

Luke 9:18-22 - The Messiah Must ...

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Turn with me to Luke chapter 9. It's on page 867 of the Bible in the pew in front of you. Luke chapter 9. As we continue to follow the storyline of Luke's gospel, we've been watching Jesus engage with his disciples.
- That continues this morning as they leave where we were last week. They're with crowds of 5,000 plus, right? And they withdraw away privately.
- We find Jesus praying with his disciples and probably for them as well. We see that habit again of Jesus making prayer, fellowship with his father a priority, getting alone away from the crowds to pray.
- And we've seen more than once already in Luke that when Jesus prays, significant things happen. Over and over, we see Jesus in prayer and then something really important happens.
- [1 : 1 0] And this morning is no exception. As we read the next few verses, get ready to see a particularly important conversations between Jesus and his disciples.
- Just five verses this morning, but full of significance. Let's give our attention to God's word in Luke 9 at verse 18. Now it happened that as he, Jesus, 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 arisen.
- 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.
- Christ, this is God's word. Will you join me as we pray and ask for his help as we look to it this morning? Father, we have rejoiced in the cross of Jesus.
- [2 : 3 4] We have spoken of our need of the cross of Jesus. And now we learn from your word more about it. Would you show us Jesus clearly?
- Would you show us Jesus in a fresh way? Would you show us Jesus in a way that is so compelling that we would fall down in worship, that we would cling to him, that we would trust him in new ways?
- Would you do that by your word and by your spirit? We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Imagine with me this morning that over the next couple of years, a new political figure begins to rise through the ranks in this country.
- He has real solutions to some of our gravest ills and people are loving him. He begins to demonstrate that he has a workable solution to the healthcare crisis.
- He's got real ideas on dealing with poverty. And there are noticeable results as he takes it on. Hunger and homelessness are really dropping everywhere he serves.

[3 : 47] And on top of that, he's got defense plans that will handle ISIS and North Korea and the strongest enemies that we might encounter. Imagine with me this morning that this is not just a guy who's in his basement coming up with really smart and creative ideas, but that he himself is the solution to these problems.

He's personally the best doctor, the wealthiest and most generous philanthropist. He himself is the bravest and strongest soldier we've ever known.

He's our hope. Can you imagine what hopes would begin to be pinned on this guy? Maybe you can. Can you imagine what it would feel like to say, yes, here's the hope for the future of our country?

I want you to think of it this way. Imagine he's from Huntsville. I mean, you're not close friends with him, but you know his parents. You know, you cheered for him when he won a swim meet a few years ago.

He's kind of a guy that you'd like to think you know. What are you thinking now? Hey, this is going to be great, right? I see great things coming for us.

[5 : 02] No more worries about the federal budget each year. This guy's going to be in charge and Huntsville is set. They're going to give us everything we need. No more Alabama being near the bottom of state education rankings.

Alabama's going to get everything we need. This guy's going to take care of us. He's one of us. And I'm starting to see it. We're just on the way up. The guy who everyone is looking to for hope is someone that I know.

He's the brightest and the best. We're going to turn things around domestically and globally. And he's one of us, so we're on the way up with him. This is going to be great, right?

If you can imagine any of those feelings, then you'll know a little bit of what it might have felt like to be a Jew in Jesus' day. They weren't thriving.

They were under the thumb of Rome. Things didn't seem to be getting much better. But you want to talk about someone who can defeat our enemies? Look at the way this guy casts out demons, right?

[6 : 06] From what we hear multiple times with just a word. Surely this is the one with the power to overthrow Rome. Maybe crisis has hit your family or your village.

Maybe you're frightened and worried. What are you hearing? He's healing everyone he touches. From town to town. You just touch a piece of his cloak and you're healed.

We just got to keep this guy nearby and we're set. In the meantime, if we have a bad farming year, if the economy takes a hit, if things are getting tight, he can feed how many?

5,000 plus with five loaves and two fish. That's it. He's got us covered. We've got nothing to worry about. We're set. God's people are on the way up again.

After all these years, it's going to be like we heard it once was and were promised it was going to be again. And you can imagine certainly people were whispering these things about Jesus, right?

[7 : 08] Just from the stories we've read over the last several weeks in the Gospel of Luke. Except that Jesus sees the way forward quite differently from this.

He's not as obsessed and caught up with earthly solutions and political power as they maybe hoped he was. He does, however, like many politicians, want their help with a public opinion poll in this passage.

Jesus comes out of prayer and he immediately initiates a conversation about his identity. Verse 18, what does he say? He turns to his disciples and says, Who do the crowds say that I am?

Who are they saying I am? And they get their heads together and they think of the results they've heard from the conversations they've had with these crowds they've just been around and all of a sudden on the top of the poll comes out, John the Baptist.

That's what they're saying. You're John the Baptist. That's the going opinion. It makes sense, right? He's this great messenger of the kingdom.

[8 : 19] A social revolutionary who didn't really fit in with the social or religious elite. But he represents God and he talks of God's promises and that's what they're hearing about you. You must be John the Baptist. Other people are saying Elijah. Further back, certainly. But still reasonable.

These are the kinds of miracles we've heard Elijah did. It sounds like the stories of the guy who heals sicknesses and raises the dead and provides food in amazing quantities.

This must be Elijah comeback. Or in third place, some other prophet of old. Many are saying, I'll take the field.

He's one of the other guys. They've heard him teach with power and call people back to God and say, Yes, definitely. This guy is a prophet. That's who he is.

[9 : 18] And it's not so much that the crowds have wrong ideas entirely of who Jesus is, but that their understanding of his identity is limited and incomplete.

So Jesus, still searching for a fuller, better answer, says, What about you? Verse 20. He says, What about you?

Who do you say that I am? Who do you say I am? He asks his disciples. He wants to know what they think. They've been with him, right?

They've seen him. They've heard him. More than anyone else. What do you think? Disciples. And sometimes wrong but never silent Peter pipes up.

You're the Christ of God. Christ is the Greek word for the Hebrew word Messiah. Messiah. The anointed one.

[10 : 22] The one long promised and often promised to come and deliver God's people. To be a king in the line of David who will do what no other prophet or priest or king had ever been able to do.

And Peter nailed it. You're the Christ of God. Perhaps it's shocking that Peter nailed it. This is the first time that a human has called Jesus Christ.

Has identified him as the Messiah. In our recent stories the disciples have seemed confused and sometimes wondering about his identity.

Who is Jesus? Even just the last episode they're not sure he can feed 5,000 people. They don't seem to know who he is. But here all of a sudden Peter gets it.

We learn elsewhere that this was revealed to him by God. Jesus' identity revealed to Peter by God. It's hard not to connect that with Jesus praying, isn't it?

[11 : 30] Stop and think for a minute about this. Maybe all the amazing deeds that Jesus had done. All the wonderful sermons that he had preached that they had listened to.

Maybe all of those things that they'd been a part of watching and hearing were not as much what was used to help them know who Jesus was as Jesus praying for them.

Is that possible? Think on that. Jesus praying for them and all of a sudden Peter sees who Jesus truly is.

Regardless of how it happened, Peter gets it. He nails it. You're the Christ of God. And we see here in this the necessity of knowing Jesus' identity.

It's absolutely essential. Who do you say that he is? Jesus is asking. He asks the crowds. He asks his disciples. He asks us. Who do you say that he is?

[12 : 38] And that's vitally important because if he's merely a kingdom preacher with radical social ideas, then some of them may be helpful to you. But the ones that don't advance your agenda, just ignore them.

Others have great ideas too. There's lots of ways to help people. If he's merely a miracle worker, then when you need something big, go to him, right?

Maybe he'll pull something off that you don't expect. But most of the time, you're fine on your own. You're okay. You don't really need him most days. If he's merely a teacher calling people back to God, there have been many of those.

And he may be a good one and may have some good things to say, but so do many other religious leaders, many other celebrities, many other politicians, many other bloggers.

There's lots of people with good things to say about God. But if he is, in fact, the Christ of God, the divine deliverer, the unique promised king, then you have to take him or leave him, all of him, and every word that he says.

[13 : 58] You have to listen to what he says over what anyone else would say or even the things that you think and feel and would like to believe. You have to trust what he says if he's the Christ of God.

You have to admit the true level of your need that it's not just small and occasional, but you have to embrace the reality of the holistic rescue that you need from him.

Not just a little tweak here and there. Not just a little bit of help in a pinch, but a holistic, life-altering rescue from your utter helplessness if he's the Christ of God.

Who do you say that Jesus is? Many have called that the most important question that we all have to answer. Who do you say that Jesus is?

I can't disagree with that. But then something strange happens. Right after this really piercing question and Peter's great answer, that this reality of Jesus' unique messianic identity, that he's the long-awaited...

[15 : 09] Y'all think, thousands of years they've been waiting. When will the Messiah come? Generation after generation. When is God's people going to be delivered?

And it's just been revealed that this is the one. This is the unique identity of Jesus that's going to turn the world upside down in the days and decades ahead.

We know that now looking back. And it's stated for the first time by a person. And Jesus says not congratulations, but shh.

Don't you dare tell anyone that. Keep it quiet. Don't let anybody know. Don't let anybody know. Look at verse 21.

Jesus strictly charged and commanded them to tell this, this identity that he's the Christ of God to no one. This is often referred to as the messianic secret.

[16 : 08] We'll see throughout the gospels, Jesus repeatedly urging people not to talk about him being the Messiah. There are exceptions. We've seen one already in Luke where he sends someone off to the Gentiles to tell them about who he is.

But it seems strange to us that he would tell someone not to share this. It's good news of great joy for all people, right? This is what they all need to hear.

Everyone needs to know. Is Jesus just being difficult? What's his problem? This is not the only answer for every one of those particular situations that comes up.

But I think the most common explanation given and the one that Jesus gives certainly in this passage is that merely knowing his identity as the Messiah can actually be very misleading if you don't know what it means to be the Messiah.

If you don't understand the mission of the Messiah and what it means that someone would be the Messiah, then finding out who the Messiah is can be wildly unhelpful to you, can be very misleading, can get you going in all sorts of unhelpful directions.

[17 : 23] And Jesus does not want to see that. Jesus is zealous for people to understand not just who he is, but his God-given mission, the path God has laid out for him that everyone else seems to reject.

So he gives his explanation in verse 22 for his seemingly strange command of silence in verse 21.

Look what he says in verse 22. 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.

Jesus connects that to why you're not supposed to tell anyone he's the Messiah. He says there is glory coming, the kind you may be hoping for, the glory you've been looking forward to, but there's suffering first.

It must be this way. And getting people worked up about any other mission distracts from the priority of the one my Father has given me.

[18 : 35] We're going to start seeing this idea of necessity. What must happen for Jesus. It's going to show up a lot more in Luke. It's a theme that he develops.

Jesus will tell us what is necessary. What must happen. And here it's clarifying the focus of his mission. The Messiah must suffer many things.

Must be rejected. Must be killed. And only then be raised to life. The glory you're hoping for.

You see, Jesus has a task. And it involves not a royal crown, but a crown of thorns. Jesus has a mission that's given to him.

And it doesn't involve people thronging to him for him to lead them in battle against the Romans. It involves actually people thronging to him to kill him as he does battle against Satan.

[19 : 40] He simply has not come to make a political power play, but rather to humble himself and to reach down to the utterly powerless.

It's very different from what they had in mind. Way too many in the crowds, even in his band of 12 disciples, would have a linear approach to this Messiahship.

Straight up to glory. Matthew tells us in his gospel that Peter himself, who gets the identity right, misses the mission, doesn't he? Jesus says this is what has to happen, and Peter says, no, no, no, no, no, no.

That's not a good idea. I don't like that. This is never going to happen, Peter says. This part about suffering and death, no, we're going to skip that.

Jesus knows how many people then and now, even those close to him, even those who have spent time among him and his people, have different ideas of what he will do.

[20 : 41] Ideas that involve a linear path to his power and glory. A Jesus to be worshipped as a great teacher. As a social revolutionary. As a moral paradigm of excellence.

But where the cross becomes dispensable or incidental. Where it's not the main focus and it's actually okay if you leave it out.

Because it's not that exciting anyway. But Jesus says those paths that go straight up to glory, no way. I will have none of that.

That's not the way this works. I must go down first. I must go down before the glory. I'm going to use an illustration from mathematics right now.

That if you don't like it at all and you don't like math, just ignore it. That's fine. This is for the engineers. I heard there were some around who spend all day working with these things.

[21 : 46] As well as for the high school students who have sat in Algebra 2 this year. And thought there will never be a use for any of this ever in my life. See, I've been there.

I've been in that class. That's what this is for. This is a parabola. Yep. And that's graph paper. Some of you remember using graph paper, right? It's still really important.

This is a parabola and it's actually a beautiful picture of the path that Jesus has to take. So if you can't think of anything else during math class, just remember Philippians chapter 2.

That's what the parabola is illustrating. Just remember at the top left, how does Philippians 2 start? We used it for our call to worship this morning. Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be held on to.

You see that arrow, the blue arrow in the top left? That means infinitely high is where this parabola begins. Jesus starts with equality with God and decides I'm not holding on to it.

[22 : 48] He comes down. Jesus comes down. How far down? A long way down. All the way down to nothing.

He made himself nothing. And humbled himself to the point of death. Even death on a cross. See where the X and Y axis cross? That has nothing to do with Jesus.

But it's a really nice picture. He humbles himself to the point of death on a cross. All the way down. Jesus says you may prefer a linear approach to glory where it just keeps going up all the time.

But that's not the path that he takes. The way of the Messiah must be parabolic. Down first. And then, yes, God does indeed exalt him to the highest place.

The blue arrow on the right side. Going up infinitely. God exalts him to the highest place. Gives him the name above. Every name. And we bow in worship to him. Okay.

[23 : 50] End of math class. You can forget about that. But I want you to remember the path. The parabolic path is the one that Jesus must follow.

It's been laid out for him by his father. Right? This is the way it's going to work. It's been prophesied by the prophet Isaiah, among others, who says the Messiah will be the suffering servant.

The man of sorrows that Logan and James were just singing about. Not maybe what they'd expected in the Messiah, but exactly what it had to be.

We're going to see next week what Jesus says this means for the shape of our path as those called to follow him. But for now, just notice that Jesus says the suffering, the rejection, and ultimately death on the cross must be my path.

And I'm passionate about people understanding that reality. He doesn't want anybody to miss it. He doesn't want them to be confused and think he's a Messiah who's going a different way. Don't be confused about the Messiah's mission.

[25 : 01] He has come for the cross. And don't get me wrong. Jesus did come to teach the way of the kingdom, to heal the sick, to feed the crowds, to demonstrate the authority of his kingdom and begin the bringing of blessing in the place of curse.

It's not an either-or situation where we now have to deny all of those things. But listen, he does none of those things in isolation from his primary mission to suffer and die and rise for the redemption of his people and the world.

None of those things happen apart from that. There's no other mission he's on that doesn't involve a cross, an empty tomb after it. His new teaching is worth listening to only if he backs it up with action.

His new community that he's been talking about creating is only worth being a part of if his death and resurrection actually make a community like that a reality. Only together with his suffering and death do those things proclaim the true glory of the king and of his kingdom.

And so now, Jesus is frustrating, if not you, some of his friends. Because his mission is not the vision they've had of the steadily growing power and influence they were going to have.

[26 : 30] Just imagine it would be like our rising political star from Huntsville who's set to be president of the United States and he's a shoo-in and all the polls show he's going to win in a landslide and he refuses to run.

Instead, he says, I'm going to be marginalized. I want to be pushed aside. My whole life I'm going to be that way. I'm going to live among the poor. I'm going to die without winning a single election.

And all those hopes you had of how well it was going to go for everyone, but I mean especially for you. Disconcerting, isn't it?

Disappointing at a minimum. But that reality is the essence of the good news of Jesus.

Be very clear on this. Jesus' gospel is not the prosperity gospel of earthly health and wealth. Jesus' gospel is not the social gospel of local community change.

[27 : 34] Jesus' gospel is not the American gospel of safety and security. It's not. Jesus' gospel is the cruciform gospel.

The cross-centered gospel marked by suffering and death. And that's the gospel that saves and, by the way, transforms you and your society and everyone around you too.

We preach Christ crucified. The gospel that saves and transforms. But there's not another one. May we never boast except in the cross of Jesus Christ.

It's the word of the cross that is the power of God, 1 Corinthians 1. May we know among the world nothing but Jesus Christ and no other Jesus than the one who was crucified.

The cruciform gospel, the gospel of the cross of Jesus Christ is the one that saves. Amen? And then it transforms everything it touches.

[28 : 42] But it's only that gospel and only that Jesus who goes to the cross and suffers and dies that saves. Y'all, how easily do we forget that?

You don't think you do. You think I came to church again and, of course, he said that. I didn't forget that. How quickly do we come up with other priorities for Jesus and other paths to accomplish his mission that don't feature the cross, his suffering and death?

How often do we offer our kids hope in moral reformation and being better than they were yesterday? How often do we offer our friends hope in social change and do-goodism and living a little better?

But Jesus is at pains for his disciples, for you and for me, to be very clear on what he came for. He wants us not to miss that.

He didn't come for your prosperity. He didn't come for your equality. He didn't come for your safety. He came for you.

[29 : 59] For your redemption, the restoration of your relationship with God that is so valuable, that you're so precious in his sight. He came for you.

For you to have that relationship restored forever and in that relationship is endless prosperity, is radical equality, is ultimate safety, but he came for you.

He came all the way down to you. He became nothing. What we deserved. He was rejected as we should have been and he suffered death.

Our punishment. He came to us. He came for us. That's the glory of King Jesus being the king already.

Of him being the Messiah, the anointed one. Of him already reigning as king is that he doesn't come seeking to win an election. He's not running for office.

[31 : 09] He is the king. And so when he comes after you, he's not coming to get your vote. He's coming to give you life, full and free. He's not coming to get something out of you.

He comes to give something to you. That's how Jesus moves towards us. The reason the path of the Messiah must involve suffering and rejection and death is so that our penalty can be paid and our relationship with him, with our father, restored forever.

And Jesus is absolutely committed to that path. There is no other for him. He must go. It must happen. And he is committed to it even though it costs him his very life.

Hallelujah. What a Savior. Let's pray. Jesus, we marvel at your willingness to leave the glories of heaven, to be born on earth, to suffer, to be humiliated, and ultimately to suffer the painful death of the cross for us.

It's an awful path that we can't imagine anyone enduring, much less choosing. And you've shown us your love in a way that goes beyond what we can comprehend and that you would do that for us because of your love for us.

[33 : 03] That you, you knowing there could be another way that some would propose, refuse for the Messiah to reign apart from his suffering and death.

Jesus, you are glorious. You are exalted today to glory at the right hand of the Father. But we remember and thank you for your life and your death in our place.

We worship you and we ask that you would even now begin teaching us what that means for us. Might you prepare our hearts even for hearing further what that means today and tomorrow in our lives as we continue reading.

And Jesus, keep us mindful of your cross that we would see our sins forgiven and our hope forever laid out so clearly in our gracious Savior.

We pray it in his name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. for more information, visit us onlineXboxxon jeszcze■■ with our user disability.

[34 : 31] Thank you. Thank you. So, thanks. Welcome. Bye-bye.