

AM Luke 9:18-36

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[0 : 00] You're very welcome as you join with us. We're continuing our studies this morning in Luke's Gospel. We've reached Luke chapter 9 and we're going to read verses 18 through 36.

Luke chapter 9 and verses 18 through 36. This is the Word of God. Luke chapter 9, beginning to read at verse 18. Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, who do the crowd 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 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 chief priests and 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.

[1 : 11] 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 his glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

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 things, he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on 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, 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 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.

[2 : 19] 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. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

Amen. This is a reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. Let us turn to the Lord in prayer now. Heavenly Father, as we gather again for another Sunday virtually together, we pray that you would encourage us.

We pray that you would strengthen us. As we gather together this morning, Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for who you are. We give you thanks that you are the God of salvation, that you are the God who is calling a people out to himself.

We give you thanks for the wonder of the atonement, Heavenly Father, that atonement that your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, would make. That the righteous would die for the unrighteous so that we might come to know God.

We thank you that Jesus came to lay down his life for the sheep. We thank you that Jesus came to take away the sins of the world. We thank you, Father, that it is in him and him alone that we can find right relationship with you this morning.

[3 : 40] That it is in him and in him alone that we have any hope this morning. We thank you for that question that Jesus asked his disciples all those years ago.

Well, who do you say that I am? And we pray for any who are tuning in this morning who may be wavering. We pray for any who are tuning in this morning who may be wondering and wrestling with this question, well, who do we say that Jesus is?

And we pray that you would open their eyes. That you would help them to see that he is indeed the Christ. That he is indeed your Son. That he is indeed the Chosen One. As we continue to emerge from lockdown, Heavenly Father, we pray for our political leaders.

Pray that you would give them wisdom and guidance as they seek to make decisions. As they seek to know which restrictions to lift and perhaps which restrictions to tighten. Pray for Boris Johnson in Westminster and all his cabinet.

We pray for Nicola Sturgeon and all the MSPs in Holyrood asking that you would give them wisdom. It's not an enviable situation therein, Heavenly Father.

[4 : 50] Not many of us would presume to take that on ourselves. But we pray that you would lead them and guide them and direct them. We remember, Heavenly Father, before you all of those leaders of the church as well as they seek to navigate the way out of lockdown for churches.

As they seek to make wise and gracious and godly decisions. May you give them wisdom. And we think of the COVID-19 emergency task force of the Board of Trustees. Asking, Father, that you would give them wisdom and insight as they deliberate.

That you would give them clarity of communication as they let the wider church know about their decisions and the reasons that they've taken such decisions. And we pray, Heavenly Father, for ourselves.

That as we come to your word now, that you would minister to us mightily through it. That the Holy Spirit, that he would be working in our hearts. That he would do his work of convincing and convicting.

Now we ask. We pray that we may be troubled by his ministry. That our hearts may be stirred up by his ministry. And that at the end we may love Christ better.

[5 : 54] I know you better we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. So let's turn then please to these verses in Luke's Gospel.

Luke chapter 9. And we're going to think about these verses 18 through 36. Verses 18 through 36 of Luke chapter 9. There is a new series on Netflix called The Last Dance.

It looks at the all-conquering Chicago Bulls basketball team of the late 80s and early 90s. They of course famously won two three-peats. They won three NBA championships in a row twice.

That great Chicago Bulls team was of course anchored by the legend that is Michael Jordan. And towards one of the episodes Michael Jordan was interviewed about his time with the Chicago Bulls. It was put to him that not many of his teammates liked him. It was put to him that he came across as a bit of a bully. That his leadership style was somewhat confrontational. And in response to those allegations this is what Jordan said.

[7 : 02] Leadership has a price. And winning has a price. Sometimes I had to pull people along when they didn't want to be pulled. Now that's what leadership in the world looks like.

That's what great leadership in the world looks like isn't it? It's getting people to do things that they don't necessarily want to do. It's dragging people along when they don't necessarily want to be dragged.

That's what great leadership in worldly terms is. And yet as we come to Luke 9 this morning. As we come to these verses 18 through 36.

They tell us something about the nature of Christ's leadership. And we see that Christ's leadership is sacrificial. That Christ's leadership is self-sacrificing.

Not self-seeking. That the question at the heart of this passage is. Well what does it mean for Jesus to be the Christ? What does it mean for Jesus to be the chosen one of God? What does it mean for Jesus to be the Messiah?

[8 : 04] And it doesn't mean fame and adulation. It doesn't mean an easy life. But rather it means suffering and death. That's what greatness in the kingdom of God looked like.

That's what leadership in the kingdom of God looked like. It looked like suffering and death. Not self-promotion and glory. Christ's leadership wouldn't be dragging people along when they didn't want to be dragged.

It looked like suffering and death. It looked like laying down his life for the sins of his people. Leadership in the kingdom of God is always self-sacrificing.

Not self-seeking. Greatness in the kingdom of God is always self-sacrificing. Not self-seeking. I want to think about three things this morning.

And see three things together from this passage. Firstly we want to think about a suffering saviour. What Jesus tells us being the Christ will mean. What Jesus tells his disciples that being the Christ would mean.

[9 : 08] Secondly then we want to think about a serious calling. What does it mean to follow Christ? What does it look like day to day to follow Jesus? And Jesus tells his disciples that again it will mean suffering and death.

And then thirdly, finally we want to think about a settled matter. That as the voice speaks from heaven it gives us that assurance. It gives us that guarantee that Jesus is God's son.

So firstly then, a suffering saviour. A suffering saviour. And we see that in verses 18 through 22.

Verses 18 through 22. A suffering saviour. So last week as we looked at Luke's gospel then.

We saw Jesus sending out the twelve on this kind of itinerant preaching mission if you like. We saw Jesus sending out the twelve on this crusade. We saw the apparent success that they met with as they went round telling people about the kingdom of God.

But last week we also thought about Herod's perplexion at who Jesus was. John I beheaded he said. But who is this? I don't know. Then finally we thought about Jesus feeding the five thousand men with just a few loaves and fish.

[10 : 17] And we move on then this morning to verse 18. And it seems we're moving on to a different episode if you like. We're moving on to a slightly different time frame. We notice that Jesus is praying.

Verse 18. Now it happened that as he was praying alone. How often do we find time. Find Jesus spending time alone in communion with God the Father.

How often do we find in the gospels times where Jesus is praying to his heavenly Father. But this occasion is a little bit confusing isn't it? This occasion feels a little bit strange.

Because what are we told? Now it happened that as he was praying alone. The disciples were with him. Now both of these things can't be true can they?

Jesus can't be simultaneously praying alone and the disciples are with him. He can't be alone and with someone at the same time. It just doesn't make sense. So what's going on here?

[11 : 17] Well think about the Garden of Gethsemane. Remember the night that our Saviour is about to be betrayed. Remember the night that our Saviour is about to be handed over to the religious leaders to crucify him. What do we read there?

We read that Jesus took the disciples with him to the Garden of Gethsemane. And he withdrew from them and went to pray. Now in a real sense Jesus was alone.

He was praying alone. But in a real sense the disciples were also with him. The disciples were also there. And that I think is something similar that we find happening here in this episode.

Jesus is alone praying. Yes but the disciples are there. Jesus is alone praying. Yes but he has withdrawn from this larger group of disciples. He has gone perhaps about a stone's throw away.

He's praying alone. But the disciples are with him. So that's the first thing that we need to establish from this passage.

[12 : 16] But the second thing that we need to address. The second question that we might have about this passage in Luke 9. Is it the same incident as recorded for us in Mark chapter 8?

By and large it's agreed that Mark is the first gospel. It's also agreed that the other gospel writers kind of used Mark as their basis with other sources added in.

So the question we need to ask is. Is this incident in Luke 9 the same incident as recorded for us in Mark 8? And there are certain similarities that has to be said aren't there? In Mark Jesus has to rebuke Peter after he tells him what it will mean to be the Christ.

In Luke 9 here we see that Peter is the one who confesses Jesus to be the Christ. In Luke 9 here similarly to Mark 8 we see how this episode occurs after a feeding miracle.

So there are certain similarities between the two events. The response that the disciples give to the question. Well who do the crowd say that I am? Is the same here in Luke as it is in Mark.

[13 : 28] But there are also certain differences aren't there? There are certain differences in the accounts between Mark 8 and Luke 9. In Mark 8 for example as I mentioned a few moments ago. After Peter confesses Jesus to be the Christ.

Jesus tells the crowd what it will mean. Jesus tells his followers what it means to be the Christ. That it will mean suffering and death. And after that Peter rebukes him. After that Peter draws him aside and says look they've got this all wrong. This isn't what being with Christ is all about.

And Jesus then has to rebuke Peter with those words. Get behind me Satan. That's a difference. Here in Luke chapter 9 Jesus has fed 5,000 people.

In Mark chapter 8 we're told that it was 4,000. In Mark chapter 8 the conversation occurs as the disciples and Jesus are journeying. They're walking.

Whereas here in Luke chapter 9 it seems that this incident occurs when Jesus is praying. On the balance of probability I would say that these two incidents are the same incidents.

[14 : 31] They're recorded with slightly different emphasis. They're recorded with slightly different focuses if you like. But they are the same incident fundamentally. I won't fall out with you if you have a different opinion.

I won't fall out with you if you think that they're different episodes. But I think on the balance of probability the episode in Mark 8 and the episode in Luke 9 are probably the same incident. And notice the question that Jesus asks his disciples.

Verse 18. Who do the crowds say that I am? Who do people think that I am? Those crowds as they come to see me.

What are they coming to see? Those crowds as they bring their sick and their suffering to me. Why are they bringing them to me? And the disciples say well you know some people say you're John the Baptist.

Some people say you're Elijah. Some other people say that you're one of the prophets of old who has been risen. Now notice please that's exactly what Herod thought about Jesus.

[15 : 29] We thought about that. Lastly that's what people said to Herod when he was questioning who Jesus is. This was kind of the rumors that were going around about Jesus if you like. This was the popular opinion about Jesus if you like.

He was John the Baptist. He was Elijah. He was one of the other prophets. That's what everyone said. That's what everyone thought about him. That was the popular opinion at the time. But Jesus doesn't stop there does he?

Because he says to his disciples verse 20. Well what about you? Who do you say that I am? That's fine. That's what the crowds think. That's what the crowds understand. But what about you? Why are you following me?

Why are you here? And Peter as he so often does jumps in and says well look. You are the Christ. The chosen one of God.

You are the Christ. The chosen one of God. Now that's a significant confession. Because as good as being John the Baptist was. He wasn't the Christ.

[16 : 36] As good as being Elijah was. He wasn't the Christ. The chosen one of God. As good as being one of the prophets of old was. It wasn't the Christ. It wasn't being the chosen one of God.

And Peter's confession here is the first time that someone realizes who Jesus is. Other than the demons. It's the first time we find on the lips of someone other than the demons. A confession.

A recognition of who Jesus is. That he is the Christ. The son of God. That he is the one who God has sent to free his people. That he is the one who God has sent.

He is the one whom the people have been waiting centuries to hear from. He is the promised one. Sent from God. To redeem his people. It's fascinating over recent weeks.

I don't know whether you've been tuning in. I tuned in at the start. But I haven't tuned in so much to the daily government briefings. And it's fascinating to see all of these various ministers.

[17 : 37] Being given an opportunity to lead the daily government briefing. People that we'd never heard of a mere ten weeks ago. Have suddenly become household names. Robert Generic.

The community secretary. Gavin Williamson. The education secretary. Matt Hancock. And of course Dominic Raab. Have all become somewhat familiar names to us.

You know we may not have heard of them. Three or four weeks ago. But now we know who they are. But the thing is. None of them quite have that gravitas.

None of them have quite that same authority. When they speak. When they speak. As the prime minister does. None of them carry quite the same weight. When they speak. As Boris Johnson does.

Of course I'm a politics student. So I know that in theory. The prime minister is simply. Primes inter pares. He is first among equals. In the cabinet. That's the theory. Of the British constitution. [18:36] But the reality is. When he speaks. People listen. The reality is. That when he speaks. People know that this is coming from the top. As good as being. Secretary of State is. It doesn't carry quite the same weight.

It doesn't carry quite the same gravitas. As when the prime minister speaks. Now why do I say that? Because Jesus here. Isn't simply a secretary of state.

If you like. Jesus here is. The prime minister. Jesus is the one who speaks with authority and gravitas. Jesus is the one. Who has been sent.

By God. Jesus is the one who has come. To redeem his people. Jesus is God's chosen king. Jesus is the one. That everyone has been waiting for.

And that's the key question. That you need to answer for yourself this morning. That's the key question. That we need to get to. This morning. Who do you say. That Jesus is.

[19:38] Who is Jesus to you? Is he just another historical figure? Is he like Mahatma Gandhi? A figure of great peace and influence?

Is he just another religious guy who turned up? Who taught nice things? Who brought nice homilies to the world?

Is he just another influential figure from history? Well friends. No he isn't. He's the Christ.

He's the one sent from God. He is the chosen son of God. He is the one who has come. To take away the sin of the world. And if he isn't that to you this morning.

Then you need to get him to know him like that. If that's not who you say that Jesus is this morning.

Then frankly friends. You've got the answer wrong. Because that's who Jesus is.

[20:36] But what would it mean to be the Christ? What would it mean to be the saviour? What would it mean to be God's chosen king? Well thankfully. Jesus himself gives us the answer.

Doesn't he? Verse 21. He says. He strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one. Peter's confession. Verse 22. Saying. The son of man must suffer many things. And be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes.

And be killed. And on the third day. Be raised. What does it mean to be the Christ? Well it means suffering. What does it mean to be the Christ? It means rejection. What does it mean to be the Christ? Well it means being rejected by the religious leaders.

It means being rejected. By those who should have been looking for him. By those who should have been waiting for him. By those who should have been rejoicing at his coming. And yet in reality Jesus says.

They're going to put me to death. That's what being the Christ looked like. That's what leadership in the kingdom of God looked like. Not fame. Not adulation that Michael Jordan received.

[21:34] But suffering. And death. Rejection. And infamy. That's a suffering saviour. Secondly then though.

We want to think about a serious calling. A serious calling. We see that in verses 23 through 27. So Jesus has told his disciples.

This is what being the Christ will mean. It will mean suffering and death and rejection. It will mean being rejected by the religious leaders. So if that's what being the Christ means. What does it mean to be one of his followers?

If that's what being the Christ meant. What would it look like to follow Jesus? Well again fortunately Jesus gives us the answer. Jesus tells us what it will mean to be one of his followers.

We see that in verse 23. And he said to all. If anyone would come after me. Let him deny himself and take up his cross daily. And follow me. Look if anyone wants to come after me.

[22:29] If anyone wants to be my disciple. If anyone wants to follow me. Then it means taking up your cross. It means following Jesus.

Now we've turned that into a bit of a glib saying haven't we? You know someone might tell you about a recurring problem that they're having. And you say oh well. We all have our cross to bear don't we?

But the question that we always need to ask. And the question that we need to come to every biblical text is. Well what did this mean to the people who first heard it? As that crowd was gathered around Jesus in verse 23.

And he said take up your cross and follow me. What did they understand by it? They didn't understand somebody having a dodgy back. Or a gammy knee.

They didn't understand someone who was going through a recurring problem if you like. As that crowd first heard Jesus' call in verse 23.

[23 : 30] What did it mean to them? Well it was an invitation to come and die. You see the man who was carrying a cross was going one place. And one place only that was to death.

To his execution. So by telling his disciples to take up their cross and follow him. Jesus is inviting them. To come. And die. And it's an invitation that Jesus extends to each one of us this morning. It's an invitation to come and die. An invitation to come. And die to self and be his disciple. It's an invitation to come. And die to sin. It's an invitation to come.

And die to the things of this world. And to follow him. Now maybe you're listening in this morning. Maybe you don't usually come to church.

Maybe you've clicked on to this by accident. Maybe you're toying with the idea of following Jesus. This coronavirus crisis has made you realize that the world that you thought you inhabited isn't as safe and secure as you first thought.

[24 : 40] Maybe you realize there's something more. Something greater in life. Well friends think very carefully.

Because the invitation to follow Jesus isn't an invitation to the Ikea catalogue life that's picture perfect. The invitation to come and follow Jesus isn't an invitation to an ideal life.

The invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to come and die. The best way I've ever heard it described is that the gospel is free.

The good news of Jesus Christ is free. But it will cost you everything. You will never lose.

Friends don't get me wrong. You will never lose. You will never miss out by following Christ. You will never be worse off by following Christ in the long run.

[25 : 40] But it will cost you everything. We see Jesus draw that out further in verse 24. You know. Whoever would save his life will lose it.

But whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is it to you if you gain the whole world and yet forfeit yourself? What profit is it to you if you have an ample supply of this world's riches?

And yet you don't know God. There's an episode of The Simpsons where Homer, who is the father of the Simpson family, is talking to his boss, to Mr. Burns, who owns the nuclear power plant where Homer works.

And Homer turns to him and says, You know, Mr. Burns, you're the richest guy I know. To which Mr. Burns replies, Aye, yes. But I'd trade it all for just a few dollars more.

You see, friends, an ample supply of this world's goods will never satisfy. Don't get me wrong. It will make this life abundantly more enjoyable. But it will never satisfy. Because deep down inside, you'll know that you're made for something more.

[26 : 53] Deep down inside, you'll know that there's something greater. An ample supply of this world's good will never give you that peace, that satisfaction of heart. Because only right relationship with God can do that.

There's no profit for you this morning in being rich in the things of the world, and yet a pauper towards God. There's no profit for you this morning in being a millionaire, and yet not knowing Christ.

Why? Because one day you're going to die. One day all of your goods will pass to someone else. One day all of your money will be someone else's to spend.

One day you're going to stand before the throne of God with nothing in your hands. And what are you going to say then? Friends, the most important thing is that we're right with God.

The most important thing is that we know Jesus Christ as our Savior. It's that we have that living, active, personal faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. Don't delay, friends.

[27 : 56] This is the hour of salvation. This is the day. It's a serious calling to follow Christ. As we saw, it's going to cost you everything. But it's a calling that cannot be put off.

One that you must take if you want eternal life. Thirdly, finally then, we want to think about a settled matter. A settled matter. And we see that in verses 28 through 36.

We're told, verse 28, that about eight days later, eight days after these sayings, he takes these three disciples up on a mountain, again notice, to pray. And Jesus, as he prays, his appearance is changed.

His clothes are bleached whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them. Two men appear and they're talking with him. Now notice who they are there. Moses and Elijah. Now why Moses and Elijah?

Because they stood for the entirety of the Old Testament. Moses, of course, gave the first five books. Moses, of course, gave the law of God to God's people. Elijah stands for the prophets of the law.

[29 : 04] And the prophets are here represented in their two figureheads, if you like. And they're talking to Jesus. And notice what they're talking to him about. What is it they're talking to him about? Verse 31. Who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now why do we mention that? Because it reminds us that the Bible is one big book, if you like. It reminds us that the Bible has one overarching plot line, if you like.

And that is how God is rescuing and redeeming his people. That is how God is bringing his people to know him. That's what the Old Testament was about. The law and the prophets predicted, prophesied the coming of Jesus.

And here they are, the law and the prophets speaking to Jesus about his departure, which he's about to accomplish at Jerusalem. About the things that he's about to accomplish in Jerusalem. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was no accident.

It was no mere afterthought. It was no afterthought. But it was the plan and purpose of God to save his people. The final thing that I want us to notice in this section comes in verse 35.

[30 : 14] This voice comes from a cloud. And what does it say? A voice came out of the cloud saying, This is my son, my chosen one. Listen to him. The whole section has been about identity.

Who do you say that I am? Who do the crowds say that I am? And then finally here we have the settling of the matter, if you like. We have this voice from heaven that declares, This is my son, my beloved.

Listen to him. It doesn't matter what other people say. It doesn't matter what the crowds say. It matters what God says.

Which brings us back to the question, and we close with it. Well, who do you say that Jesus is? Do you know him for yourself?

Do you know the reality of sins forgiven? Do you know that personal, deep, living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you know for yourself the peace of sins forgiven that only he can offer?

[31 : 13] If not, friends, come to him. It's much too important to ignore. Come to him. It's much too important to put off for another day.

It will cost you everything. But you'll never lose. Amen. Amen.