

A bigger view of discipleship

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[0 : 00] Right, the reading is Luke chapter 9, verses 18 to 27, page 1044. 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 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 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 his Father and of the holy angels.

[1 : 34] But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. I'm sorry about my croaky voice.

If you can't hear, I can't speak any louder, but there are lots of lovely seats in the front row, which is a very un-English thing to do, but you're very welcome to move and come and sit in the front row instead. Why don't I pray for us?

Luke tells us, he's writing, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this extraordinary privilege we have this morning of hearing your word, your voice.

And we pray, therefore, please would you grant us confidence and certainty about Jesus, about who he is, why he came, and about what it means to be a disciple.

And we ask it in his name. Amen. Well, this is the second of four talks on following Jesus from Luke chapter 9. Last week, a bigger view of salvation, as we saw the enormous significance of the salvation that Jesus Christ has come to bring in the context of the whole Bible.

[2 : 52] And if you missed that, then do listen to it online. This week, a bigger view of discipleship, a, I guess you could think it like this, a discipleship check-up.

Just as you might take your car to the garage for an M.O.T., or you might take yourself to the health centre for a check-up. Because as we've just been reminded, Luke is writing to give us certainty about Jesus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you've been taught.

Luke chapter 1, verse 4. For those of us who are looking on the Christian faith, there can be few more important things in life to be certain about than who Jesus is and what genuine discipleship looks like.

For those of us who have just started the Christian life, likewise, what's he going to look like now as I've committed to following Jesus, what's the rest of my life going to look like being one of his disciples?

For those of us who have been following Jesus for some time, why we could do, we need to ask ourselves the question, is my discipleship genuine? As we hold up this morning what Jesus says genuine discipleship looks like, as we hold that up against our own discipleship.

[4 : 08] How does it measure? And as we put the spotlight on discipleship, Luke wants us to consider both who Jesus is, as well as what genuine discipleship is.

Because remember our New Year maths equation, as we looked at Luke chapters 7 and 8, I've stuck it there on the outline just as a reminder. You remember back if you were here back in

January and February, how we said, didn't we, that if we have a big view of Jesus, why that is going to lead to a big life transforming discipleship.

Whereas if we have a small view of Jesus, that is going to lead to a small discipleship, which actually is really no discipleship at all. Hence the two headings on the outline.

First of all, the Christ who must suffer. Verse 18. Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him, and he asked them, who did the crowd say that I am?

It is the key question of Luke's gospel. Who is Jesus? John the Baptist's disciples asked Jesus the question in chapter 7. Jesus' disciples in chapter 8. And King Herod last week in chapter 9, verse 9. [5 : 25] And the answer, verse 19, John the Baptist. But others say Elijah, and others that one of the prophets of old has risen. I wonder what you make of that answer.

I guess we might say, might we, it's a respectful answer. I guess we might even say, it's a big answer. To speak of Jesus being a prophet from the Old Testament, who's come back to life, it's certainly a big answer, but it is an inadequate answer.

It's not big enough. I guess it's the kind of thing, if we went to do a survey in Brockwell Park, this afternoon, as people enjoy the sunshine, I guess it's the kind of thing people might well say.

A prophet, a teacher, a religious leader, a respectful, and yet inadequate. And then verse 20, but who do you say that I am?

Because at the end of the day, it is always a personal question. It was the question someone put to me when I was thinking about the claims of Jesus for myself. Simon, who do you make?

[6 : 23] What do you make of Jesus? Who do you say he is? Christianity stands or falls on who Jesus is, and Peter's answer, the Christ of God.

So what we've been thinking about so far this morning, isn't it, in our songs, that Jesus is the Christ. It's his job description, the Christ, the Messiah. The word means God's anointed king.

So back in the Old Testament, in 2 Samuel chapter 7, God has said to King David, one of your descendants will be an everlasting king who will rule forever.

And as we go through the Old Testament, we see that he's the one who's going to come and he's going to put our messed up world back together again. He's the one who's going to usher in a whole new creation, a new kingdom, heaven itself.

It's what, back in Luke chapter 1, the angel tells Mary about the child she's carrying. The Lord will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

[7 : 32] And it's what we see Jesus doing throughout Luke's gospel. Snapshots of the new creation as he drives out evil, as he heals sickness, as he raises the dead, as he brings this disordered world, this disordered creation in which we live, under his control.

Why, he even has the power to forgive sin, the root cause of everything that's wrong with our world. Do you remember how he, how people were amazed and asked, who can forgive sins but God alone?

And now here in Luke chapter 9, verse 20, you see, it's as if everything that's happened over those three years, they've all come together, like all this sort of different piece for the jigsaw, they've all come together.

As Peter then answers the question, you are the Christ of God. I guess it shows the inadequacy of some of those other answers.

A prophet, a religious teacher, a moral example. Perhaps that's all you think Jesus is. But of course, the truth is, there isn't any evidence for a Jesus who was simply such as that.

[8 : 45] You know, only a prophet, only a good teacher. It was the former middleweight professional boxer, Chris Eubank, who once famously said, I am a hero.

Go and look the word up in the dictionary and you'll find a picture of me. And yet, the arrogance of Jesus surpasses even that, doesn't it?

If it were not true. And imagine for a moment if I stood at the back over coffee at the end of the formal part of our meeting this morning and I started asking people, you know, who do people say that I am?

You wouldn't need Dr. Nick Hallett to come over and give his psychiatric assessments of the patients. Now, Jesus cannot simply have been a good teacher or a prophet.

Either he was something much worse or he was infinitely better and greater. But then notice how Jesus immediately goes on in verses 21 and 22.

[9 : 52] 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.

Notice really how Jesus' identity is then linked with his mission. He is the Christ come to fix our broken world to bring in a whole new creation. He is the Savior, rescuer.

And the key word is that one word, verse 22, must. The Son of Man must suffer. Jesus' death on the cross, not a mistake.

It wasn't the point at which the plan went wrong, but the moment the plan was always heading for. Just as last week, if you were here, we saw, didn't we, that you can summarize Jesus' mission in that one word, Exodus.

Exodus. When God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, how they killed a lamb, how they put the blood around the door frames of their homes, and on the night the judgment of God came on Egypt, they were spared.

[10 : 59] Their sins forgiven. The Son of Man must suffer. I don't know about you, but I found it impossible not to be moved in the run-up to Easter by the astonishing heroism and sacrifice of Lieutenant Colonel Arnaud Beltram, the French policeman who voluntarily exchanged himself for a hostage of an Islamic terrorist in southern France.

The hostage already proved that he was capable of murder. He had shot two people dead and was said to have laughed as he killed them. He then took several hostages. He was persuaded to release all but one, a terrified woman.

Arnaud Beltram calmly offered to change places with her, knowing no doubt that it might well cost him his life. Nobody ordered him to do it.

No one asked him to do it. He went miles further than is required to go by the normal expectations of duty and bravery and he was rightly honoured.

And yes, here we see in an even more wonderful way Jesus who is the Christ willingly giving up his life in this world so that those who trust in him might have life in the next.

[12 : 27] There's so much wrong with our world, isn't there? Rising knife crime in the news recently, the intractable conflict in Syria, the loss of trust in Facebook, the list is endless.

And yet, of course, the problems are not simply out there. They are in here because there is hatred and dishonesty and conflict in our world because it's in here, in my heart.

Which is why, of course, our secular world as it grapples with the very real problems of evil, it's always going to fail to come up with answers, answers that work.

You cannot simply save the world through better education, social justice, being tough on crime, and tighter regulation. Because the problem is the human heart.

And it's only through the death of Jesus on the cross that our sins can be forgiven and our hearts changed and we can be a new people, new people destined for the new creation, for heaven itself.

[13 : 36] So, the Christ who must suffer. Secondly, the disciple who must follow. Have a look at 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.

Now, hang on a moment, we just need to slow down, don't we? Because I guess it's such a familiar verse. I guess many of us, we've learnt it, we could say it off by heart.

So, look again, if anyone, Jesus isn't talking about a few disciples, those who are particularly keen, but every disciple, deny himself not just things like giving up chocolate or booze for Lent, but to say no to me being in charge of my life.

take up his cross, not in the way we so often use the phrase of having to bear a few small hardships, but instead Jesus being first, following him as Lord and daily.

In other words, this isn't something to do every now and then when we're feeling particularly keen, this is the normal, everyday life of a disciple of Jesus.

[14 : 53] Of course it is. Because it is exactly the opposite of sin. Exactly the opposite of sin. Sin says I'm going to live my way in God's world.

It is a rejection of God. Sin is the cause of all the problems in our world. It's the reason Jesus died.

And therefore to say that I'm going to follow Jesus but I'm going to do it my way, to say that I'm going to follow Jesus but I'll reserve the right to live how I want to live in certain areas of my life.

Whether it's work or whether it's with regards to money or in the area of sex and who I sleep with or when it comes to thinking about how I spend my time to live like that.

Why that is not to be a disciple at all. Because to follow Jesus is to yield to his authority. Jesus' disciples would have known that as soon as he said the words of verse 23.

No doubt they'd have seen people being escorted by Roman soldiers, being forced to carry a cross to a place of execution. It was an act of surrender, an act of surrender to the Roman state.

[16:06] Just as to follow Jesus is to surrender to his authority. For every disciple the whole of my life willingly, extravagantly, gladly.

Now I take it we wouldn't do it, would we, if Jesus were simply a prophet, if he was yet another religious leader or moral example. But he isn't.

He is the Christ. He is God's everlasting king, the Christ who came to die for his people. It is radically counter-cultural.

people. In 2006, the respected Henley Centre disclosed findings of an opinion poll which they had been running for the last 20 years, asking people this question.

Do you think the quality of life in Britain is best improved by A, looking after the community's interests above your own, or B, looking after yourself first, first, which ultimately raises standards for everyone?

[17:16] And before the year 2000, the overwhelming majority of answers had been A. The way to improve the quality of life for everyone is to put other people's interests first.

By 2006, the majority were choosing B. For the first time in the history of the poll, the majority of people believed in looking after me first, and that trend has continued subsequently over the last ten years.

Isn't that striking? It's what our culture says the whole time, isn't it? Serve yourself, fulfill your ambitions, live the dream. Indeed, you owe it to yourself to do so. You have a duty to yourself to do so.

That's what our culture says. And yet, what does Jesus say? To die yourself. Why would you want to do that?

Well, follow the logic of verses 24 to 26. I think we'll go in reverse. So, first of all, 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 of the holy angels.

[18:28] Notice Jesus says there's going to be a future day when he will return, not in weakness, to suffer and to be crucified, but in great glory and power, the day of judgment.

That's where history is heading. That's the day to focus on as we consider what is and isn't important, what I'm going to value, what I'm not going to value in this life.

Hence the inescapable logic of verse 25. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? Imagine for a moment what it would look like if you did have everything this world can offer.

To reach the top of the ladder in your career, to have a wonderful marriage, to have great kids who do well in life, to live in a dream house, to enjoy the dream lifestyle, fantastic holidays, to be surrounded by great friends, and to be happy, to be fulfilled, and countless other things no doubt. And Jesus says, to have it all, and yet be lost for eternity. Don't you see, the sums just don't add up.

[19:48] Can you see how dangerous it is, our relative ease and comfort as we live in this very prosperous corner of one of the world's wealthiest cities? You see, if I'm not careful, I can begin to live as if this life is the life to live for, rather than the life to come.

Which means, of course, verse 24, there's a choice. You can live for yourself a life now, but lose your life in eternity, or you can lose your life now, follow Jesus, and be saved for eternity.

That's the choice, one or the other. There's no middle road, one or the other. Jim Elliot was an American missionary who went to Ecuador to take the gospel to the Orca Indians.

He thought about staying in the US where he'd been involved in youth and student ministry. He went to Ecuador because that's where he saw the greatest gospel need was. In January 1956, he was killed by those he was trying to reach.

Seven years earlier, he had written these words in his diary reflecting on Luke chapter nine, verse 24. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.

[21:08] Jesus Christ demands everything we have in this world. Our ambitions, our priorities, our resources, our reputation, and yet his disciples gain everything in the next.

Whereas to save my life now as I perceive it, to stick with my plans, the things I love, the ambitions I have, says Jesus, will cost everything for eternity.

If we think the way to have life and fulfillment is to be true to ourselves and chase our dreams, which is of course what our world says to us all the time, fulfill your ambitions, chase your dreams, Jesus says we've swallowed a lie.

That is the way to lose life, not the way to gain it. Now it seems to me that one of the challenges for us looking at this passage this morning is that some of us need to hear the warning that is here, while others of us need to hear the encouragement that is here.

As we thought about in our talks on conscience, some of us have tender consciences, others have hardened consciences. So we need to be honest with ourselves and think, do I need to hear the encouragement or do I need to hear the warning?

[22 : 31] A friend might tell you the answer if you're not sure for yourself. Some need to hear the warning because you're hanging on to your life, life lived for yourself with ambition for yourself at the fore.

In other words, you say to Jesus, I'm willing to be a disciple but only so far and no further. I wonder what the no further is for you.

What's the non-negotiable? It might be your career, it might be your lifestyle, or financial security, or in the area of sex and relationships. But Jesus says you cannot be one of my disciples and yourself remain in the driving seat of your life.

genuine discipleship means putting ambition and goals to death as we make Jesus and the service of the gospel the priority of our lives.

In every area of our lives, whether it's time, money, family life, work life, and sex life. And every decision of life, where I choose to live, what job I do, how much time I devote to my job, whether I accept that promotion, my willingness or otherwise to serve at church to give sacrificially and generously with my time and energy for the gospel, the gifts and abilities I have are all to be placed at the disposal of the Lord Jesus.

[24 : 03] Some need to hear the warning. But there'll be others and actually we need to hear the encouragement. In other words, the encouragement that actually if your discipleship is costing you something, then it is likely for real.

be certain that you are on the right track. You may have less money. You probably will have less money because you've been generous with giving it away.

You'll probably have less time because you're keen to serve. Less energy as you give yourself in whatever way you can to the work of the gospel, to making Jesus known, to making disciples.

Less freedom. Less freedom to go away at weekends because actually you're committed to being here on a Sunday morning. And you know from verse 26 that you can't say I'm a disciple of Jesus and be ashamed of his words.

And so you stood for the plain, simple teaching the Bible where it challenges our culture. You know there's no such thing as being a private Christian.

[25 : 10] As a result, some of us have lost friends, some of us have lost our reputations at school, at work, in the community or extended family. And we know what it is to experience the shame of being a Bible-believing Jesus-following Christian.

Not looking for the applause of this world, but the eternal praise and reward of heaven. And Jesus assures us.

He says that is normal. That is normal discipleship. Of course, it may well be that some of us here this morning, conscious as we look at Luke 9 together, we're aware that actually we are not disciples of Jesus at all.

And yet you're convinced that he is the Christ, that he is God's king. You believe that he died on the cross so that you might be forgiven. And yet you've never made the decision to follow him.

And yet as you look at these words of Jesus, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me, you're thinking to yourself, this is a no-brainer.

[26 : 24] Of course, why wouldn't I want to do that? And if you've never done that, then do come and speak to me afterwards about how you might do it. Let's have a few moments for reflection and then I shall pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father, we praise you that the Lord Jesus is indeed the Christ, that he is the eternal king.

Thank you that after his death he rose from the dead, never to die again. He ascended to your right hand. Thank you that he will return, that on that day everyone will see him as the great king that he

is.

And therefore, please would you enable each one of us to live our lives in the light of that great reality and to be willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him daily.

And we ask it in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[27 : 44] Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.