3). For these and many more reasons, Jesus is a prophet greater than Moses.  
  
The Messiah was to have priestly duties; Jesus was not a Levite, and only Levites were allowed to be priests. So how could Jesus qualify? Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek (Genesis 14; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 6:20). Melchizedek predated the   
Jewish temple, and his very name means “King of Righteousness.” Melchizedek was also called the “King of Salem,” which means “King of Peace” (Hebrews 7:2). Melchizedek blessed Abraham (the greater blesses the lesser, Hebrews 7:7), and Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe. Thus, as a priest in the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is greater than Abraham (see John 8:58) and the Levitical priesthood. He is a heavenly priest who offered   
a sacrifice that removes sin permanently, not just temporarily covers it.  
  
Jesus must also be a king in order to be the Messiah. Jesus was from Judah, the kingly tribe. When Jesus was born, wise men from the East came looking for the King of the Jews (Matthew 2:1–2). Jesus taught that He would one day sit on a glorious throne (Matthew 19:28; 25:31). Many people in Israel saw Jesus as their long-awaited king and expected Him to set up His rule immediately (Luke 19:11), although Jesus’ kingdom is currently not of this world (John 18:36). At the end of Jesus’ life, during His trial before Pilate, Jesus did not defend Himself except to answer affirmatively when Pilate asked if He was the King of the Jews (Mark 15:2).  
  
Another way Jesus fits the Old Testament description of the Messiah is that He was the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. On the cross Jesus was “despised” and “held… in low esteem” (Isaiah 53:3). He was “pierced” (verse 5) and “oppressed and afflicted” (verse 7).   
He died with thieves yet was buried in a rich man’s tomb (verse 9; cf. Mark 15:27; Matthew 27:57–60). After His suffering and death, Jesus the Messiah was resurrected (Isaiah 53:11; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:4) and glorified (Isaiah 53:12). Isaiah 53 is one of the clearest prophecies identifying Jesus as the Messiah; it is the very passage that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when Philip met him and explained to him about Jesus (Acts 8:26–35).  
  
There are other ways in which Jesus is shown to be the Messiah. Each of the feasts of the Lord in the Old Testament is related to and fulfilled by Jesus. When Jesus came the first time, He was our Passover Lamb (John 1:29), our Unleavened Bread (John 6:35), and our First Fruits (1 Corinthians 15:20). The pouring out of Christ’s Spirit happened at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). When Jesus the Messiah returns, we will hear the shout of the archangel and the trumpet of God. It is no coincidence that the first fall festival day is *Yom Teruah*, the Feast of Trumpets. After Jesus returns, He will judge the earth. This is the fulfillment of the next fall festival, *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. Then Jesus will set up His millennial kingdom and reign from the throne of David for 1,000 years; that will complete the final fall festival, *Sukkot* or the Feast of Tabernacles, when God dwells with us.  
  
To those of us who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, the proof that He is the Jewish Messiah seems overwhelming. How is it that, generally speaking, the Jews do not accept Jesus as their Messiah? Both Isaiah and Jesus prophesied a spiritual blindness upon Israel as a judgment for their lack of faith (Isaiah 6:9–10; Matthew 13:13–15). Also, most of the Jews of Jesus’ time were looking for a political and cultural savior, not a Savior from sin. They wanted Jesus to throw off the yoke of Rome and establish Zion as the capital of the world (see Acts 1:6). They could not see how the meek and lowly Jesus could possibly do that.

The story of Joseph provides an interesting parallel to the Jews’ missing their Messiah. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, and after many ups and downs he was made prime minister of all of Egypt. When a famine hit both Egypt and Israel, Joseph’s brothers traveled to Egypt to get food, and they met with Joseph—but they did not recognize him. Their own brother, standing right in front of them, yet they were oblivious. They did not recognize Joseph for a very simple reason: he did not look as they expected him to look. Joseph was dressed as an Egyptian; he spoke as an Egyptian; he lived as an Egyptian. The thought that he might be their long-lost brother never crossed their minds—Joseph was a Hebrew shepherd, after all, not Egyptian royalty. In a similar way, most Jewish people did not (and do not) recognize Jesus as their Messiah. They were looking for an earthly king, not the ruler of a spiritual kingdom. (Many rabbis interpret the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 as the Jewish people who have suffered at the hands of the world.) Their blindness was so great that no amount of miracles made a difference (Matthew 11:20).  
  
Still, there were many in Jesus’ day who saw the truth about Jesus. The Bethlehem shepherds saw (Luke 2:16–17). Simeon in the temple saw (verse 34). Anna saw and “spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (verse 38). Peter and the other disciples saw (Matthew 16:16). May many more continue to see that Jesus is the Messiah, the One who fulfills the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17).[[2]](#endnote-2)

1. Read Luke 9:21-27.

**The Disciples** (vv. 23-27)

When we confess Christ, we embrace his dying on the cross for us. But we also accept the reality of a cross for ourselves.

*The Necessity of the Cross*

Apparently using no transition, Jesus next informed his disciples they too would have to carry a cross: “And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me"(v.23). This call to a crucified life demands a willingness to pour out one's life for Christ. The biography *The Shadow of the Almighty* records a beautiful prayer uttered by Jim Elliot:

*Father, take my life, yea, my blood if Thou wilt, and consume it with Thine enveloping fire. I would not save it, for it is not mine to save. Have it, Lord, have it all. Pour out my life as an oblation for the world. Blood is only of value as it flows before Thine altar.[[3]](#endnote-3)*

Young Jim Elliot went on to willingly shoulder his cross in missionary service, literally sealing it with his own blood at the hands of primitive spear-men deep in the jungles   
of Ecuador.

Living for Christ requires self-denial. This begins when we voluntarily abdicate the throne   
of our lives—when we radically renounce self-centeredness. A crucified Savior is not well served by self-pleasing, self-indulging people.

What are our crosses? They are not simply trials or hardships. Some think of a nutty boss   
or an unfair teacher or a bossy mother-in-law as a “cross.” But they are not. Neither can we properly call an illness or a handicap a cross.

A cross results from specifically walking in Christ's steps, embracing his life. It comes from bearing disdain because we are following the narrow way of Jesus Christ, “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). It comes from living out the business and sexual ethics of Christ in the marketplace, the community, the family, the world. It comes from standing true in difficult circumstances for the sake of the gospel.

Our crosses come from and are proportionate to our dedication to Christ. Difficulties do not indicate cross bearing, though difficulties for Christ's sake do. Do we have any difficulties because we are closely following Christ?[[4]](#endnote-4)

1. Why did Jesus warn them not to tell anyone that He was the Christ (Messiah) prophesied in the Old Testament? (See John 2:4; 7:2-9, 30; 8:20; 12:23, 27;   
   13:1; 17:1)
2. Read verse 22 again. For what hour was Jesus born?
3. Verse 23 states, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and   
   take up his cross and follow me.”
4. Explain this verse.
5. Have you ever had to carry a cross for the sake of Christ? If yes, explain.   
   If no, why not?
6. Read Philippians 3:10-11. Is it a privilege to carry a cross for Christ? Explain.
7. Verses 24-25 state, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his soul?”
8. Explain these two verses.
9. How can we as men lose our lives for the sake of Christ?
10. Read Matthew 6:19-20. How do these verses relate to losing your life for the sake of Christ and what does one gain in so doing?
11. Verse 26 says, “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.”
12. How can we as believers sometimes act ashamed of Jesus?
13. Read Matthew 10:32-33. Have you ever acknowledged Jesus publicly?   
    If not, why not?
14. Verse 27 states, “I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.” Explain (Consider Luke 9:28-36; Acts 2:1-12; 2 Peter 1:17-18; Revelation 1:9-17).

**Closing Reflections**

Jesus ended his comments by challenging his followers to confess him because those who do so will be affirmed by him in the judgment and because the kingdom of God would touch many of their lives before their death (which in fact it did in the transfiguration, the resurrection, and the ascension and at Pentecost).

*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. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. (vv.26, 27)*

Who do you say Jesus is? Is he a fraud? Is he only a prophet? Is he merely a great moral teacher? Or is he the Messiah, God's Son, the Savior, and King?

If you confess him as Christ, you must cling to his bloody cross as your only hope, and you must take up your own cross as you deny yourself and follow him. Do you do this? If so, you have made a good confession.[[5]](#endnote-5)

1. Who is Jesus to you? Are you clinging to his bloody cross as your   
   only hope?

1. Kent Hughes *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 345. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. “*Is Jesus the Messiah?*” Got Questions Ministries, accessed March 10, 2022 [https://www.gotquestions.org/is-Jesus-the-Messiah.html] [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. C. Marvin Pate quoted in Hughes, 349. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Hughes, 349. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Hughes, 351-352. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)