

# THE REAL JESUS: HIS MINISTRY

Week Six | June 24, 2018 | Knowing and Following Jesus

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 9:1–9, 18–27, 46–48, and 57–62. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Following the Real Jesus requires our whole lives.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

Knowing Jesus as more than an historical figure, but as a personal Savior, gives us purpose, but it also leads to suffering and requires humility and sacrifice.

### MEDITATE

*"For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:24).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

**Q:** *If you were asked the question, “Who is Jesus,” how would you answer?*

Luke has taught us that if we want to encounter the Real Jesus, we must consider both history and theology. Without theology, historical facts may give us information about the Jesus of Nazareth, but we will never be able to grasp the significance of His life beyond a few historical particularities. Furthermore, Luke teaches us that we need to put these historical facts in the context of the broader story of the Bible to understand their significance.

On the other hand, Luke also teaches us that encountering the Real Jesus requires us to look at the historical facts of His life. As New Testament scholar N. T. Wright puts it, “It’s not enough to know that Jesus is your Savior, you must know who Jesus himself was and is. Otherwise, simply saying ‘he lives within my heart’ and ‘I have a sense that Jesus loves me’ can easily turn into mere fantasy. That has happened before and it will happen again unless it is earthed in the actuality of who Jesus is.” While some people like to draw a sharp distinction between the Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of faith, Luke insists that we hold these two figures together. When we separate them, we miss the Real Jesus.

In Luke 9:7–9, we see an unexpected figure express a desire to know who the real Jesus was. As the ruler of the land, he heard about all the events surrounding Jesus’ ministry. No doubt, he heard the reports of miracles such as a man walking on water, people being healed, and the dead being raised. He undoubtedly also heard reports of the Pharisees, who were greatly offended by Jesus’ teaching and the way He exposed their false religiosity. In verses 7–8, we read that Herod was “perplexed” by these conflicting accounts of Jesus. Some spoke of Him in adoration, others with fury. Some saw Him as the Son of God, others as a radical usurper, and still others as a prophet.

In the face of these conflicting reports, Herod, a cold-hearted leader, says, “I beheaded John.” This happened back in Luke 3, when John the Baptist confronted Herod about having had an affair with his brother’s wife, Herodias. At Herodias’ request, he had John beheaded. Yet there is something about Jesus he could not figure out. “Who is this about whom I hear such things?” Herod asks. In other words, who is Jesus? What is truth, what is fantasy, and what is fiction? Who is He really? These are all excellent questions. But we also read that Herod was content to leave them largely unanswered.

At the end of verse 9 the text says, “And he sought to see him.” In other words, he tried to see Him. If the ruler of the land wanted to see someone, they wouldn’t have to try very hard. At a snap of their fingers, whoever they wanted would be brought to them directly. Thabiti Anyabwile suggests that “Herod remained satisfied with

being perplexed. He did not press forward to get an actual answer. You don't get any points, praise, or rewards for asking about Jesus while never going to see or getting to know Jesus for yourself. It is a tragic mistake leaving the question 'Who is Jesus?' unanswered."

This is a question we all must face. We can do it superficially by satisfying ourselves with a trite answer. We can do it sterilely by looking solely at historical facts that give us information without transformation. Or, we can answer it subjectively by creating our own personal Jesus according to our desires and preferences. In verses 18–20, Jesus poses this exact question to His disciples. Regardless of what the crowds say, "who do you say that I am?" He asks. How do you answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" If you have truly encountered the Real Jesus, that answer should completely change your life.

**Q:** *In what ways has your answer to the question, "who is Jesus," radically changed your life?*

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. FOLLOWING JESUS GIVES US PURPOSE
2. FOLLOWING JESUS LEADS TO SUFFERING
3. FOLLOWING JESUS REQUIRES HUMILITY

## GOING DEEPER

+ This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.

## FOLLOWING JESUS GIVES US PURPOSE

### ■ LUKE 9:1–6

Q: *What task did Jesus give the disciples?*

Q: *What were they not to worry about?*

One mistake people make is thinking that this life is totally disconnected from the next life. Many think once this life is over there will be nothing left. We will die and be no more. Others think the way they live in this life doesn't really matter for the next life because, in the end, we will all be in heaven together, regardless of the way we each answered the question, "Who is Jesus?" However, Jesus shows that while we are on earth, we are given a purpose that isn't just confined to this life, but has meaning for the next life as well. This purpose is to know Jesus and to make Him known. It is this purpose that should guide the way we live, the affections of our heart, the way we relate to God, and the way we relate to others. It should be what shapes our entire lives.

In these verses, Jesus tells His disciples to continue His ministry, to spread the good news that sinners can be reconciled to God through Christ. Obviously, they are not the Saviors. They are the ambassadors of the Savior, called to preach the good news in both word and deed, just like He did. They are called not to build their lives around their possessions or what others think of them, but around the glory of Christ crucified and risen again. They are called not to depend on their own strength, but on Christ alone. They are called to see themselves as pilgrims, or travelers, passing through on their way home. They should consider their lives here a "short-term trip" that allows them to pack light and keep moving.

God used these twelve disciples to establish the Church. Today, we are experiencing part of the fruit of their labor even though we are in a completely different time and part of the globe. We are called to this very purpose as well. The gospel not only provides our eternal salvation, but also gives meaning and direction to our lives.

Q: *Do you sense a lack of purpose in your life?*

Q: *If you don't feel a lack of purpose, what is it that gives you your sense of purpose? Is it a life goal, a career goal, a relationship goal, etc.?*

# FOLLOWING JESUS LEADS TO SUFFERING

LUKE 9:21–27

Q: *What role does the cross play in the life of the Christian?*

Q: *What about Jesus' teaching in these verses is particularly offensive to the world's concept of the "good life?"*

The logic of the world is “no cross, only crown.” But according to Jesus, the logic of the kingdom is “cross before crown.” For the world, common sense says to get through life with as little suffering and as much glory as possible. As the popular song says, “All I do is win, win, win, win, no matter what.” This is supposed to be what the “good life” is all about—gain with as little pain as possible. But this was not the path Jesus took, nor is it the one He calls His disciples to take.

In verses 21–22, Jesus foretells His death. Imagine what the disciples were thinking when their master, the Messiah, told them He was about to die. His death would not be a normal one, but one full of pain, rejection, betrayal, and hatred. How did this make sense? How could the only truly Holy One who has ever existed be murdered in such a way? How could God die the death of a criminal? The very idea goes against all logic. It is unjust. It is offensive. It just seems wrong.

But Jesus also says that after this death, He will be raised. That probably didn't make the scenario any less confusing! Die to be raised? Win by dying? Why not just stay alive and win that way? But we know the cross was necessary. The penalty of sin is death (Romans 6:23). God knew we would never be able to achieve holiness and reconciliation with Him on our own. But instead of wiping us off the face of the earth, Christ took our punishment so we could receive His righteousness. As Paul says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). In order to redeem us once and for all, Christ had to die. But after His suffering on the cross came a crown of glory. “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12). “Therefore,” says Paul, “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9–11).

Jesus tells His disciples they are to follow Him down this path. To be sure, Jesus has gone before us and has taken our punishment. Those who are in Christ will never have to experience the wrath of God or ever be forsaken by Him because Christ suffered and died on our behalf. Our road of suffering is not to pay for our sins, it is to follow our Savior. It is to die to ourselves, our pride, our insistence on our own success, our self-mastery and autonomy, our sin, and follow Christ. He is ahead of us carrying a cross we could never carry, but we are behind Him following in His footsteps. Following Jesus is not like “following” someone on Twitter or Facebook. It doesn’t mean having high esteem for Him, appreciating what He does, or merely retweeting or “sharing” what He says. Following Jesus involves our whole lives.

Why do we want to follow Him down this path? Because we know where the path leads. We want to be united to Him because, as Paul says in Romans 6:5, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” In other words, better to die with Christ and be raised with Him than to die on our own in our sin and face eternal separation from God. Paul continues, “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him” (Romans 6:6–8).

The path of Christ requires temporary suffering for eternal glory. Admittedly, this logic is difficult, especially for a culture of instant gratification and quick results. Jesus is calling us to follow Him on a path of “long obedience in the same direction,” as Eugene Peterson puts it. On this path we proclaim that Jesus is far better than anything the world has to offer, and only in Him can we find a truly abundant life.

🔗: *Do you see the logic of “no cross, only crown” in your own life? Is it at the root of your frustrations? Your desires? Your criteria for happiness? Your expectations for others?*

🔗: *How does the logic of “cross before crown” allow you to hold loosely to this world and face trials with joy?*

## FOLLOWING JESUS REQUIRES HUMILITY

📖 LUKE 9:46–48; 57–62

**Q:** *How is Jesus' logic about who is the greatest counterintuitive to the way the world sees it?*

**Q:** *What kind of sacrifices are present in verses 57-62?*

According to the logic of the world, the first, the greatest, the fastest, the wealthiest, the smartest gets the reward. In fact, this is what the disciples were arguing about. Jesus told them He was going to suffer and die, and the disciples were busy arguing about who was the best among them. We see their pride exposed and their self-centered quest for their own advancement and glory revealed. Who is really the best disciple? Who is really Jesus' "best" friend? Who is the most esteemed, the most important, the most spiritually advanced? Each of them was obviously vouching for themselves, and this led to an argument. If you were Jesus, how would you have reacted?

Look at the patience He demonstrates in His response to them. Verse 47 says that Jesus knew their "reasoning," He understood which logic they were using, and He lovingly corrected it. Instead of declaring who was greatest among them like they wanted, He drew a child to His side. This child sat next to Him, in the coveted position they all wanted.

Children were not the center of attention in that society as they often are today. They were considered the least important, the least impressive, the last in line. Hearing Jesus say a child was greater than they were according to the logic of the kingdom was indeed humbling for the disciples to hear. The child is great because he or she is loved by God. In the same way, the disciples are great not because they have it all together, have great skills, or are impressive, but simply because they are beloved children of God.

**Q:** *How do we tend to idolize people today based on their gifts, platforms, resources, or abilities? How is this seen in the Church as well?*

**Q:** *What can you learn about faith from children? What is the difference between being child-like and childish?*

## NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

- ❓ *When we say Jesus satisfies all our needs, what does that mean, and what does it look like in everyday life?*
- ❓ *How do you measure greatness in your life? Is it the same way that Jesus measures greatness?*
- ❓ *How is knowing and following the Real Jesus different from merely discovering the "historical Jesus" or being devoted to your own personal "Christ of faith?"*

## PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- *Father, thank You for revealing Yourself through Christ. Thank You that through Him we can be fully reconciled to You.*
- *Holy Spirit, thank You for revealing the Real Jesus to me through the Word. Please continue to work in my life to mold me more and more into His image.*
- *Jesus, forgive me for seeking to use my life for my own greatness, advancement, comfort, and security. Teach me to follow You and embrace the cross with joy like You did, knowing that You are a God who comforts us in our afflictions, is present with us in every moment, and is the lifter of our heads. Help me to hope in You alone and eagerly await Your kingdom.*



**LUKE 9:5** By instructing the disciples to “shake off the dust from your feet” for those who do not receive them, Jesus is referencing the future judgment that awaits those who willingly reject Christ. Christ’s messengers cannot save them, nor can they force the message on them. They can only faithfully share the good news of the gospel with them.

**LUKE 9:7–8** Notice that Luke calls Herod a “tetrarch” rather than a king, as he is referred to in the other gospels. This is another example of Luke’s careful scholarship and detailed historical account. Herod’s proper title was “tetrarch,” meaning he was a governor of one of four divisions of the empire.

**LUKE 9:27** By saying some standing there will not die until they see the kingdom of God, the majority of commentators believe Jesus was either talking about the transfiguration, which prefigured the kingdom, or Pentecost.

*\*All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the Christ Centered Exposition (Luke), and Preaching the Word (Luke).*

