Follow Jesus' Lifestyle

Luke 9:18-27
Key Verse: Luke 9:23
“Then he said to them all: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’”

Jesus calls all sorts of people to follow him, no matter what their background is. Jesus called ordinary men from rural Galilee who had no special training. He called a tax collector Matthew to leave his life of sin and follow him. We all have different starting points, but Jesus asks each of us to come and see who he is. Prior to the events of today’s passage, these disciples were following Jesus for two or two-and-a-half years. During that time, Jesus showed and taught his disciples many things. Jesus healed those with leprosy; he made those who could not walk leap and dance with joy. Jesus fed five thousand with five small barley loaves and two small fish. Jesus cast out demons and even brought the dead back to life. Jesus taught the people about the spirit of the law, and he taught eternal truths through stories called parables. For more than two years, Jesus allowed his disciples and all the people to see who he actually was. When we arrive at this passage, Jesus wants for his disciples to go deeper. Jesus wanted his disciples to know who he really is and what it really means to follow Jesus. Let’s take a look.

Our passage this morning begins, “Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say I am?’” (18) Jesus isn’t the type to fuss over the number of followers he has on Twitter or how many likes one of his comments garnered on Facebook. Jesus wanted his disciples to think about who he is. “They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.’” (19) The disciples’ reply revealed a few things. The people thought that Jesus was a great man. The people greatly respected John the Baptist and Elijah and considered them great men of God, but they were only scratching the surface on who Jesus is.

After the disciples answered, Jesus asked another question, “‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’” (20) Jesus heard what other people thought about him, but he really wanted his disciples to think about what they thought about him. The crowds only saw Jesus in public, but the disciples had seen every part of Jesus’ life. They saw Jesus’ public life like the crowd, but they also saw his private life. They would know intimate details about Jesus like whether Jesus snored as he slept or what his favorite food was. They saw that in his public life and his private life, Jesus was the same. So, Jesus wanted for them to put all these things together and make a conclusion about who he was. Jesus doesn’t want for his disciples to simply parrot what the crowds say, but he wants them to come to their own conclusions. It is very important to come to our own conclusions about who Jesus is. It is up to us to find out because we all have these preconceived notions about Jesus. I grew up with no real knowledge of God. I never attended church or talked about God at home. In college, I made up my mind that God was cruel and manipulative, because I was lonely, in anguish and I couldn’t see him. After two years of Bible

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study and being told about Jesus, those old thoughts that I had about Jesus still rattled about in my head, but then I was invited to a Christmas worship service and that knocked away those ideas. I never attended a worship service before and I was nervous to do so. It was 2002 and I honestly don't remember who gave the message or what the message was, but my heart was touched by the love and grace that filled the atmosphere of the place. I could see God's love through the people's love for each other and even me.

When Jesus asked his disciples "Who do you say I am", Peter spoke up. "God's Messiah," he said. The word "Messiah" is Hebrew for "Anointed One". In Greek the word is "Christ". In older times, a king or priest is anointed by having oil poured on his head by one of God's servants to represent God's choice. However, the Messiah is God's special Anointed One. He is a singular person, chosen by God to rule forever. It is a bold claim for Peter to make. The Jews were waiting for the Messiah for centuries, like a bride waiting for her groom, and Peter simply says that Jesus was the one they were waiting for. He had seen so much of Jesus that the only conclusion that he could make was that Jesus was God's Messiah.

After Peter answered, Jesus strictly warned them not to tell anyone. (21) The reason Jesus did this was that the word Messiah had meaning for the people that was wrong. The people's had the idea that the Messiah was going to be a conquering hero who would drive away the nasty, occupying Roman army and reestablish Israel's place among the table of nations. They wanted a messiah to be their national savior. They wanted a savior for their petty little problems. We, too, want to be saved from our lives of stress and pain, but pleasure, money and making a name for yourself are just escapes. We want them to save us, but they don't lead to lasting fulfillment. However, when we seek out these little messiahs, we miss out on the true Messiah. Everything that the Jewish people thought about the Messiah was made up. The people were hoping for a messiah of that would fit the box they chose and that would hinder Jesus' mission to reunite the people with God. When Jesus wouldn't fulfill their expectations, then they would never be able accept him as the true Messiah, God's Messiah.

After warning his disciples not to say anything, Jesus told them what it truly means to be God's Messiah. He said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." (22) Right here is the lifestyle of God's Messiah, Jesus. It is a lifestyle of suffering, rejection, death and glory. It is a lifestyle of submitting to God. If you look again at verse 22, you can see the word "must" used twice. There is a purpose in Jesus's death and that purpose was defined by God himself in Scripture. About seven hundred years before Jesus' time, the prophet Isaiah wrote about the Messiah, "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:3-5) The Messiah would be despised and rejected, a man of suffering, and

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familiar with pain. That is exactly what Jesus said would happen to him.

So, Jesus wasn't some conquering hero who would throw off the shackles of political repression. Jesus is the conquering hero who would throw off the shackles of spiritual repression. Since the dawn of humanity, people have lied and cheated. We have lusted and raged. We have marginalized, beaten and killed. We were created in the image of God, but sin pulls us further and further from that image. Sin beats us down and tells us that we are not good enough. Sin tells us that we are better off dead, because there is shame and humiliation awaiting us when everyone finds out what we did and the lies we have told and lived. The ultimate end of sin is death, since sin pulls us away from the author of life. The further we step away from life, the closer we go to death. Sin is right when it says that we are not good enough, but Jesus is good enough. Jesus was pierced on the cross for our sins. His body was beaten and bruised because of all the wrong that we have done and all the right that we did not do. Jesus died so that we could be healed and have the image of God restored.

However, there is more to the story. Not only did Jesus have to suffer and die on the cross, but he said that on the third day, he would be raised to life. The full punishment for our sins was Jesus' death, but he did not stay dead. The apostle Paul wrote about Jesus, "For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God." (Romans 6:9-10) Jesus already died once because of sin; he cannot die again. Death has no more sway over Jesus. He overcame death and is alive even now.

Jesus, right now, sits at the right hand of God waiting for the day he will return. His death and resurrection give us victory over sin and the grave. Paul also wrote, "the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:54-57) Jesus is victorious over death. He is the Messiah and he leads us to that very same victory if we choose to follow him.

By why choose to follow him or anyone for that matter? It seems like there is no one out there who cares about you. Politicians seem to care more about arguing than helping people. Corporate leaders seem to care only about the bottom line. Therefore, it feels like you have to look out for yourself, but is following our own way a good idea? We should follow someone we trust. Do you trust yourself? Let me ask you this question, who here has ever lied? Give me a show of hands. There are a lot of liars here, and if your hand isn't up, then you are lying to me right now. I like to think that I can trust myself, but the person to lies to me the most is me, and the biggest liar you know is you. Did you know that Jesus never lied and never broke a promise? Everything that he said was true and everything that he said that he would do, he did, all the way to the cross. Jesus wants to lead us to victory over our sins and brokenness. He actually cares for us and is willing to give everything so that we can be fully healed. He has already done so. Jesus is the only one worth

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following.

To follow Jesus means to follow his lifestyle. When Jesus talked about what the Messiah would do, it included suffering, death and resurrection. That is Jesus' lifestyle. In verse 23, Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." If someone wants to follow Jesus and be his disciple, they have to follow his lifestyle and that means to deny ourselves and take up our crosses daily and follow him. We aren't meant to be vampire Christians, where we would take only a little of the blood of Jesus and ignore everything else. We have to be life-wide Christians and follow Jesus in every aspect of our lives. Jesus denied himself and went to the cross and he wants for us to follow him there. That doesn't sound very easy. The cross is an implement of death. To carry our cross means to follow Jesus to our death, but remember, Jesus conquered sin and death and we inherit that victory when we follow him. The cross means suffering and death, but if you are victorious over death, there is no fear in the cross because death no longer has power over you. In fact, your eyes aren't on the cross anymore, it is on the glory of the risen Messiah, whom you are following.

Elisabeth Elliot recently passed away, just about a month ago. For those of you who don't know that name, Elisabeth Elliot is known for her work with the Waorani tribe in Ecuador. The Waoranis were an isolated and fierce group who killed everyone who came into contact with them. The neighboring tribes called them savages. In 1956, her husband Jim Elliot and four other missionaries arrived in the area of the Waorani. The wanted to share the love of Jesus with them and it seemed to start ok. They met three tribe members under friendly terms, but then the missionaries were killed because of the tribe members lied about the missionaries intent. Elisabeth could have been torn apart. She had a 10-month old child, who no longer had a father because of this tribe. She could have remained in pain and bitter about the whole experience, but instead, she denied herself and followed God's will to share the gospel message to the Waorani. Elisabeth and her daughter moved in with the Waorani two years after her husband's death. She went and shared the gospel to the very people that killed her husband. It's unbelievable! Even the tribe members could not understand why she wanted to be among them because of what she went through. But because of the love and compassion she showed them, the entire tribe came to believe in Jesus and became good friends with Elisabeth. She was not bound by the power of sin and death. She carried her cross daily and followed Jesus to share the gospel. For Elisabeth Elliot, following Jesus' lifestyle was the best lifestyle. It was fulfilling and lives were changed.

To help his disciples understand that Jesus' lifestyle is the best lifestyle, he continued, "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?" (24-25) When we look out only for ourselves, we might get what we want. We might get the whole world, but what is the cost? There are a number of successful and famous people, who seem to have everything that we could ever want. Not matter how much they have, it doesn't fill the hole in their souls. Just look in the tabloids and you can see so many famous people self-destructing through drugs and alcohol. When we look out only for ourselves, we actually end up forfeiting our very

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selves.

Conversely, if we surrender our lives to Jesus, we find life. When you say that Jesus is always right, then there is life. Jesus said to God as he was once praying, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3) Seeking God’s way means seeking God. How can we know God’s way if we do not know God? When know God then we have found eternal life. This is why it is so important for us to know who Jesus is. Because if we truly know who Jesus is, we will have found eternal life. We can’t follow Jesus if we don’t know who he is. Denying yourself means that when Jesus’ will and your will conflict, you choose Jesus’ will over your own. We have to make a decision whether to follow our will and choose death or to follow Jesus and find life.

For those who choose to deny themselves and take up their crosses and follow Jesus, he promises great things. We already know that knowing Jesus means that we know life and have eternal life, but that life is not the same miserable drudgery that we experience now. Jesus finishes this passage by saying, “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.” (27) The kingdom of God is wherever God’s people are. The kingdom of God is wherever sinners are transformed by the forgiveness of their sins through Jesus’ death and resurrection. While it will come into its fullness when Jesus returns, God’s great kingdom starts the moment you decide to follow Jesus and that changes things.

These changes are blessings that are given to those who follow Jesus. Now, I am not saying that we follow Jesus for its benefits, but blessings do come. They vary from person to person and according to God’s will. If God doesn’t want to bless you a certain way, then he won’t. These blessings may present themselves as gifts given to us, God’s provision, changed habits, or greatest of all, a changed spirit. Paul wrote, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23) We can know that we are following Jesus because we can see the fruit of our change. This is how we are healed. When good grows in us, then the good fruit grows in us. This is the greatest blessing because when we are filled with love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, it changes the world around us. Just look at Elisabeth Elliot, through Jesus she had that fruit and a tribe was changed by the love of Jesus.

Likewise, God’s kingdom is eternal. Jesus promised that he would return and when he does return, it would mark an age of perfection. All of the inadequacies, all the pain and suffering, all the brokenness and tears and all of the lies will be no more. Jesus’ resurrection put death to death and broke its power. It no longer had mastery over Jesus and if we follow him, it has no mastery over us. With victory over sin and death, creation can be renewed. The apostle John saw this renewal and wrote, “‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:3-4) This is the glorious renewal that we all hope for: a world without pain and tears and death.

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It’s been nearly thirteen years since I first decided to follow Jesus and serve him at IIT. Some of those days were really hard, like I was dying. In April 2009, just months before my wedding, I lost my job because of the economic downturn. My degree is in mechanical and aerospace engineering, but Chicago is not an aerospace hub. I couldn’t find a job in my field, but I chose to serve Jesus at IIT. I held tightly to that to that decision and took a job at Northwestern University as a web developer. It is a blow to me because all my education is being forgotten, but God’s way is truly the best. The job God has provided for me is very flexible with great benefits. It has allowed me to support my beautiful wife Viola as she completed her pharmacy degree and has just started her residency. God is also so gracious as to give me a daughter who was born two years after I was laid off to the day. God redeemed what could have been a terrible, depressing day and made it one of the most blessed that I know. My wife, daughter and son are great blessings, but the Lord has done more. For the past seven years, I have regularly given messages on Sunday at IIT and one of my former Bible students, Ison Hong is now serving Malaysia with the gospel, and he will be speaking here tonight. Greatest of all, however, because I have decided to follow Jesus he has been changing me and making me aware of my many sins. When I first made the decision to follow Jesus, I was timid, fearful and blamed God for all my troubles. As an example, I couldn’t speak publicly without my hands shaking profusely. Now, I am powerful in Christ and my hands are rock solid. Plus, I know that my God loves me and desires the best for me. Everyday, I am growing in love and all the fruit, and eternity is starting to feel real.

Following Jesus is something that we have to choose to do. Following our own thoughts and desires is bad since we know how much we lie. However, Jesus has never lied and has always kept his word. He cares about us because he is the Messiah. He is the one who suffered and died for our sins. Jesus rose from the dead to lead us to life everlasting. We have to be willing to deny ourselves and take up our crosses daily and follow Jesus. This is a daily decision, and even though it may be hard, when we deny our own desires to follow Jesus’ will, we find out that Jesus’ way is the best way. There is so much peace and joy when we submit ourselves to God. We become greater than this world, no longer filled with bitterness and pettiness, but filled with grace and love. We become part of a counter culture that seeks to bring joy, love and hope into a world that has very little. It all starts now with the decision to deny ourselves and take up our crosses and follow Jesus.

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