

# THE CHRIST OF GOD

Luke 9:18-27

Key Verse: 9:20

**“‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter answered, ‘The Christ of God.’”**

This passage teaches us the ABC’s of Christian discipleship, essentials for Jesus’ followers. For a plant to grow healthy and strong, the root must be put into good soil. For a disciple of Jesus to grow healthy and strong, he or she must root their lives in Jesus and his words. In our time there are many fake disciples of Jesus who ignore basic discipleship. Today, let’s learn how each one of us can be a healthy and true disciple of Jesus.

This passage can be divided into three parts: Peter’s confession of Christ (18-20), Jesus teaches the true work of the Christ (21-22), and Jesus teaches the requirements of discipleship (23-27).

## **I. Peter answered, “The Christ of God” (18-20)**

In his gospel, Luke proceeds directly from the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand to Peter’s confession of Christ. This is different than the progression of both Matthew and Mark, who interject other events between the two. Luke indicates an indefinite passage of time between the two by beginning verse 18 with the word “Once.” Luke’s purpose was not to relay events in precise chronological order, but to reveal Jesus’ disciple training ministry as it developed. Jesus had begun training his disciples by sending them on an evangelistic journey. Then he challenged them to feed the large crowd. Jesus was teaching them to depend on his power and to learn his compassion in serving others. This was important. Yet it was not the heart of discipleship. It is possible to participate in Jesus’ work without being his true disciple. The heart of discipleship is a personal relationship with Christ. Luke emphasizes how Jesus helped his disciples make such a relationship. To do so, Jesus prayed a lot, as verse 18 says. Jesus prayed because he needed God’s help. Jesus prayed because only the Holy Spirit could move the disciples’ hearts to confess faith in him. When Jesus asked questions of his disciples, he was not merely making a persuasive argument. Jesus was working with the Holy Spirit, and acknowledging the Father’s sovereign guidance in raising his disciples. We must know that helping others confess

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faith in Christ is holy work, and it is God's work. We can participate in this holy work only through much prayer.

After prayer, Jesus began to dialogue with his disciples. First he asked them, **“Who do the crowds say I am?”** This was a rather objective question. All it required was to relay information. They replied, **“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life”** (19). Their answer tells us what ordinary people of the time thought about Jesus. They respected Jesus as a man of God, though the religious leaders had slandered Jesus in many ways. The people of Israel felt that God was speaking to them again through Jesus, after many years of silence. Jesus was, and always has been, popular among ordinary people. Recently, Dan Kimball published a book describing the attitude of the emerging generation toward Jesus. It is called, “They like Jesus but not the church.” Many people respect and admire Jesus without having a personal relationship with him, including Buddhists and Muslims.

However, Jesus wanted something more from his disciples. Look at verse 20a. **“But what about you?” he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’**” Jesus had given them the privilege of sharing his personal daily life. He had allowed them to participate in great miracles. Since they had received more light, he expected them to have a more accurate understanding. He also wanted them to make a personal confession. He wanted them to reveal the deep thoughts of their hearts, in all honesty, in a public confession. This requires the courage of conviction. It is not a mere statement of intellectual consent, but a statement of the heart that belies commitment and passion. The difference between these has been illustrated by Dr. Billy Graham through a story. There was a daring man who walked a high wire across Niagara Falls, pushing a wheelbarrow. After doing so, he asked the audience, “Do you think I can do this with a person in the wheelbarrow?” They all said, “Yes.” Then he asked one man, “Will you be that person?” He said, “No.” The spectator agreed in his mind that the daring man could do it, but he was not willing to risk his own life over it. Jesus was not looking for cheerleading spectators. Jesus wanted his disciples to get into the wheelbarrow. Jesus wants a confession that elicits life commitment.

Perhaps the disciples grew quiet for a moment after Jesus' question. As they looked into his eyes, they realized that he was serious and that their

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answer was very important. Then Peter stepped forward and said boldly, **“The Christ of God.”** It was the right answer. It was the answer Jesus wanted to hear. It was exactly what the angels had said about Jesus at birth: **“a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord”** (Lk 2:11).

Many people think that Christ is Jesus’ last name. However, “Christ” is not a name, but a designation. “Christ” is a Greek word, the equivalent of “Messiah” in Hebrew, and means “Anointed One.” In the Old Testament, special people were anointed by God with the Holy Spirit. Their anointing was the source of power and wisdom to deliver God’s people from oppression. Jesus was specially anointed by God as he was baptized by John in the Jordan River. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus and equipped him to deliver his people. By the power of that anointing, Jesus defeated the devil and began to preach the kingdom of God. Peter had seen the evidence that Jesus was the one anointed by God when Jesus drove out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead and calmed the storm. As Peter said, **“The Christ of God,”** he acknowledged God’s anointing on Jesus as the Christ.

The coming of God’s anointed Christ is well developed in the Old Testament. He is the promised seed of the woman who crushes Satan’s head (Gen 3:15); he is Abraham’s descendant through whom the whole world would be blessed (Gen 12:2-3; Gal 3:16); he is the king who sits on David’s throne forever (2 Sam 7:12,16; Lk 1:31-33). Isaiah’s poetic description in 9:6 says most excellently: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” He reigns forever with righteousness and justice. He makes everything right in the world once again. He is the deliverer of Israel, the hope of nations, and the Savior of all mankind. Peter boldly declared that Jesus was this Christ. In doing so, Peter declared loyalty and allegiance to Jesus. In this part, we learn that what Jesus wants from his disciples is a personal confession that he is the Christ of God. Who do you say Jesus is?

## **II. Jesus said, “The Son of Man must suffer, die and rise to life” (21-22)**

Peter’s confession was right and true. But right after he made it, Jesus strictly warned the disciples not to tell anyone. Why? Jesus wanted his disciples to understand what it really meant first. At this point, they did not.

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Like most of Israel, they looked for the Christ to deliver them from Rome and restore their power and glory as a nation. The Christ would do this eventually. But his first task was to fight against the spiritual enemies of God and of all mankind. How would he do this?

Look at verse 22. **“And he said, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.’”** Jesus refers to himself as **“The Son of Man.”** This is a messianic title that we can find in Daniel 7:13-14. This son of man comes on the clouds of heaven, approaches the Ancient of Days, and is led into his presence. He is given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worship him. His dominion is everlasting, and his kingdom will never be destroyed. Jesus declared to be this Son of Man. Yet before accomplishing this great final victory, Jesus had to first suffer and die and rise again.

Jesus’ way of becoming the Christ is a contrast to the way worldly rulers seize power. They sacrifice their followers to win victory and attain power and glory. But Jesus sacrificed himself. Jesus would suffer, be rejected and be killed. It was to save those who believe in him. Our real enemy is not the situation, or the system, or the people around us who always seem to make life difficult. Our real enemies are sin and death and the devil. In order to liberate us from these enemies, Jesus had to suffer and die. There was no other way. That is why he used the word “must.” Jesus was the only one in God’s universe who could accomplish the salvation of mankind. He alone is fully human and fully divine. His sacrifice alone is sufficient and efficacious to solve man’s sin problem and restore us to a right relationship with God. If he did not go the way of the cross, God’s glory would be compromised and mankind would perish. But as we know, Jesus did go the way of the cross. Jesus suffered and died for our sins. Isaiah says, **“...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities....”** Paul says, “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood” (Ro 3:25). Jesus’ sacrifice purchased our forgiveness, gives us healing, and restores our relationship with God.

Then, on the third day, God raised Jesus to life. Jesus shows us that death is not the tragic end. After death, there is resurrection. According to

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Jesus, everyone who has ever lived will be raised again: the good to everlasting life and the wicked to condemnation (Jn 5:28-29). Our real problem is not just death, but the fact that after death we face judgment. Christ alone saves us from this judgment. He promises that those who die in him will also rise with him as heirs of his kingdom, where there are no tears, sorrows or pains. In a word, Jesus accomplished our complete salvation through his suffering, death and resurrection. Thank you, Jesus!

Jesus' disciples must know the meaning of his suffering, death and resurrection. On this basis, we accept him as king and give our lives to him. When I was a carefree teenager I thought my life was my own and I could do whatever I wanted to do. However, in the course of living like that I fell into sins of immorality. When the Lord confronted me through his word, I found that I no longer deserved to live in God's world. I should have forfeited my life because of my sins. But Christ died for my sins, and he rose to life for my justification. When I believed in him, he forgave my sins, healed my soul and raised me as his servant. My life does not belong to me, but to Christ. Jesus, you are my King and my Lord; I give my life to you.

### **III. "If anyone would come after me..." (23-27)**

When we come into a relationship with Jesus, on the basis of his grace of forgiveness, Jesus becomes our Lord and our King. So we can no longer live in our own way. We must learn how to please our king. In verses 23-27 Jesus tells us how. There are two clear requirements. They are not easy to accept and practice. So to help us, Jesus teaches us a right value system and the great hope of his coming in glory.

Look at verse 23. "Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'" Jesus is here making a universal statement that applies to anyone who would come after him. Until now, Jesus' disciples had enjoyed a privileged status. They had been following Jesus without any conditions. But now, Jesus is changing the terms of discipleship. It is no longer enough just to hang around Jesus and see what he is doing. Now the disciples must decide to meet the two requirements of discipleship. Let's think about each one.

**First, "...he must deny himself..."** What? Our culture tells us to "indulge yourself," and "treat yourself." But Jesus said to "deny yourself." What does

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this mean? The self is a kind of evil monster, corrupted by sin, which wants to rule us. The goal of the self is self-glory, self-gratification, self-indulgence, and other “self-“ words. The self claims that the universe exists to gratify the self. The self ignores God, and uses others for its own benefit. The self wants to exist, avoiding death at all costs. Once, we were governed by this wicked self. But since Christ has come into our hearts, we now serve Christ as our king. Instead of listening to the self, we must listen to Christ. Instead of serving the self, we must serve Christ. So we must deny the self every day. Whenever it whispers to us to “be selfish,” we must say “no,” and turn to Christ. The Bible teaches that the self cannot be self-helped. Rather the self must be crucified with Christ.

How can we deny ourselves? We must come to the cross each day, confessing our sins and asking Jesus’ help. We must begin each day, not by figuring out what to do, but by yielding control of our lives to Christ. When Christ is our King, we come into harmony with his body, the church, and with what he is doing in the world. We can find out how to serve him practically. In order to do this, we must trust Christ to take care of us. We can claim his promise in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”

**Second, “...and take up his cross daily...”** The cross symbolizes the painful difficulty required to accomplish God’s purpose. Of course, accomplishing God’s purpose gives us deep joy and the meaning of life. But it is not always easy or pleasant. We must bear painful hardships. Jesus wants us to take these willingly and positively, as he did. The cross here includes the pains of rejection from unbelievers, and the sacrifices that are necessary to share the gospel and raise disciples. The cross also includes the personal pains we may live with due to specific life problems or issues. It may be to live as a widow, or to care for a special child or a husband with Alzheimers disease. God gives such crosses to his beloved children to help us know Jesus better. Paul said: **“I want to know Christ...the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection of the dead”** (Php 3:10-11).

Look at verses 24-25. **“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”** Our

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bodies and this world, and everything in it, will perish in the course of time. Human achievements will fade away, wealth will be consumed, relationships with others will end, and pleasures will be completely forgotten. Those who blindly pursue the treasures and pleasures of the world will perish. But those who accept Christ, deny themselves, and take up their crosses, gain everlasting life and eternal blessing in his kingdom. Investing our time and hearts and labor for Christ and his kingdom is the best investment of all.

Look at verse 26. **“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”** Jesus will come again in glory. He will have all power and authority, and his majesty will be displayed fully. He will appear as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will bless those who believed in him and curse those who opposed him. Then, those who were ashamed of him will feel greatly ashamed. But those who confessed him will share in his heavenly glory forever. This is not just a distant future hope. We can see the kingdom even now. Look at verse 27. **“I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”**

Today we have learned the essence of discipleship from Jesus. At the heart of discipleship is a relationship with Christ. Jesus wants us to confess him as the Christ, receive his salvation, and follow him by denying ourselves and taking up our crosses daily. Let's prayerfully decide to do this today.