

HOW DO YOU BECOME A DISCIPLE OF JESUS?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

By Ron Ritchie

A fellow Christian once said to me in a joking manner, "I don't mind being a servant of Jesus Christ, I just don't want to be treated like one." His words have come back to me many times as I have sought to live out my life as a follower of Jesus Christ. On occasion I find myself wanting to be a disciple of Christ but on my own terms.

This setting of pre-conditions for discipleship was familiar to Jesus during his ministry. He said to one man, "Follow me," only to hear in response, "Permit me first to go and bury my father." Another man told Jesus, "I will follow you, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home" (Luke 9:57-62). True discipleship, however, has no pre-conditions. Having placed our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, as 1 Corinthians says, "our life is no longer our own; we have been bought with a price."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who gave up his life daily on behalf of the German people during the time of the Nazis, and finally died for his faith at the end of a rope in a Nazi prison, once said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." The concept of discipleship has been greatly watered down in our modern age. From time to time it is helpful to review the true definition of discipleship as it is found in the Scripture. Let us turn to Luke 9:18-27 to find the answer to our question, "How does one become a disciple of Jesus Christ?"

We are continuing our studies in Luke's gospel, and today we will look at verses 18 through 27 of chapter 9. Between verses 17-18, according to the other gospels, our Lord 1) blocked the people's attempt to make him king by sending his disciples back to Capernaum by boat while he went up the mountain to pray; 2) joined his disciples by walking some 3-4 miles on the surface of the waters of Lake Galilee during a storm. They became afraid and thought he was a ghost; Peter wanted to join him, but lost faith and almost drowned. Then as the Lord got into the boat, Mark 6:51-52 says, "...the wind stopped and they were astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." 3) after Jesus landed in Gennesaret he continued his healing ministry; 4) he followed with a discourse on the true Bread of Life, in the synagogue of Capernaum (John 6:22-59), which resulted in many disciples leaving him. Next, he had a confrontation with the Pharisees over the tradition of ceremonial defilement; 5) then the Lord and his disciples went northwest to the cities of Tyre and Sidon and ministered to a Gentile woman whose daughter was possessed by demons; 6) he then returned to the eastern shores of the lake in the district of Decapolis, where the hearts of the Gentiles had been prepared by the ministry of the former demoniac named "Legion." There he healed many sick Gentiles and miraculously fed another crowd of 4,000; 6) he returned by boat to the north coast of the Sea of Galilee, was confronted by the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians, and he used that opportunity to teach his disciples to "beware of the leaven (teaching) of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt. 16:12); 8) they then returned to Bethsaida, where Jesus healed a blind man, and finally, they all headed north to Caesarea Philippi.

Jesus was aware that the Pharisees in Jerusalem were seeking to kill him at Passover, so he did not attend the third feast in April of the end of his second year of ministry, but remained in Northern Galilee and Decapolis (John 7:1-9). He gathered his disciples around him once again. At this meeting he wanted them to clearly understand who he was and why he had to die on the cross, be buried and raised again on the third day. He also wanted them to know what he considered to be the marks of genuine discipleship. The future of his gospel would depend on their being faithful to follow him even unto death.

As we turn to Luke 9:18-27 today, let this passage challenge our own commitment to Jesus Christ in our generation. Let us make sure that when we invite men and women to become disciples of our Lord, we do not

present some watered-down version of what Jesus asks of each of his true followers. How do you become a disciple of Jesus ?

I. Believe he is "The Christ of God", Luke 9:18-20

And it came about that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, "Who do the multitudes say that I am?" And they answered and said, "'John the Baptist; but others say, Elijah; and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again." And He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God."

Caesarea Philippi, lying on the southern slopes of Mt. Hermon, which was snow-capped each winter, was one of the centers of Decapolis. One of the many streams that flow through the town make up the headwaters of the Jordan River. Through the centuries, the ancient pagans built many idols there to worship the gods of the waters. Some think that Jesus asked this question, "Who do the multitudes say that I am?" as he stood a high cliff by the town which housed idols to Roman and Greek gods in its many caves and indentations.

Following a time of prayer, our Lord asked his disciples this important question. Jesus was asking, in other words, "In light these gods, who do the people think I am?" (This incident is also covered in Matt.16:13-20 and Mark 8:27-30.) He was seeking to know if the people to whom the disciples had been ministering for the last year in the region of Galilee really understood who he was. Remember that the Pharisees had already denounced him as a law breaker and a Sabbath breaker who performed all his miracles by the power of Satan. News of this would have spread quickly into every synagogue in Galilee and caused great confusion in the minds of these "sheep without a shepherd."

"John the Baptist," was the first answer Jesus received in response to his question. In Luke 19:7, we read that Herod Antipas, governor of Galilee, who had beheaded John, became perplexed when he heard of the miracles of Jesus. He was told that some people thought Jesus was John the Baptist. But why would the people think that Jesus was the deceased forerunner? It was because they were looking for a Messiah who would introduce a physical kingdom, but first they would see the forerunner of Malachi who would come with a message of repentance and judgement. John and Jesus had the same message. The disciples' second reply was Elijah, the prophet and miracle worker who never died but was taken up into heaven by God some 850 years earlier and was prophesied to return to earth as the forerunner of the Messiah. Their third answer was, one of the prophets, like the miracle worker Elisha, or even Moses raised from the dead.

Jesus then asked the disciples a second time, "But who do you say that I am?" This was a very important question. Jesus was facing the cross, and he needed his disciples to clearly understand his person and purpose on earth, and the part they would play in bringing the kingdom of God into the hearts of men and women after he returned to his Father. All his messages and miracles were designed so that his disciples would in time become fully convinced that he was truly the Messiah. But not the Messiah of popular expectation, rather the one in harmony with Isaiah 53, the man who would come to this earth to suffer and die for the sins of mankind and on the third day be raised from the dead by the power of His Father. For the Messiah to die on a cross was a stumbling block to the Jewish mind. Deut. 21:22-23 states, "...if a man has committed a sin, worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ...for he who is hanged is accursed of God..." The disciples did not understand that Jesus was about to go to the cross to become a curse for us (Gal. 3:13).

Now it was Peter's turn to answer, and by the power of spiritual revelation he replied, "The Christ of God" (The Son of the living God, Matt. 16:16). He was saying, "You are the Lord's anointed, as prophesied by the prophets of old. You are the promised prophet, priest and king come to deliver us from our sins and our enemies." John would later write of Jesus' incarnation, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). According to Matthew, Jesus said to Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that your are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall

loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven ."

The cults and the world religions have not been given this revelation and thus they continue to deny our Lord's incarnation. Here is what they say of the Lord Jesus: "Jesus is the human man and Christ is the divine ideal"; "Christ himself was nothing more than a medium high order"; "Jesus was not Jehovah God"; "Jesus is among the spirit children of Elohim, the firstborn was and is Jehovah, or Jesus Christ, to whom all others are juniors"; "Christ is considered to be one of a long line of 'masters' who had themselves realized divinity"; "Jesus is the Son of God, but not God the Son or God himself." The apostle Peter, however, here was given a divine revelation from our heavenly Father as to the truth of Jesus' person: He was "The Christ of God." God incarnate!

How do you become a disciple of Jesus? You must believe in your heart that Jesus is the Christ of God, the very Son of the one and only living God, God come in the flesh. "...there is salvation in one one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

How do you become a disciple of Jesus? You must believe that Jesus is the Christ of God, and then, by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit,

II. Take up your cross daily, Luke 9:21-23

But He warned them, and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

The reason Jesus warned his disciples to not tell anyone was that at this time he was at the peak of his popularity with the common people. They wanted to take him by force and make him their king. If that happened, he would be forced to set up an earthy political kingdom and many of his followers would be unbelievers who would resist denying themselves, taking up their cross, and losing their lives to follow him. The leaders of Israel and the majority of the Jewish people chose to not believe that he was the Son of God in spite of his person, message and miracles. Jesus wanted his disciples to be quiet about this truth until he could give his witness before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. At that time the High Priest would said to him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 26:63f).

Next, Jesus prophesied concerning his own death and resurrection (9:22): "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day." This is the first direct prophecy our Lord gave to his disciples concerning his forthcoming suffering and death at the hands of the elders, high priest and scribes in Jerusalem. He also gave them word concerning his physical resurrection from the dead. (All these events would take place a year from this current Passover season.) His suffering, death and resurrection were all prophesied in Isaiah 53, and Psalm 22, as God's plan to deal with the sinful fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden.

To the disciples, this divine program was a startling revelation. As forceful as Peter was to declare Jesus "the Christ of God," he was just as ready to rebuke the Lord and his plans. Matthew 16:22-23 records Peter as saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but on man's.'" For God's interest was already prophesied in Isaiah 53: 3-4: "He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face. He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our sin He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening of our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. "

"And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'" To deny oneself means to choose by the power of the Holy Spirit to live daily in the spiritual reality that Paul shared with the Corinthians, "You are not your own; you have been bought with a

price" (6:19-20). "To deny oneself...is to turn away from the idolatry of self-centeredness" (C.E.B. Cranfield). Once we place our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior we become his bondservant, and we begin to learn to live our lives to fulfill his will, not ours. We will need to deny our self-confidence, self-adequacy, and self-sufficiency. Either Jesus is Lord of our lives or we are. We cannot have it both ways. The key attitude of our new lives in Christ is stated in the words of our Lord the night before he died on the cross for our sins: "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22: 42).

"...and take up his cross daily ... " Jesus followed up his prophecy by saying that if after confessing him as Messiah one still want to follow him, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily." The Roman cross was an instrument of shame, humiliation and death, used by the government to punish criminals. When the Jews watched a criminal take up a cross and be led by a squad of Roman soldiers to the hill of Calvary, they all knew the man was making a one-way trip to his death. The criminal takes up his cross under duress, the Christian does it willingly, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Taking up my cross means I admit that it was my sin of envy, rebellion, pride, lust, murder, adultery, slander, etc., that put Jesus on that cross. But when I placed my faith in him, I died once and for all to the power of sin, and now because he lives I am able to life a new resurrected life of righteousness by his resurrection power (Romans 6). The cross of Christ is a daily reminder that our flesh needs to be put to death. The apostle Paul said years later to the Galatians, "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5: 24-25). We are not to coddle or cuddle our flesh, nor give it any encouragement or even tolerate it. Instead we are to reject it together with its selfish desires. We are to nail the flesh to the cross daily. Paul tells us that if Jesus is Lord, then "...we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you" (2 Cor 4:11-12). In his book, *The Cross of Christ*, John R.W. Stott wrote, "The cross undermines our self-righteousness. We stand before it with a bowed head and a broken spirit, and there we remain until the Lord Jesus speaks to our hearts his word of pardon and acceptance, and we, gripped by his love and brimful of thanksgiving, go out into the world to live our lives in his service."

"...and follow Me..." There were many disciples who were willing to follow Jesus for a while, but then they left him because he continued to offer them a spiritual kingdom when they wanted a political kingdom. But the offer of the Lord was that true disciples would not only deny themselves and take up their cross, but also follow him wherever he led them, even to their own physical death on a cross if necessary, the same death Peter would suffer later. The disciples were asked to trust the Lord as "he set his face toward Jerusalem" (9:51), to suffer, die and be raised again. To follow Jesus means to walk in obedience to his word so that our lives bring glory to him and joy to our own hearts.

Most of us have seen the movie *Chariots of Fire*, the story of two outstanding athletes in the 1924 Olympic Games held in Paris. One of the athletes was Eric Liddell, a Scotsman and a Christian who won the gold medal and set a world record in the 400 meters. Following the Games, Eric was called of God to serve as a missionary in China. When the Japanese invaded China in the '30's, Eric task of teaching and evangelism in the countryside brought him face to face with the victims of that war. On several occasion he was called upon to rescue wounded and dying men who were left untreated because the local people feared reprisals from the Japanese. Just before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Eric was rounded up with all the other "enemy nationals" and placed in a prison camp. There he taught the other prisoners and children the word of God, and tried to met their medical needs. He died at the age of 43, just months before the liberation, and was buried in the little cemetery in the Japanese part of the camp. Do you remember the last lines that came up on screen at the end of the movie? They were: "Eric Liddell. Missionary. Died in occupied China at the end of World War II. All Scotland mourned."

How do you become a disciple of Jesus? You must believe that he is the Christ; take up your cross daily, and.

III. Be willing to lose your life, Luke 9: 24-27

"For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses

or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and 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 of those standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

The disciples were aware that John the Baptist had "lost" his life daily from the time he was a youth up to the time of his physical death at the hands of Herod and Herodias. Over the following 30 years, 11 of the 12 disciples would be placed into circumstances in which they would day by day have to give up their hopes and dreams in order to remain faithful to their Lord and their calling. They would be persecuted, arrested, tried, placed in prisons, beaten, suffer cold, hunger, loneliness, fear and abandonment for the sake of Christ. And in the end, all but perhaps John would die a martyr's death. "Remember the word that I said to you," Jesus said in the upper room, "a slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you..." (John 15: 20). Paul would tell his spiritual son, Timothy, some 30 years later that, "...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim.3:12). The writer to the Hebrews reminded the Christian community that they would be made made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated: "For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one (in eternity)" (10:32-35).

Jesus had preached earlier that he was the Bread of Life, and everyone who believed in him would be given the gift of eternal life: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe. Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore" (John 6). This statement may have been made directly to Judas, who was having second thoughts about the person and claims of Jesus. Judas was a Jewish Zealot before he met Jesus. He hoped the Lord would set up a powerful political kingdom that would overthrow the Roman government. But the more he listened to the Lord, the more it became apparent that Jesus was speaking of a spiritual kingdom. Judas was not about to lose his life for a man he really didn't believe was the political Messiah he had hoped would save Israel from Roman domination. Thus he took steps to save his life, and in doing so began to lose it.

"For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" (Mark 8:37 adds, "For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?") Where are you investing your life? Remember the words of Satan at the beginning of Jesus' ministry: "Again the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory; and he said to Him, 'All things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me' (Matt. 4:8-9). The Roman Caesars thought they had approached this high water mark when they were declared to be the gods of Rome and Emperors of the world, yet each died in their turn and took into eternity all that they were born with-nothing but their soul! The man who built his life on a sandy foundation lost his house, his life and his soul when the deadly storm finally hit. This would be true of Herod Antipas, the High Priest, the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes, and finally, Judas, who all thought this world was all there was and invested so heavily in it they lost their souls.

"For whoever is ashamed of Me and 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" (9:26). Matthew adds, quoting Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12, "and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." Here our Lord is speaking of his second coming, after his death, resurrection and ascension, because he makes reference to the great white throne judgment, in which all the deeds of men will be weighed and found wanting. Paul reminded the Ephesians, "by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (2: 8-9).

"But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." Matt. 16: 28 adds, "...until they see the Son of man coming in His Kingdom"; Mark 9:1 says, "...until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." None of this glory will be stopped by the rejection of the Pharisees, the High Priest, the Supreme Court, the political powers of Rome or even our Lord's death on the cross. In the immediate context it appears that our Lord is referring to the time six days

later, when he will take his disciples out of Caesarea Philippi and move higher up the slopes of Mt Hermon. There, Peter, James and John would see the Transfiguration of Jesus and be allowed to look into eternity and see the risen Savior in all his glory and power. This is the vision all the world will finally see at his second coming when he assumes his rightful position as King of kings and Lord of lords.

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