

STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS

THE KINGDOM AND THE CROSS!

Read Luke 9:18-26

This scene began with Jesus praying, and the disciples joining Him. We do not really know if they joined with Him in prayer, or if they interrupted His time of prayer. When Jesus was done praying, He asked them a question: **Who do the crowds say that I am?** Jesus did not ask this question because He was ignorant on this point and needed information from His disciples. He asked because He would use this question to introduce a more important follow-up question.

People who thought that Jesus was John the Baptist did not know much about Him neither did those who called Him Elijah or one of the old prophets. Who do people out there say Jesus is - your neighbours, colleagues, or those whom you have had conversation with?

Who do you say that I am? It was fine for the disciples to know what the crowds thought about Jesus. But Jesus had to ask them, as individuals, what they believed about Jesus. This is the question placed before all who hear of Jesus; and it is we, not He, who are judged by our answer. In fact, we answer this question every day by what we believe and do. If we really believe Jesus is who He says He is, it will affect the way that we live.

Peter's answer was divine and based on the Father's revelation, Peter knew that Jesus is the Christ of God, God's Messiah, the promised redeemer from the Old Testament, the Messiah from the heart of God, not the Messiah from the desire of man. Matthew's rendition puts it this way:

"He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 16:15-17)

Jesus Death & Resurrection Foretold

"And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one" (v21)

But while Jesus clearly acknowledges He is the Messiah, He wants to keep this secret for now. If he came publicly claiming to be the Messiah, He would rapidly attract a following with political and revolutionary goals, and his ministry would be cut short by prison and death. To continue the ministry that the Father has laid out for him, Jesus instead calls himself the more ambiguous "Son of Man" and only on a few occasions acknowledges that He is the Messiah.

In the following verse, Jesus moves from the wonderful theme of him being the Messiah to a topic everyone at the time steadfastly refuse to understand. Jesus predicts his own horrible death.

"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." (v22)

In Matthew's Gospel we read Peter's brash rebuke, "Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!" And we read Jesus' own stiff rebuke: "Get behind me.... You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (**Matthew 16:23**).

Jesus is right. All Jews long for the Messiah to overthrow the hated Roman oppressors and restore the Kingdom to Israel but instead, Jesus talks about His suffering, death, and resurrection. "Suffer" is used with an important word "must". This was not just a plan or an idea or a prediction; this was the fulfilment of what was planned before the world began for our salvation.

Jesus calls everyone wanting to follow Him to do what He will do

The phrase, "*then he said to them all,*" indicates that, while the prediction of his death is for the Twelve's ears only, what he says now is of more general application, and he is now saying this regularly to groups of followers.

It was bad enough for the disciples to hear that Jesus would suffer, be rejected, and die on a cross. Now He told them that they must do the same; or at least have the same intention.

The term: "deny, disregard oneself, that is, act in a wholly selfless way." Christianity is not an add-on to our already full, self-directed way of life. Discipleship means deliberately choosing to follow another person's way, rather than making our own way. We follow in a selfless manner Jesus' way.

Let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me: As Jesus spoke these words, everybody knew what Jesus meant. In the Roman world, before a man died on a cross, he had to carry his cross (or at least the horizontal beam of the cross) to the place of execution.

When the Romans crucified a criminal, they did not just hang them on a cross. They first hung a cross on the person. Carrying a cross always led to death on a cross. No one carried a cross for fun. The first hearers of Jesus did not need an explanation of the cross; they knew it was an unrelenting instrument of torture, death, and humiliation. If someone took up his cross, he never came back. It was a one-way journey.

Jesus made deny himself equal with take up his cross. The two phrases expressed the same idea. The cross was not about self-promotion or self-affirmation. The person carrying a cross knew they could not save themselves, and that self was destined to die. Denying yourself means to live as an others-centred person. Jesus was the only person to do this perfectly, but we are to follow in His steps.

What is the meaning of the Cross?

It is important that we do not misunderstand Jesus. He is not talking about a mere burden or trial or difficulty as the cross. He is talking about death. That is the context in verse 23, "*he must be killed....*" Make no mistake; Jesus is not speaking figuratively here. Paul said the same of himself:

"... I die daily." (1 **Corinthians 15:31**)

Take up his cross daily: Jesus made it clear that He spoke spiritually when He added the word daily. No one could be crucified literally every day. Daily they could have the same attitude as Jesus had. This is following Jesus at its simplest. He carried a cross, so His followers carry one. He walked to His self-death, so must those who would follow Him.

To emphasise the same point, Jesus is saying the disciple is to deny himself and pick up his cross at the beginning of each day, so that he might succeed in continuing to follow Jesus throughout the day. Interesting!

The Apostle Paul understood well what this meant and lived it out day by day until the day he was beheaded by the Roman emperor. In three classic passages he expresses this concept in different ways:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (**Galatians 2:20**)

"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." (**Colossians 3:3**)

How to gain your life!

When you realize that only one of the Twelve Apostles died a natural death, you realize that Jesus is not speaking figuratively about saving and losing one's life.

"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it." (v24)

"Survive at all costs," is a flawed philosophy by which to live. "Be faithful to Christ no matter what the cost," is the philosophy Jesus' disciples came to live by. In the first and second centuries there were many times when Christians faced the decision to renounce Jesus and live or maintain their Christian witness and be executed.

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it: We must follow Jesus this way because it is the only way that we will ever find life. It sounds strange to say, "You will never live until you walk to your death with Jesus," but that is the idea. You cannot gain resurrection life without dying first. You do not lose a seed when you plant it, though it seems dead and buried. In truth, you set it free to be what it was always intended to be.

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world: Avoiding the walk to death with Jesus means that we may gain the whole world – and end up losing everything. Amazingly, the people who live this way before Jesus are the ones who are really, genuinely happy. Giving our lives to Jesus all the way and living as an others-centred person does not take away from our lives, it adds to it.

Closet Christians

We cannot be closet Christians, ashamed of what Jesus stands for and seeking to avoid the slander and persecution that comes with following him faithfully. The Apostle Paul says to young Timothy,

"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Timothy 3:12)

We must decide whether or not we will identify ourselves publicly with Jesus. If we are ashamed of him and his words, he will be ashamed of us on the Day when he returns in his glory.

But there is a promise contained in identifying with Jesus. Paul puts it this way:

"This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." (2 Timothy 2:11-13)

Do you want to live with Him? Do you want to reign with Him? Do you want to be His disciple?

- Know Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God
- Be prepared to deny yourself
- Take up your cross daily (or die daily)
- Be ready to follow Jesus
- Be prepared to lose your life for Jesus' sake
- Be proud of Jesus, His words, and your identity as a Christian – at all times.

