

Luke 9.1-27

"The Power of the Kingdom and the Way of the Cross"

What about you?... Who do you say that I am? What are some of the answers people in our day give to that question Jesus asks his apostles here in verse 20?

Some say he was a prophet. Others say he was a powerful spiritual leader. Others say he was a great wonder worker. Others say he was a brilliant moral teacher. And others say he was a great revolutionary.

But then there's the faith of the Christian Church, which is encapsulated here in the apostle Peter's answer to the question: *"You are the Christ of God."*

Now, in chapter 8, just before this section we're looking at today, Jesus told the *Parable of the Sower* and emphasized the importance of *rightly hearing* the word of God.

And then Luke followed that by recording four miracles where people *saw* Jesus' power. 1. The *stilling* of the wind and the sea, 2. the *healing* of a demonized man, 3. the *healing* of a woman with an issue of blood, and 4. the *raising* of Jairus' daughter from the dead.

And those miracles all demonstrated the power of God's Kingdom in Jesus Christ in 4 distinct ways—1. power over the *forces of nature*, 2. over *demonic forces*, 3. over *human sickness*, and 4. over *death itself*.

So, it's against that backdrop that our passage here in chapter 9 picks up. And here we have a whole complex of events and teachings that reveal more of Jesus' identity and the nature of his mission.

And the main point of these 27 verses is that *As the Messiah, Jesus would be called to die and after three days rise from the dead. And just as Jesus was crucified and raised, so everyone who follows him must daily walk that same path of death and resurrection.*

1. The Sending of the 12 and Herod's Question (verses 1-9)

So, looking now at the beginning of our passage, we see in the first six verses that Jesus gathers his apostles together and gives them his power over demons and diseases—the *very power* they just witnessed in chapter 8—and sends them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

And as he sends them, he instructs them in verse 3, "*Take nothing for the journey--no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town.*"

The point here's that they're to go on this mission trusting the Lord to provide what they need. This will be a tangible expression of their faith over against the cares of life.

Now, what Jesus does here is similar to what happened with Elijah and Elisha in 2 Kings 2. In 2 Kings 2, Elisha received a double portion of Elijah's spirit. And then after Elijah was taken into heaven, Elisha went around doing all the same sorts of things Elijah did.

And here in Luke 9, Jesus gives his power to his apostles. And that's important here because he's about to foretell his death for the very first time in verse 22.

And like Elisha, the apostles will carry on the prophetic ministry of their teacher after he's gone. And this is sort of like a trial run. And Luke informs us in verse 6 that they had success. As they preached the gospel and healed people everywhere.

But then in verse 7, almost out of nowhere, King Herod enters the picture. Now, Herod has already been presented by Luke as an enemy of God's messengers.

He *imprisoned* John the Baptist. And now here in verse 9 we find that he also had John beheaded. And so, it's certainly no coincidence that it's in this context of sending out the apostles that Herod starts asking questions about Jesus.

Because Jesus has been drawing more and more crowds of people and performing great miracles. And now he's even sending out his disciples to do the same sorts of things he was doing.

So, for somebody like Herod, this Jesus is fast becoming the leader of a full-fledged movement. Individual teachers were one thing. But movements could be really dangerous.

So, naturally, as he gets these reports about Jesus, Herod's starting to wonder what he's really all about. And the people suggested three possibilities:

1. He could be *John the Baptist* raised from the dead. 2. He could be the *prophet Elijah* come back to earth—He's been doing some things similar to what Elijah did..... Or, 3. he could be any of the *other prophets* come back to life.

And so, Herod's intrigued by all this. And he asks, "*I beheaded John. So, Who is this I hear such things about. And he tried to see him.*" Now, keep all that in mind because it'll be important later.

2. The Feeding of the 5000 and Peter's Confession (verses 10-20)

Well, after the bit about Herod, we see in verse 10 that when the disciples returned to Jesus they told him everything they did.

Luke doesn't tell us Jesus' response, only that after their return Jesus took them to a place called Bethsaida. Now, Bethsaida was a town located on the northern part of the Sea of Galilee.

And it sort of *seems like* he went there so they could be alone for a while, *doesn't it?* Luke says, "*he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida.*"

But then, in verse 11, we see that when they heard that Jesus and his disciples went there, the crowds followed them. And Jesus received them and preached to them about the Kingdom and healed people.

Notice it says he *welcomed* them. He didn't just put up with them out of a sense of obligation. But he *received* them *gladly*. Think about that. Jesus has been pouring himself out doing good for these people.

And then when he tries to get away for a while, they follow him. And he doesn't *even consider* turning them away. You see, he understood that there would be time to rest. In fact, we see in verse 18 that he did eventually have a chance to be alone with his disciples.

But as long as he was physically capable to serve those came to him, he won't turn them away..... Now, what do *you* do when *your plans* are interrupted by people?

You just got home from a long day. Maybe you're just getting ready to eat dinner. And then there's a knock on the door. Or the phone rings.... Somebody needs your help.

What's your reaction?.... *Do you* ignore it?.... Or *do you* do what's right, but begrudgingly and out of a sense of obligation? But look at Jesus here. He's the Lord of all, and he gladly receives these people.

Now, up to this point Jesus was just doing the very same things his apostles just did. But then, in verses 12-17, something else happens. His apostles come to him and tell him to send the people away to get something to eat.

They're trying to impart some of their wisdom to Jesus. And he responds, verse 13, "*You give them something to eat.*" Now, they only had 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. And of course, Jesus knew that.

But, remember, they've recently seen him do some pretty incredible things—like *commanding* the weather and *raising* the dead. And he just gave them his power to heal and cast out demons.

So they're no strangers at this point to the fact that Jesus can work miraculously through them.... But they didn't get it.... And so they just respond, "*All we have is 5 loaves and 2 fish!*"

But Jesus has them all sit down, takes the bread and fish, looks up to heaven and gives thanks. And then gives them to his disciples and tells them to pass them out to the crowd. What must have been going through their minds? They did obey. But I'm sure there was still some doubt.

This whole scene calls to mind an event from the ministry of Elisha. In 2 Kings 4.42-44, Elisha did something similar to what Jesus does here: A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And Elisha said, "Give them to the men, that they may eat." ⁴³ But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred men?" So he repeated, "Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" ⁴⁴ So he set it before them. And they ate and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.

But, of course, Jesus does what Elisha did on a *much grander scale*. And Jesus doesn't say "*Thus says the Lord.*" He just does it.

And in the very next scene, starting in verse 18, Jesus is praying, and the apostles are with him. And he asks them, "*Who do the crowds say that I am?*" They respond: Well, *some say you're John the Baptist risen from the dead, others think you're Elijah come back, or one of the prophets of old.*

That's just what people were saying to Herod earlier, *isn't it?* The crowds think Jesus is a prophet. And that's good, *right?* Sure. It's good to be a prophet..... But *is* a prophet all they needed? *Was* a prophet really all they were looking for?

You see, there's something similar about all those people mentioned here, *isn't there?* Yes.... They've all come and gone. The crowds think Jesus is *just like* others who've come before him.

But the people of Israel needed someone much greater than a prophet. They needed something more than what they've already seen. Because they're *in exile!*

Sure, the prophets spoke the word of God and did wonderful things. But the people remained in exile. None of the prophets delivered them. That's why John the Baptist asked Jesus back in chapter 7 (v. 20), "*Are you the one who is to come. Or shall we look for another?*"

You see, John knew that Jesus was *at least* a great prophet. He knew about his preaching and all the miracles. But John remained in prison! And the people were still in exile!

So, John wanted to know, *is* this Jesus simply a prophet. Or is he really the promised Messiah come to deliver us from our enemies? *Is this* Jesus really the long awaited Christ? And *if* he is, then what am I doing still in prison?

Now, Jesus did come to deliver people from their enemies. But not the way John expected him to. That's why one of the things Jesus said in response to John was, "*Blessed is he who is not offended by me.*"

And all that brings us now to verse 20, where Jesus turns the question to the apostles. "*But what about you? Who do you say that I am?*" In other words, "*Have you yet begun to grasp who I really am?*"

And Peter's answer is really the first and most basic Creed of the Church: "*You are the Christ of God.*"

Not just a prophet like the prophets of old! *Not just* a great leader! *Not just* a wonder-worker! *No!* You are the *Christ of God*. The *Messiah* come to deliver us from the hands of all our enemies!

We know it! We've *heard* the message. We've *seen* you still the wind and sea *with a word*, cast out demons *with a word*, heal the sick *with a word*, raise the dead *with a word*, create food *with a word*. And you've even given your power to us! *You're the Messiah!*

3. The Way of the Cross (verses 21-27)

But then, immediately following Peter's confession of faith, Jesus tells the apostles to not tell it to anyone! *Why?* I mean, *isn't* declaring that Jesus is the Christ what preaching the gospel is all about?

Well notice, verse 22 gives the reason—"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

The point's that there *will* come a time when they'll go around telling people that Jesus is the Christ. But that time won't come until after he's crucified, buried, and raised.

And *that's* because his work as the Messiah is *so intimately linked* with his death and resurrection that they *cannot* in any way be separated from each other.

And so, for the apostles to go around declaring that Jesus is the Christ *before* his crucifixion might reinforce to the crowds the mistaken notion that he came to overthrow the Roman government.

But in reality his work as the Messiah was the opposite of that. It was to be *willingly overcome* by the authorities and crucified for the destruction—*not of Rome*—but of sin, death, and Satan.

And thanks be to God, brothers and sisters, because apart from that none of us has any hope!

So, yes, declaring that Jesus is the Christ *is* what preaching the gospel is all about. But it's declaring that he's the Christ *precisely as* the one who was crucified and raised for our redemption.

Now, remember, after *Herod's question* in verse 9, "*Who then is this?*" Jesus miraculously gave the crowd of people *physical food*. But now here, after *Peter's confession*, Jesus tells his Apostles that his mission will ultimately lead to his *death*.

This one who has power to feed *over 5000 people* with five loaves of bread and two fish, *is going to die*. ... And set against the backdrop of giving physical food, here we see that Jesus' true work will be to offer up his *own body as spiritual food*.

Because, no doubt, this looks forward to when Jesus will later say to the Apostles in chapter 22 after breaking the bread at the Last Supper, "*This is my body given for you. Do this in memory of me.*"

For it's through his death and resurrection that the Lord Jesus Christ would become *living bread* for the life of the world.

John 6.51: *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."*

But, Jesus goes even further. In verses 23-27 he makes it clear that his own death will set a precedent for the lives of his disciples. Verse 23: *"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."*

Now, this is the first time Jesus' disciples have heard him talk about this whole idea of the Cross. So, *what* would this image of the cross have communicated to them?

Well, it would've communicated *condemnation*. Because the cross was a symbol of criminal execution. And *even more than that*, it was a symbol of God's curse.

It communicated the death and curse of an enemy—an enemy of the state and an enemy of God. *This* is what Jesus is telling his disciples they have to take up *daily* in order to follow him—and right after giving them power and authority to perform miracles at the beginning of the chapter!

That power was a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, which only comes in its full measure after suffering and death. But before that New Age dawns—*indeed, in order* for it to dawn—what's needed is for Christ and his disciples to go through the trial of the cross.

Because, you see, *just as* Jesus couldn't circumvent the cross to get to glory, *so* we can't, either. Crucifixion and resurrection was the pattern of Jesus' life. And it's the *daily pattern* for everyone who's united to him by faith.

So, when you wake up in the morning, remind yourself that as a Christian you're a dead man walking. And then proceed to rise for the day in the *newness of life* that you have in Christ.

Because to do anything else is, *ironically*, to walk in the way of death. As Jesus says here in verse 24, to seek to save your life in this world—to live

life in such a way that this world is all there is—is in fact to lose it in the world to come.

In other words, to live for the *fleeting pleasures* of a life that will *end in death* is to *forfeit* the *lasting pleasures* of *eternal life*.

So, then, *What* profit will it be to you *really* if you were even to gain *the whole world*—*Everything* there is to get your hands on in this present age—*all* the riches, *all* the power, *all* the pleasure you can.

But then after your short life here you lose it all—and *your life itself*— in the age to come. As you stand before God the judge apart from Christ with nothing but your your sin?

Friends, please see that that's the *most tragic* thing that can ever happen to anyone. Remember the words of Psalm 90:

The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.... So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

But what does losing your life for Christ on a day to day basis really mean? Well, it means a lot of things. But there are two basic aspects of it

First, with respect to *your relationship to God*, it means *daily* humbling yourself before God and laying your life and your sin down through repentance and faith in Christ And confessing Jesus as Lord come whatever consequences may.

Are you ashamed to confess him before men? Then he'll be ashamed of you. *Are you confessing* him as Lord? Then be sure that he'll confess you as good and faithful servant.

And second, with respect to *your relationship to other people*, it means laying aside whatever you *think* you deserve in your dealings with people. We're not to exert our *own will* and try to get out of other people what we think we're entitled to.

Instead, we're to have the same mind that was in Christ when he humbled himself and took the form of a servant and became obedient to death, even the cursed death of the cross.

You see, those who follow Christ are called to be servants, just as Jesus came not to be served but to serve and give himself over for us. Because in the Kingdom of God the *greatest* of all is *least* of all. That's exactly what Jesus will tell his disciples later in verse 48.

So, What would Jesus find in you if he returned today? Are you seeking to save your life in this age of death? Or are you losing your life in this world for his sake and for the glory of the age to come?

We see in verse 26 that he is coming back—and in three-fold glory—His own glory, the glory of his Father, and the glory of the holy angels. And he's coming in order to receive into that glory those who follow him in the Way of the Cross. But to bring shame upon those who reject him.

And in the very next scene, notice, we see that *glory burst forth!* As Jesus is *transfigured* before the eyes of Peter, James, and John. And declared by the Father's voice to be greater than even Moses and Elijah!

That's why Jesus ends here in verse 27 by saying, *"there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."*

You see, Peter, James, and John saw the kingdom of God. For they saw Christ glorified on the mountain. And *Christ himself IS* the Kingdom.

And now as the risen and ascended Lord, he reigns in *heavenly glory*. We may not see that glory with our physical eyes, *brothers and sisters*. But we walk by faith, not by sight. That's what the author of Hebrews is getting at when he says,

At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

So, *What about you? Who do You say that he is?* People can give lots of answers to that question. But *what's your answer?* And *what difference does it make in your life?*