

Luke 9:18-36

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[0 : 0 0] Again, the reading for today is Luke chapter 9, verses 18 through 36. Please stand for the reading of God's Word.

Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, Who do the crowds say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist, but others say Elijah, and others that one of the prophets of old has risen.

Then he said to them, But who do you say that I am? And Peter answered, The Christ of God. And he strictly charged them and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.

And he said to all, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

[1 : 3 4] But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. Now about eight days after these sayings, he took with him Peter and John and James and went up onto the mountain to pray.

And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep. But when they became fully awake and they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him, and as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good that we are here.

Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah, not knowing what he said. And as he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.

And a voice came out of the cloud saying, This is my son, my chosen one. Listen to him. And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.

[2 : 4 9] And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. When I was young, I was in grad school looking to complete a Master's of Divinity, which is the carrying card for pastors, those especially who aren't going on for Ph.D. work and in the academy.

And one of the requirements to complete the M.D.V. degree was to do an internship in a church to get some field experience.

The church that I completed my internship in had a Wednesday evening prayer meeting. And so the senior pastor asked me to preside over the Wednesday evening prayer meeting, and I did.

And I made my way there, and for three or four weeks got used to what it was to stand in the front and to gather the congregation to prayer.

It wasn't that large of a gathering. And so it didn't take long, probably three or four weeks at most, that I knew everybody there. And it was a solid core, and it was a returning core.

[4 : 20] Nobody knew, ever seemed to walk in. And then one week, an elderly couple did. Being young and learning in ministry, I wanted to make sure they were acclimated, not recognizing them.

I didn't know them. And so I said, well, why don't all of us introduce ourselves? We have some folks visiting tonight. Introduce ourselves one by one and just say who we are and how long we've been here.

And then we'll allow the visiting couple to introduce themselves. I thought I was, you know, making the visitor feel welcome. The older folks who came regularly already had a smile on their face, but they dutifully went around and said their name and introduced themselves to the couple and indicated how long they had been there.

And when this went full circle, it came to the visiting couple. And I said, tell us a little bit about who you are and what brought you here tonight. Well, we're the...

And then he mentioned his name. And I was born into this church 80-some years ago. And a flush began to rise in my face, something similar to the color that I'm wearing now.

[5 : 35] This was a patriarchal family in the church. I didn't know who they were. I didn't recognize them from Adam. I was embarrassed.

It was an unforgettable prayer meeting. Needless to say, I didn't charge out of there all gung-ho to tell everyone who I had met that night.

Our text today is shaped by two different but equally unforgettable prayer meetings. Each one will be interrupted by a conversation, in particular the sort of conversation that's interested in the identity of somebody present.

And in each of them, the climactic moment is located when that person's identity is revealed. And in a puzzling way, just like my prayer meeting those many years ago, both of these prayer meetings will break up without so much as a word about what took place.

Take a look at the text. It starts at Luke 9, 18. By the time you and I arrive at the text, it appears the first prayer meeting is already in progress.

[7 : 01] Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. It's a little difficult to understand the nature of that prayer meeting.

He seems to be the one doing the praying, and yet it's in the context of at least the 12 others who were closest to him.

A small gathering for prayer in which he was doing the talking to God. So those in attendance are mentioned.

What Jesus was praying about is not mentioned. Although it's interesting to note that earlier in Luke's Gospel, we found Jesus praying all night on the day that he selected these 12 to be his disciples.

And now, interestingly, and we'll come back to it later, we find him praying on the day he will be recognized for who he is by these same disciples.

[8 : 08] Before long, though, the prayer meeting is interrupted by a conversation. Take a look at the middle of verse 18 through 19.

And he asked them, Who do the crowds say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.

Jesus wanted a discussion on how people viewed him. It's a conversation on his identity.

And by the looks of the responses given, Jesus was viewed, I think you could put it in contemporary terms, as a rising religious celebrity. I mean, he's now mentioned in the same breath as people like Elijah, or even in a more elevated way in the first century, John the Baptist.

I mean, there was nobody in the first century, in the religious arena, that had more cash than John the Baptist. There's something here that I think might be worth pausing on.

[9 : 24] Jesus is evidently looking like a real winner. He's somebody to get behind. I think Luke might be establishing something here for his first reader.

Remember, his first reader goes by the name of Theophilus. Verse 1. Everyone wants to back a winner. It's true in sports.

It's true in business. It's true in education. It's true in politics. Nobody wants to wear the colors of a loser. Nobody wants to finance a failure.

Nobody here wants to give their time or energy or talents to an also-ran. And that's where Theophilus comes in. In the introduction to the book, we learn that Theophilus was in need of some assurances.

Some certainty. The word in chapter 1-4, he wanted some asphalt under his feet. Or at least that's what Luke thought he needed. He needed some hard ground that the things he'd started out with were actually worthy of him going on with.

[10 : 39] Well, it seems to me that with last week's introduction or reintroduction of even Herod the Tetrarch wanting an audience with Jesus, Theophilus, as the first reader, would arrive at this moment and realize, hey, the one I started with is noteworthy.

He's not some backwater preacher. Maybe he actually was one. He was indeed, according to the witnesses, that in his day demanded the attention of even the greatest people who walked.

He was already being equated with the great ones. And this would settle on Theophilus, for surely doubts do come for him and for all who start out with Jesus.

Have I really given myself to one who is worthy of my life? Well, Jesus has evidently entered into the ranks of those who must be recognized, of those who must be known, of those who must be understood, evaluated.

Herod wants an audience. So when doubts arise in your mind, and I know we have many here today who have just begun with Jesus, decided to, like Theophilus, get on with Jesus.

[12 : 16] And when the conversations come concerning the stupidity of your movement, be reminded. He's no man without credentials.

In his own time, he was one who needed to be reckoned with. The climax of the prayer meeting, the climax of the prayer meeting, though, comes in verse 21, doesn't it?

It's not merely that there was a prayer meeting, or that they were in conversation about the identity of one at the prayer meeting. The climax comes when you recognize something very important about the person who is leading the prayer meeting.

Verse 20, Then he said to them, But who do you say that I am? And Peter answered him, The Christ of God. Definite article included.

The Christ of God. The Greek word, Christos. Think of it in verbal form, when one is christened.

[13 : 25] A baby is christened. They are anointed. The Christ. The anointed. Peter says, Well, I've come to my own conclusion on who you are.

You are one of the great ones. You are the Christ. The anointed. The echo of Israel's history about David, who in the subtuagent was christened by Samuel, who is declared to be the anointed.

The anointed one was the one who would bring salvation to God's people. And so what Peter seems to be indicating here is that he believes that Jesus is the promised one to rule over God's people, to bring deliverance to God's people, the one who we are to pledge our allegiance to as God's people.

Now, how fully he had worked it all out, Luke says nothing. But the title is certainly there. The puzzling thing about the prayer meeting, though, is how it broke up.

I mean, there's no application to those present. Like, hey, now that you've got some stuff about Jesus, go tell the world. Go tell them everything you've learned.

[14 : 56] No, actually, it's just the opposite. It's the most puzzling thing there. Verse 21, Well, that makes it a little difficult on the modern preacher.

For we would like to say, having learned what we've learned about Jesus as the promised one, go through these doors today and declare it. Well, if there is to be an application today, and there will be, certainly isn't that.

Not from this text. What a strange and unforgettable prayer meeting. No one leaves talking about it.

But I told you at the outset that this is a text of two prayer meetings. I want to take a look at the second one. You're going to find that at verse 28. You see, this is the indication that we're on a whole shape.

The whole shape of our text comes out of prayer meetings. Verse 28, Now, about eight days after these sayings, he took with him Peter and John and James, and he went up on the mountain to pray.

[16 : 06] Again, those who were in attendance at the prayer meeting are mentioned by name. And again, like the first prayer meeting, the content of what he was praying is not given.

The setting on the mountain, though, is suggestive, isn't it? He went up to a mountain to pray. It's suggestive, especially when we consider what happens next.

Just like the first prayer meeting, this one is interrupted by a conversation. And it's a conversation on the identity and the role of one of the people present. But here, there are two conversations.

One between Jesus and two luminaries of the kind that were already mentioned by name in the first prayer meeting. They seem to have a conversation.

And it's followed by a conversation that Peter will have. Just take a look. Let's read it. Verse 29 to 33. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered.

[17 : 13] And his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep. But when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good that we're here.

Let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah, not knowing what he had said. The first conversation, I think, in this, between Jesus and Moses and Elijah, would have worked on Theophilus, the first reader, in a particular way.

Theophilus, of course, would have been familiar with the Greco-Roman world in which he was raised and schooled. He wouldn't have had to think twice about the thought that the gods within the pantheon meet on the mountain, whether it would be Olympus or somewhere else, and that the one that he had pledged to follow, Jesus was suddenly, experientially, amidst this kind of pantheon and a conversation among the big ones.

But, it's interesting here, he actually has some indication, Luke does, of the nature of this conversation. It's not a question spoken to the disciples about who do people say that I am, but it's an indication of what was about to take place.

[19 : 04] You'll see it there in verse 31, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish or fulfill at Jerusalem.

This word, departure, is literally, it would sound exactly like the word, Exodus. Jesus. Jesus is now talking with the leading prophetic voices, the beginning and the end, if you will, about his exodus.

Now, the exodus in Israel's history involved the time period under Moses, when Israel was released from captivity under Egypt.

They got out from under a bad rule and became the children of God. They were saved by blood over the lintel and by walking and exiting out and through the water into a relationship with the living God.

It seems to be that Jesus and Moses and Elijah are speaking about his own exodus, his own victory from enemies, dare we even allude to the notion, through blood, in a way that validates or declares him to be the son of God by power of the resurrection.

[20 : 49] So they are in discussion on massive things. And then that discussion ends.

The disciples are a little bit jarred. You know, verse 32, they had been heavy with sleep out too late the night before, like some of you perhaps now.

That was a joke by the way. They become fully awake and Peter gets railed throughout church history for what he suggests. I'd like to come to his defense today.

Peter says, hey, wow, I'm thinking maybe three altars. And we look at that and go, what an idiot. Actually, I think he was kind of on to something.

I mean, drawing on his own history, when Jacob found himself in a spot in the world that all of a sudden he realized he was in a place where this was a ladder.

[21 : 51] This was like, I'm in a unique place. I'm in a place where the intersection is taking place between the heavens and the earth. And God has been present at this.

What did they do? They built an altar. Abraham does the same thing. When God shows up, they built an altar. You would commemorate it. You would go, wow, this is to remember something. And I think Peter is kind of on about that. I think he's actually a moment and I want to know my way back here one day.

So much for the conversations. The climactic moment, though, again, comes when the identity of Jesus is revealed, just like the first prayer meeting, and here in a very complimentary way.

As he was ready to do that, as he was saying these things, verse 34, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. Now, this notion takes it completely out of a kind of Greco-Roman pantheon of the gods, right back into Israel's history, where God would descend like Exodus 24 in a cloud, and he would speak from there.

I mean, you are now, in a sense, paralleling God delivering his word on Mount Sinai. A cloud comes down, the glory of God would be shielded from people and all of a sudden the whole thing is enveloped in a way in which you can't really maybe even see what's in front of your eyes.

[23 : 25] So, they saw enough to know that these other two guys were departing, but as these other two guys are kind of departing, they are ensconced in a fog.

And the climax comes. Not in this prayer meeting from the mouth of Peter, but rather verse 35, a voice came out of the cloud.

This is a voice from heaven saying, this is my son, my chosen one, or textually a variant, perhaps my beloved one.

Either way, this is my son, my chosen one, the beloved one, and here's the command, listen to him, my son.

I mean, this pulls us all the way back to Luke's moment at Jesus' baptism, when a voice came from heaven about being the son. This is a movement all the way back to the Psalms, that prophesied like Psalm 2, that God would put his son, he would install his son on his holy mountain, in his way, that all the world would have to give allegiance to him.

[24 : 43] The voice from heaven is saying, yes, from the voice of Peter, this is the Christ, the anointed one, but now collaborative to that, it is the very son of God, my chosen one.

And even chosen would bring the echoes all the way back, running in the mind of the early listeners to King David and 1 Samuel and his anointing where Samuel learned, no, not this, one's not chosen, no, this one's not chosen, no, it's this one.

Or Isaiah is continually talking about the chosen one, the servant of God who would come to accomplish God's work. That's what we're told. Or, if it's the beloved, the mind would run to images like Abraham who offers Isaac, his beloved, the beloved one was always the one that was going to suffer.

And all of these images are swirling. I mean, this is an unforgettable prayer meeting. But just like the first prayer meeting, it breaks up in silence.

Just an aside, I don't think it's any accident that Luke lets you know that Jesus is revealed to people for who he is on the heels of prayer.

[26 : 19] Just a little contemporary application in regard to your desire for maybe your friends or family members or the person you brought today. that you want them to know who Jesus is.

In Luke, he's continually telling you, well, people recognize him for who he is in prayer, right after prayer. I mean, that went all the way back to Luke 2 with both Simeon and Anna, the devout ones in the temple praying.

And when Jesus comes, the Holy Spirit lets them know this is the one. This goes to chapter 3 at his baptism. It says that while he was praying, the clouds opened up and the voice came down and people recognized this is my son.

It happens here. This is something that's important for you if you follow Christ today and you would like other people to come to some understanding of who is he actually?

Well, guess what? He usually is revealed to people on the heels of prayer. I think it could be intentional here, something Luke wants to put forward.

[27 : 28] But the thing I really want you to see, though, textually, is that this prayer meeting breaks up like the first prayer meeting in complete silence. I mean, look at verse 36, and when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone, and they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen, and I doubt it was because Peter felt embarrassed.

what a puzzle in the text. Why?

The shape of the passage. Two prayer meetings in which conversations come, a climactic moment about the person present, and nothing is said.

it's because these two prayer meetings are pushing from the outside in. It's not what you're to say about Jesus.

What's the directive? Listen to Him. The text does not emphasize what we're to say about Jesus. This text is a discipleship text for Theophilus, and for you, and for me.

[28 : 46] It concerns the kind of words you're to listen to if you intend to follow Him. And so you ask yourself in the text, what are the words of Jesus that I'm to listen to?

And there they are, just pressed right in between both prayer meetings. The point you're to take from the prayer meetings is there, 22 to 26.

That's the takeaway. That's what Luke wants your mind on. That's what the shape of the passage emphasizes. And there we read about what these titles will require of Jesus first, and secondly, what these things will demand of us.

What does it require of Him? Verse 22, the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and the scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

It will require of Jesus His life. Salvation that He is bringing is costly. It will come at the cost of His substitutionary death.

[30 : 02] yet, also, it will demand something of you and me, the reader. It isn't just enough to say, well, Jesus died for our sins.

Thank God, go home today. No, the whole force of this text moves to these very central words, 23 to 27, and He said to them, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

That is the epicenter of the movement. Listen to Him. That's what you're to hear.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. That is the appropriate word to hear given the exalted natures of these titles.

The Christ, the Son, the Chosen One. Put it all down for a moment and understand what it will mean for you. If anyone is to have followed that exalted one, that great one, that mighty one, that rising religious celebrity one.

[31 : 28] This is what it demands. Deny himself, take up his cross and that daily and follow him. Now, I just want to sit on this as we close for a few moments because this passage is really it.

What could it possibly have meant to take up your cross daily? Now, here we've got to distinguish between Theophilus, who would have been reading this after Jesus' death and therefore interpreting these words in light of Jesus dying on the cross.

But I'd like you to think for a moment not so much of the first readers of Luke's gospel, but the first listeners, the first ones who heard these words even before they had that interpretive clue that he had his own cross.

What would they have thought? What would they have thought, those who were present who heard these words, take up your own cross daily? What would have been fixed in the mind of the hearer?

Well, at least a couple of things. He was asking them to do something that no person in first century Rome had any intention of ever finding themselves doing.

[32 : 57] Because this was the personal sentence of death. It also means something public, not merely personal. In other words, the construct of taking up your cross daily would have been a social construct, a relational construct.

the way in which you were viewed by others construct. Because in Rome, the cross was the preferred sentence that would be executed upon men and women who had lost their own life battle in the courts concerning a case where it was a capital offense.

The first hearers would have had much to draw on. For them, the phrase would have had an inescapably public dimension to it. a public humiliation in it.

For as recently as 73 B.C., Crassus, the great Roman general who was awarded a triumph, a victory into Rome after putting down Spartacus and the rebellion, executed on the Appian Way every 30 to 40 meters, some 6,000 who rebelled against Rome.

And those bodies hung for years. Everyone in the first century would have understood that in Rome, if you defy the authorities, it isn't just something that comes at a personal cost to you, it is a public shaming.

[34 : 30] people would have been living in fear of the cross, but the cross would have been a humiliation to them in regard to those that they lived among.

the one who carried his cross was by nature the one being shamed and being shamed publicly.

So what does it mean for you then? Well, take a look at the way it follows. Look at the three fours in 24, 25, and 26.

He now begins to explicate what he wants you to hear today. The first four speaks of priority.

The second of profit. The third public cost. Now let me just go through them. The priority of these words, verse 34, for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

[35 : 48] The word salvation is appearing again. And for this time, the first time in Luke, it's attended with the priority of your salvation.

In chapter one, Zachariah's prayer, salvation would come, forgiveness of sins. In chapter six, and seven, and eight, we've been seeing it week after week.

Jesus comes to save. It's all upside. It's all great. It's all wonderful, saved from all kinds of things. And now Jesus takes that word and speaks about the priority of it.

You need to follow him, deny yourself, take up your cross daily. The priority of it is this. That is the way of salvation. Salvation comes by relinquishing your life under the rule and headship of Jesus and taking up with him.

Salvation rides on our relationship with Jesus. The priority of these words is set down. The profit one can expect from these words is set down.

[37 : 08] Look at verse 25. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world or loses or forfeits himself? What do you gain by following Christ?

At the end of the day, what do you get in a transactional way? What you get, you get your own life back. Now if you want everything in the world, well that's profit of one order.

But there's going to come a day when you die in all the things that you have, you don't take with you. But if you take him, well what do you profit?

You get the one thing that you leave this world with, yourself. I can't think of any reason or anything in the world anything in the world that would be worth giving up my own eternal state and well-being and self for outside of my life in Christ.

There is no greater profit than my own soul. God's the priority of these words, the profit one can expect from these words.

[38 : 33] Third, the public cost that attends these words. Verse 26, 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 the holy angels.

The word ashamed, twice said, is completely embedded in Luke within this social construct. Let me put it this way. I'm not talking about the shame where you feel like, wow, I always feel a little out of sorts.

Now, shame in Luke is public. It's relational. So, it's used only a couple of other times.

It's going to show up in chapter 14, 9 at a dinner party when somebody is going to be publicly shamed and humiliated because they sat really close to the important seat and the host gets up and says, well, wow, it's great to have you there on my right, but actually your place card is down there on the back side and guess what the person has to do at that moment?

It's a public shaming. They've been called out. They've got to get up. They've got to walk to their other place in the far back of the table. That's a shame. What does it mean that they were ashamed?

[39 : 47] They were publicly humiliated and they felt the humiliation of those in attendance with them. The same word is going to appear again in chapter 16, 3 where there's a fund manager who did a very bad job managing the funds and he was ashamed to do what?

To beg. He was going to do anything he could do to not have the public humiliation of standing on the street corner and begging. To be ashamed of Jesus then involves intrinsically the way in which you are viewed by others.

If you are ashamed of him, him, if you safeguard your public stance with the world outside of him, well, look at the warning.

There's going to be a moment in history where there's going to be a public shaming of you by him. That is one long walk.

I'd rather take any shaming today in the presence of men and live in the fear of God than submit myself to the fear of man and therefore be ashamed of Christ.

[41 : 05] Now this is so contemporary for Theophilus. I mean, Theophilus is probably a well-educated, sophisticated kid who has to deal with competing views all the time.

This is the word for Theophilus. Let me just give a couple of examples. Three. Don't be ashamed that salvation comes by suffering.

That seems to be the primary application in this text. That Jesus is going to suffer. Or look what you're going to see next week, verse 44. Let these words sink into your ears. You want to listen to Jesus?

Well, let these words sink into your ears. The Son of Man is about to be delivered in the hands of men. Don't be ashamed that your understanding of salvation comes through one who suffers.

Yes, I believe in substitutionary atonement, death on the cross, blood shed, atonement made, life given. You walk away from that, you are walking away from everything that Luke is trying to instill into the will of Theophilus.

[42 : 21] Secondly, salvation by suffering. Think of it just in terms, I'm just trying to think of human touch points for us today. Think of it in terms of human sexuality. It says, Jesus says, Jesus and my words.

This is such a massive thing because it's so private and so personal and so important. But the words of the scripture are there, they're spoken. Jesus talks about his way that he appeals to at creation and what it means by intention and his desire that human beings don't walk outside of it by negation.

Now, how you hold the words of Christ, they better be humble, gracious, forbearing, but that you hold the words of Christ, well, that's important.

Don't be ashamed. Think of it in regard to religious exclusivity. Think of the rise of Islam. Those perhaps even here today who are wondering whether Muhammad is equal to, well, here are the words.

The words have come forth. This is my son. This is the one. This is my chosen. This is the one I'm looking to. He's not one among more. He's the exclusive one.

[43 : 43] So whether it be salvation by suffering or human sexuality or religious exclusivity, there are, and we could go on, couldn't we? Think of it in the academy.

How many opportunities you uniquely face to be ashamed of Jesus and his words? Think of it in the office. How many times it's easy to walk away from Jesus and his words?

Think of it when you talk to your neighbor. We have to be the most wise, humble, gracious, yet vibrant lovers of Jesus and his word.

God. Well, the priority of it, the profit of it, the public cost of it, there is that promise, verse 27, but I tell you truly there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.

There's a power to what he was all about that they would actually see in their own day, probably a reference to the transfiguration that follows. Definitely a reference to the death and resurrection that they would witness.

[45 : 00] The power of the kingdom would come. All the things he'd said were true. And so now it comes back to you and to me.

Two unforgettable prayer meetings. Unforgettable prayer meetings. And the point is the stuff in the middle. Deny yourself.

Take up that cross daily. And follow him. Our heavenly father, help us to hear the word of Christ in the midst of the assembly.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen. God