

Christ, Cross and Christian

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[0 : 0 0] we all have hobbies some of us like reading others of us like working out at the gym some others of us like working with fabric or another kind of art but we're not defined by our hobbies they're not a matter of life and death to us by contrast our Christian commitment isn't a pastime our Christian commitment is something that really defines us something without which life would have no meaning something which is a matter of life and death to us who we are and what we are as Christians means everything to us and if you asked us we'd say I'm nothing I'm nothing without Jesus that's true for us as it was for the first disciples of Jesus it's just that our Christianity doesn't cost us as much as it costed them for many of them their faith in Jesus really was a matter of life and death all the disciples of Jesus without exception died for their faith in Jesus for them and for us Christianity wasn't a lifestyle choice it really was a matter of life and death so to become a disciple of Christ to become a Christian is the most serious and important step any human being can ever take we must count the cost of our faith in him lest our Christianity be to us as it is to so many a mere name we call ourselves or a hobby in which we engage at convenient times

Luke chapter 9 verses 18 through 27 we'll read this in a moment describes to us why it is that to be a Christian is so very serious and why for us it really is a matter of life and death let's read the passage of God's Word together Luke chapter 9 verses 18 through 27 page number 814 Luke chapter 9 verses 18 through 27 now it happened that as he that's Jesus was praying alone the disciples were with him and he asked them who did the crowd say that I am and they answered John the Baptist and others Elijah and others that one of the prophets of old has written remember Fred's reading from Moses are any of these the prophet like Moses well no they're not 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 for what does it profit to 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 his 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 this passage moves through three stages helpfully headed in your bibles first of all who Jesus is the cross in verses 18 through 20 second what it means to be the Christ in verses 21 and 22 the cross and then thirdly the Christian from verse 23 through 27 where Jesus describes what it means to be a Christian a follower of Christ I wonder whether any of us are still under some illusion that to be a Christian is a lifestyle choice similar to becoming a vegetarian that it's merely a name we call ourselves by contrast to be a Christian says Jesus is to deny ourselves to take up our crosses daily and to follow him let's get real let's take our faith seriously recognizing that it may cost us our lives first of all then from verse 18 to 20 the Christ the Christ our passage begins in verse 18 with Jesus praying most of the important events in Luke's gospel are preceded by Jesus praying and here it is for the first time the disciples are going to confess that Jesus is the Christ the Messiah so his disciples are with him when he's praying and he asks them two questions the first is uncontroversial who do the crowds say I am this is a an easy question it's not a personal question it refers to the belief of others and the answer

some say John the Baptist others Elijah and others one of the old prophets has risen Jeremiah or Isaiah or Ezekiel so on now we've met this range of answers before in verse 7 and 8 when it refers to the thought processes of Herod the Tetrarch for all that Jesus had performed these mighty miracles of power and spoken words of divine authority the crowd still didn't understand who Jesus really was he had healed their sick he had made their lame walk but still they didn't get it well then Jesus asks them but who do you say I am who do you say I am now this is an awkward question because it's a personal direct question it refers to one's own beliefs this is the climax of the gospel so far the high point to which everything else has been building his miraculous birth his powerful baptism his his miraculous works his powerful words these all provide the body of evidence as to who Jesus really is well Peter the spokesman of the disciples in what is a most incredible profession of faith says the Christ of God the Christ of God

Peter was the first to publicly confess the Christ ship of Jesus that is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah whom God has sent to rescue his people from their spiritual bondage in Egypt and to build for himself a new kingdom of grace and righteousness and love Peter was the first but since then billions more have come to the same conclusion based upon the body of evidence Jesus provides in the gospels they too have concluded Jesus as the Christ now if we should go back to the beginning of Luke's gospel we learn that the reason Luke wrote this gospel was so that we could have certainty concerning the things we have been taught all those chapters leading up to Peter's confession of Christ here in Luke 9 verse 20 show us that Jesus is the Christ of God by detailing all his miraculous works and his powerful words they're designed to give us certainty that what Peter confessed here is the absolute truth

Jesus really is the Christ of God suppose we try to describe someone in these ways he lives in a palace everyone bows down to him and his wife is the queen we wouldn't hesitate to say oh it's the king right it's the king we could play guess who all day long but when it comes to Jesus our guess who comes up with only one answer he is the Christ of God he does things only God can do he says things only God can say he talks about the kingdom of God and the spirit of God rests upon him in his fullness for the early Christians the identity of Jesus was a matter of life and death from the book of Hebrews we learn that to profess Jesus as the Christ carried severe consequences persecution suffering even death so for the early Christians it was essential that they were certain that Jesus really is the Christ of God we too must be certain of the identity of Christ and be willing to make public profession of him so that we may join our voices with the billions of Christians who together with Peter say you are the Christ of God and when I say public of course

[10:17] I'm referring to what we say to other people both inside and outside the church but more important still to make a public confession to God God asks each one of us here today who do you think Jesus is?

He asks us a direct and personal question and he deserves a direct and personal answer we will answer him will we not I believe that he is the Christ of God I believe that he is the Christ of God well secondly from verse 21 to 22 we have the cross we have the cross for the Jews of Jesus day to be the Christ meant something very different than what it means for us for them to be the Christ of God was more or less an earthly title as a nation they had been invaded and occupied by foreign nations for hundreds of years well a couple of hundred years before Jesus was born there was a Jewish uprising under the headship of a man called Judas Maccabeus some of you may have heard of him

Judas Maccabeus he had successfully liberated Israel from their occupation by a foreign power the Seleucids were the descendants of the Greek army of Alexander the Great and they had conquered Israel and tried to destroy its culture and religion they're prophesied about in the book of Daniel now Judas Maccabeus was the son of a priest and he began a rebellion to liberate Israel from the Seleucids his rebellion was successful and he was given the nickname Maccabeus which means hammer hammer by the way you can always tell where someone's from in Scotland by asking them to say hammer because if you're from Inverness or north of that it's hammer if you're from here it's hammer hammer Maccabeus means hammer the hammer of the Seleucids the Jewish feast of Hanukkah celebrates Judas Maccabeus' victory since then the Romans had invaded and occupied Israel for the Jews of Jesus' day the Christ they wanted and were waiting for was another Judas Maccabeus they wanted a military figure to lead a rebellion against the Romans and liberate Israel this is the kind of Christ they're waiting for so perhaps with this confession of Jesus as the Christ of God this is now the time for Jesus to raise the standard of rebellion against the Romans and become the new Jewish hammer over the centuries many Christians or many people have tried to use Christianity in that way as a hammer to the nations they twist Christianity into a message of worldly conquest by military or political victory

Jesus the Christ becomes Jesus the hammer Jesus the Christ becomes the banner Christian armies carry before them into war is that the way we think of Christ that somehow to be a Christian will confer upon us some worldly advantage well verses 21 and 22 destroy the contemporary Jewish vision of what the Christ would be and do for them the Christ will unite the Jewish nation raise rebellion against the Romans be victorious against his enemies and sit on the throne of worldly glory the Christ shall be the hammer but what does Jesus say he says 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 far from uniting the Jews they will reject their Christ far from worldly victory the Son of Man shall be killed he shall not be the Jewish hammer he shall be the Jewish sufferer he will suffer many things the symbol the picture of Christ when the kids ask you later the symbol of Christ shall not be a hammer but a cross a cross now Jesus always knew that to be the Christ meant embracing the way of the cross he always knew it would mean his death and yet how willingly for us he became that Christ at every stage of his ministry he turns his back on worldly power and he embraces the way of suffering instead he will not sit on an earthly throne he will die on an earthly cross he will be rejected he will be killed this is our hero and Lord this is the Christ who was a stumbling block to the Jews because he died on a cross and foolishness to the nations because his mission seemed to end in such failure and yet there is divine victory through it all for Jesus says after his death on the third day he shall be raised there is divine victory here the suffering of Christ shall but act as a prelude to his heavenly coronation not as king over the Jews alone but over all the nations of the world he shall be crowned not with earthly gold but with heavenly glory it shall not be a military or political victory but his lordship over all the peoples shall come as the gospel is preached on nations willingly bow down before his self-giving love and majesty the sword which comes from his exalted mouth in John's vision in Revelation 1 is the word of God by which the nations are subdued and fall in worship before

Jesus this is what it means for Jesus to be the Christ confessed by the apostles and his church glory comes but only by way of the cross shall not be worldly glory such that he or we shall receive the applause of the world it shall be an infinitely greater glory that shall never pass away do we mistake what it means to be a follower of Christ if it involved suffering for him it shall most certainly involve suffering for us we too shall be rejected by our peers and by our people we too shall be mocked for our foolishness and weakness our message shall be a stumbling block to all who believe that worldly power status reputation and comfort is all that really matters and if we're Christians today we must willingly embrace that way of Christ and his cross to be willing to suffer for Jesus if that should mean we shall be more like him because ultimately what matters isn't the cross on which we die but the eternal glory which shall be ours in this kingdom ultimately what matters is not the cross on which we die but the eternal glory which shall be ours in this kingdom you know if Christianity should be to us a hobby or just a name we call ourselves we'll back down under pressure and we'll go back to embracing worldly comfort rather than the cross but if we should stray from the way of the cross think of the glory we shall forfeit with him our majestic Christ who in his glorified body in heaven today still bears the marks of his death for us think of it and reckon along with the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:17 that these slight momentary afflictions that we endure are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison think of it an independence upon the promised grace of Christ let's strengthen those feeble arms and that weak resolve so that we too may be like him the Christ the cross and then finally from verse 23 through 27 the Christian the Christian

[19 : 29] Jesus says if anyone would come after me anyone let him deny himself take up his cross daily and follow me this is the core of the challenge of Christ and his cross I thought of changing the headings of this sermon to who what and so what the who being the Christ the what being the cross and the so what being the relevance and challenge of this passage to us Jesus is the Christ his path to heavenly glory leads us to the cross and resurrection the question for us is this so what many great historical events have no relevance for us today the great fire of London requires no change in the way we think or behave the triumphs of Julius Caesar in the

Gaulish wars doesn't change my life today but the truth is that Jesus is the Christ and his path to victory lying through suffering that must change my life today he says if anyone would come after me let him deny himself take up his cross daily and follow me here's the cost of discipleship a cost about which Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote and paid for with his blood in May 1945 at the hands of the Nazis when for his faith in Jesus they killed him people don't die for their hobbies but were called to die for Jesus just as surely as he died for us we could spend all year discussing this one verse never mind the rest of verses 24 through 27 as followers of Christ in view of who Jesus is and what

Jesus has done for us we're called to deny ourselves this is not a call to the self-denial of chocolate or sugar during Lent but to the denial of self I deny myself the right to be on the throne of my own heart I deny myself the right to have my own desires and comforts govern my thoughts choices affections and lifestyle you see the thing we deny is not chocolate even I couldn't do that we deny ourselves we enthrone Christ as king over us and what drives us is his desire his love and his glory who gets the final say in what I do or say or think is it

I or is it Christ denying ourselves means giving up the right to selfish decisions selfish ambitions and selfish comforts Jesus says take up your cross daily for Luke's first readers the cross wasn't a symbol they made into a golden necklace it was an instrument of torture for them the call to go after Christ was a call to martyrdom they had to be ready to die for him and thousands did what about us what are we ready to do for Jesus be ready to give it all up he says just as Jesus gave everything up for us this is to be the normal life of the Christians self-denial and cross baiting it's normal for many millions of Christians in our world today we call them the persecuted church but in reality they're the normal church and we're living out in the west a fantasy where our

Christianity costs us little or nothing Christ doesn't call us to a life of ease but to a life of hardship not a life of health but of hostility not a life of prosperity but of persecution we might wonder to ourselves is it all worth it to be a Christian is to sign my own death warrant to deny myself and to walk the path of the cross in a society governed by the pursuit of wealth and prosperity where if we turned our backs on Christianity we could live our best lives now is it really worth being a Christian well perhaps not if we're only taking this life into account many non-Christians I know are just as happy as many Christians I know but then they and we haven't considered two things first for Christ what came after death was resurrection what came after death was resurrection no man has suffered in this life more than he and yet what lay after was the glory of resurrection life beyond the sufferings of this life is the glory of the resurrection life of

[25 : 06] Christ if we're unwilling to be conformed to the sufferings of Christ here we shall not be conformed to the glorious Christ there the old hymn that many of us learn from our children says if you will not bear the cross you won't wear a crown if you will not bear the cross you will not wear the crown but then the second thing they and we haven't fully considered and why we run a mile from any kind of suffering we might endure as Christians here and now is what Jesus says in the following verses for whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it what does it profit to man if he gains the whole world and loses 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 his father and the holy angels it may be it may be

I'm not saying it is but it may be to our advantage in this life to have nothing to do with Christ and his cross but what should it profit us if we gain the whole world but when Christ returns of his glory we should lose our souls spend this afternoon thinking about the force of Jesus arguments in these verses and especially the directness of this question in verse 25 what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses or forfeits his soul we might be the richest person in the world morally financially socially emotionally but can we trade any of it for just one day of eternal life can our good works win us forgiveness hope and eternal life can our money buy us these things can our achievements win us an entrance and make us worthy not one

God is not impressed with those who sit on golden thrones and their wealth rather God calls us to walk the way of the cross what Jesus says here is really important for us not the least because he uses expressions in this passage like losing eternal life loses himself the son of man will be ashamed of him if ever there was a call of Christ to which we must give careful consideration it's here the consequences of being wrong about Jesus his cross and about what it means to be a Christian are beyond reckoning but then as we close I want to return to this what exactly can I give in exchange for my soul what exactly can I give in exchange for my soul what can

I do to earn forgiveness hope and eternal life it's not our self-denial the way I give chocolate up at Lent it's not the cross I bear it's not my discipleship these don't win me anything these are all natural consequences of something else we dare not think that our religious efforts can never win or buy us at eternal salvation rather we pursue these things and engage willingly and joyfully in them because first and foremost Christ has walked away at the cross Christ has suffered and died as our substitute Christ has given himself up to death for us it is by faith in him by bowing at the foot of the cross on which he died by receiving his salvation as a free gift of his grace that we are saved and receive eternal life

Christ's cross not the one I bear earns our salvation so is our Christianity a hobby to us or is it life and death what was it for Jesus what should it be for us perhaps you know perhaps it's time to get serious about our commitment to him and the practical demonstration of our faith in him and it's time to start right here and right now