

This morning, we are in the fourteenth week of a sermon series that is entitled “Meeting Jesus.” We have been making our way through Luke’s account of the life of Jesus, looking at various interactions that people had with Jesus, in order to better understand what it means to know and follow Him. This morning we’ll be in Luke 9:18-27, looking at Jesus’ interaction with his disciples about who He is and what it means to follow Him.

LUKE 9:18-27 –

¹⁸Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, He asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?” ¹⁹They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say, Elijah, and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has risen.” ²⁰“But what about you? He asked. “Who do you say I am?” And Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”

²¹Jesus strictly warned them not to tell anyone. ²²And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed, and on the third day be raised to life.”

²³Then He said to them all; “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. ²⁵ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? ²⁶Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷” Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom God.”

This is the word of God. Let’s Pray -

I think this passage asks and answers three critical questions:

1. Who is Jesus?
2. What did He come to do?
3. What does it look like to follow Him?

Before we answer those three questions, I think it’s important to notice that in verse 18 we see that Jesus was praying alone. We often hear that Jesus does this, as He sets time apart to be with His Heavenly Father. I think this really emphasizes how critical it is for us to spend time daily with God. But what does it mean to set time aside to be with God? Does it mean praying as we’re driving from point A to point B? Or when we’re mowing the lawn? Or how about when we’re stressed and in need of some relief? Or just when we really need something? I’m sure these are great times for us to connect with God, but I don’t think it’s what Jesus was doing here, asking for something from God. Jesus is praying. Before He asks hard questions, before

He gives hard truth, before He talks about suffering and the cross. Jesus spends time alone with the Father to understand His will. That matters. As Jesus said to his disciples in John 5:19:

“Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”

If Jesus needed time alone with God to stay grounded and focused, how much more do we? Prayer isn't something we squeeze in when life gets hard—it's where clarity begins. It's where wisdom is found. It's where we learn to hear God and follow His leading instead of just reacting to everything around us.

Ephesians 5:15-16 – Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

We must take advantage of times to do something good. But how can we take time to do this if we were too busy and distracted to tell if that 'something good' is in the wisdom of God or perhaps it's evil creeping in? It's hard to truly see God's wisdom unless we set aside some solid time to reflect on God's word to see His holy will.

So, right off the bat, we see how integral prayer was to Jesus and how integral it is for our lives. Let's move on from there to the first question:

1) Who is Jesus?

Luke 9:18-20 – Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?”¹⁹ 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.”²⁰ “But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”

The critical question Jesus asks his disciples is “Who do YOU say I am?” This is still a critical question today. Who do you say that Jesus is? Jesus begins by asking the disciples “*Who do the crowds say that I am?*” And they respond with “*John the Baptist, Elijah or a Prophet of Old.*” It seems that they don't quite understand who Jesus is. And then Peter replies, “*God’s Messiah.*” As Matthew puts it in his gospel:

Matthew 16:16-17 – Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”¹⁷ Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Johah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.”

Peter was speaking **for** the disciples here but Jesus' reply was meant directly for Peter. Jesus is telling Peter that he has been privileged to benefit from God's personal revelation that Jesus

wasn't just any other flesh and blood human but that He came from God the Father who is in heaven.

But who do YOU say that He is? And what does Peter's answer mean, that Jesus is the Messiah?

Some of you may remember Gino Marozzi, who was long time member and past elder of New Life before he passed away. Gino used to say that God was Abba, his real Father. And Gino would talk with Abba every day asking, "What do you want me to learn today?" As far as Gino was concerned, God was his true father. (I don't think we're ever told to address Jesus as Abba; only God the father).

Some in today's secular culture might respect Jesus' ethics such as: Love your neighbor, care for the poor and forgive. But it might stop there with "I like Jesus's teachings. I'm not sure about the whole Son of God thing." They don't **follow** Him. He becomes a good moral example, but not a Savior. This answer just avoids the cross and why Jesus died.

In religious upbringings some people say, "I'm Christian. I grew up in church." Jesus is part of family tradition, holidays, and language—it's not necessarily a personal conviction. *Jesus is familiar, but not transformative.*

As Rick Warren said, "Everyone has an answer to the question 'Who is Jesus?' The real question is whether our lives agree with our answer."

The truth is that when you read the Bible, and particularly when you read the things that Jesus does and what He says about himself, you realize that He is not just a good teacher or prophet.

As C.S. Lewis wrote in Mere Christianity:

"I'm ready to accept Jesus as a moral teacher, but I don't accept the claim that he is God." That is the one thing we must never say. A man who is merely a man and said the things Jesus said can not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic, on the level of the man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You can shut him up as a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, you may fall at his feet and call him Lord and God but let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about him being a great moral teacher. He did not leave that open to us, and he did not intend to... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God."

So, who do you say that Jesus is? As Peter said, Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one promised in the Old Testament, the Savior sent by God to redeem the world. If you do not see Him as Lord and Savior, the Messiah, the eternal Son of God, then who do you say that He is?

And if you do accept Him as all those things, how did you come to believe that?

I was raised Catholic and had a belief in God. I just didn't really understand the meaning of a relationship with Christ. Probably because I never opened a Bible. In years past I was only going to church for holidays, the occasional Sundays or for special events like weddings. It was religion on request. Only when I needed something was I looking towards God. I was hanging around with a group of guys and all we did was party. I traveled a lot for my job. It was a time in my life when I just wasn't very happy with myself or anything else. I was living life as I wanted it (so I thought). Doing things my way and being pretty selfish. I was harboring a lot of resentments and anger towards things I had no control over. Yet, I continued wanting to do it my way.

Fast forward to around 2011, 2012. I had been in CT for a short while and Jeanette and I started dating, and she was attending New Life.

Jeanette was so patient with me. Gently asking a few times if I wanted to go to church with her. It took a while, but I finally attended. And am I ever grateful that I did!

I first came to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior in this church when it was meeting in Glastonbury. We had been attending service a while and Pastor was teaching about Saul (Paul) and who he used to be, including his crusade against Christians and his transformation to believing and following Christ. Then later, hearing about all the trials and tribulations Paul went through during his mission to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. The difficulties he ran into, the beatings, the number of times in prison, shipwrecked, rejection. Paul willingly suffered for Christ and understood it was part of knowing Jesus. As Paul wrote:

Romans 5:3–5 - “Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

For the first time I **heard** what a relationship with Christ meant. And how this man, Paul, went through all the suffering yet understood that knowing Jesus would not mean the hardships would go away. His strength to persevere through it all was amazing to hear. It hit me all at

once in my head and in my heart. In a much quieter way, I could relate to Paul in so many ways.

During this time, I was going through one of the hardest stretches of my life. I had gone through a divorce, I was pretty sure my kids hated me, I was in the middle of a career change, starting a new job, and my finances were doing that thing where they disappear faster than you can track them. I didn't really have a place to settle and feel grounded. I was fighting for my own sobriety while still worrying about my son's addiction struggles. It honestly felt like someone dumped every major life stressor into one bucket, shook it up, and said, "Good luck—let's see what you're made of."

After Pastor Eric's sermon, I just broke down. It felt like everything I'd been carrying finally caught up with me all at once. In that moment, I realized I couldn't keep doing life my way anymore—I needed to surrender. I needed to turn my life over to Christ.

I understood confessing my sins and receiving Christ's forgiveness wouldn't get rid of my struggles and make them disappear. My struggles weren't going anywhere overnight. But what I did understand was this: surrendering to Jesus would give me something to stand firmly on in the middle of all the chaos and a power to help me persevere.

I was overwhelmed but I also seemed clear. For the first time, I stopped fighting for control and realized I can't do this without Christ. And right there, I surrendered and turned my life over to Christ.

I mentioned during this time how I really didn't have a place to stay. I was vulnerable, unsure, and honestly a little ashamed of how far I'd fallen. And it was right there, in that place of need, that God met me through the church.

Paul Joss, a member of NewLife and one of the first people to genuinely welcome me, opened his home to me. I quickly learned that I wasn't the only one—there were a few other men living there too, all of us in very different places, each carrying our own struggles. What Paul created wasn't just a roof over our heads; it was an example of sacrificial love. It was someone choosing daily to put others before himself. A place where we read Scripture together, talked honestly about life, and tried to figure out what it meant to follow Jesus when life wasn't neat or comfortable.

Looking back, I see it clearly now—that was my first real picture of Christian brotherhood. Real community. People choosing, day after day, to carry their cross by loving, serving, and walking with others instead of turning away.

And that experience helps us understand something important about Jesus. Because what Paul Joss was doing in that small, ordinary way reflects the much larger mission of Christ Himself.

Which brings us to the second question.

2) What did He come to do?

Luke 9:21-23 – ²¹Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. ²²And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and teachers of the law, and must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” ²³Then He said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”

Jesus affirms Peter for saying that he is the Messiah, the anointed one, the Savior sent by God to redeem the world. But he commands them to say nothing to anyone! Jesus follows up by explaining what he has come to do: to be rejected, to suffer, to die, and to rise again. And then, Jesus tells his disciples that if they want to follow Him, they must be prepared to lose their lives and to suffer as well. Not once. Not when it's good timing for us. Not when life is coasting by. Daily, daily...

Jesus didn't come to protect His own comfort. He didn't come to keep His distance from broken people.

Now, this doesn't even come close to mean that we would suffer the same way Christ has or even compare to what He's given up, for us. But it does mean coming to faith in Jesus includes following His example of self-giving LOVE. It means that following Jesus isn't a walk-in-the-park. Us humans? We chase comfort, success, control but, none of it can save us. Only Christ can.

In Luke 9, Jesus makes it clear why He came. He did not come to avoid suffering, but to willingly suffer in order to die on the cross, taking the punishment we deserved for our sins. As the prophet Isaiah wrote:

Isaiah 53:4-5 “Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

He came to be rejected, to die, and to rise again—so that sin would be defeated and our hope and eternal life would be secured. Christ is taking the punishment WE deserve for our sins. Knowingly!

Think about this in today's world where blame is shifted, responsibility is avoided, and sacrifice is rare. We protect our time and comfort, our reputations and our rights. It's not a natural thought for us to willingly step up to the plate and take someone else's pain and suffering. And that's exactly what Jesus did. He suffered because He chose to, out of love for us.

I'm a sinner. We're all sinners. We have all rebelled against God, we have all fallen short of God's holy standard. We all have regrets, broken decisions, selfish moments, words we wish we could take back and choices we try to justify or take back. And Jesus said, "I'll take the punishment, the guilt, the shame, the condemnation away from you." All because of His love for us.

And that's why Luke 9 matters so much for us today. Because after Jesus turns to His followers and says in verse 24:

“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?”

In other words, this is what He came to do... and this is what following Him will look like. Following Jesus doesn't remove hardship, but it gives it meaning. Jesus came to call people into a new way of life. Not perfectly but differently, intentionally. I know I'm not even close to perfect but, walking thru some of the difficulties I've been through? It's definitely helped bring me closer to Christ.

Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Jesus didn't just come **for us** to make us feel better. He came to **walk with us**. He came to create Followers, not just admirers. Disciples, not just spectators.

Jesus is not just a good teacher or miracle worker who's come to impress us. No- he left the comfort of heaven to seek and to save the lost, to bring God's kingdom to earth.

So, when we ask ourselves the second question – What did He come to do? The answer is plain to see. He came to give His life for us, so we can be forgiven, so that we can be restored to God, so that we can have His Holy Spirit inside of us, so that we can truly live. And by Jesus doing this, He asks us to walk with Him and share that same self-giving way of life, one day at a time.

And that leads us into the third question...

3) What does it look like to follow Him?

Luke 9:23-27 – Then He said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. ²⁵What good is it for

someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? ²⁶Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”

Jesus says, if you want to follow me, it will take denying yourself, taking up your cross daily, and following me. It will mean losing your life for Him so you might truly find eternal life. It means dying to yourself. Instead of giving in to all your desires, it will involve denying yourself and being willing to suffer and sacrifice to bring His gospel and love to others. Instead of entering into the world looking for what others can do for you, it means looking to love and serve others as Jesus loves and serves you. And Jesus promises by doing that, you will find life. Our suffering, our pain? It puts us in some terribly dark places. However, those sufferings and that pain does something for us. It can make us stronger, wiser, more patient. But only when we trust in Jesus first. God wants us to surrender to His will. And sometimes that takes bringing us to our knees, or into despair.

James 1:2–4 - Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Since I've accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior, my life has definitely changed, but in a positive way. I'm not saying it's been easy. There sure have been plenty of challenges. But something deep inside me shifted. Little by little, the anger and resentment I'd been carrying around started to loosen their grip. I've found myself more at peace, more patient. And I remember talking with Jim Scrobko about that once, and he simply said, "That's JOY." That word stuck with me, because it perfectly described what God was doing in my heart. True joy, even when life was still hard.

One particular time Christ was working in my life was when Jeanette and I were really having a difficult time in our lives. Jeanette had relapsed and I was having nothing to do with it. That anger and resentment came rushing back, and I was struggling badly. I had convinced myself I was going to leave her. I had boxes packed and movers scheduled to pick my things up. It seemed like the struggle making that decision went on forever and was tearing me apart, physically and emotionally. I even took time off work because I was so depressed and unable to process my thoughts. I was talking with my therapist, leaning on family, sharing with close friends. But even then, the decision wasn't getting any easier. Deep down, it just didn't feel right. But it was my decision and mine alone to make and that weight was crushing.

Then one night I was praying hard for God to help me make the right decision, to guide me and give me His wisdom. I was unable to sleep and just kept praying. And about 2 am suddenly I had a rush of thoughts come into my head. The first was ‘look at yourself in the mirror, you really have to look at yourself’. Then at the same time thoughts of the parable of the prodigal son, walking thru the narrow gate, the wedding at Cana. It was like a flood of water had rushed over me with all these thoughts.

I realized I’m no better than Jeanette and I had been judging her. My sins have been just as great, and I haven’t been putting God first in my life or our marriage. Placing this all at Christ’s feet and trusting in Him helped me realize that my decision to leave was all out of selfishness, anger, hurt, judgement and frustration. But most of all; NOT honoring God.

That’s when I made the decision to honor God and stay in our marriage no matter the circumstances. To trust in Him and put Jesus first in my life and our marriage. I wrote all this down that very next morning so I would never forget it. The next thing I did was share what happened that night with my therapist. That made me sure I wasn’t just crazy. Then I talked with some close friends in this church. Then with Pastor Eric. It was then I decided to go see Jeanette. She was in a recovery program in New Haven, and this was during covid. I walked right into that place and said, “I need to see my wife!”

I shared with Jeanette what had happened and how God had placed these things on my heart. I told her I’m committed to our marriage and staying. That I want to honor God myself and in our marriage.

Looking back at all this I was definitely brought to my knees. But in retrospect, thinking about the flood of thoughts that rushed over me? It was God speaking to me. You see the parable of the Prodigal son, that spoke of how God has accepted me back and was calling me to accept Jeanette back. Walking thru the narrow gate? Matthew 7:13-14, that was telling me leaving was easy, staying is the hard choice. The right choice. The wedding at Cana story? That represents the joy of the new covenant and Jesus’s role in honoring marriage.

And I am so thankful that God gave me the wisdom and strength to stay, that Jeanette was able to get sober, and that our marriage is now in a much better place.

Luke 9:18–27 shows us a big turning point for the disciples. It starts with Jesus praying, which reminds us that before we try to figure things out, before we make big decisions, and before we speak bold truths, we need time alone with God. Prayer is where clarity and wisdom begin.

Then Jesus asks a question that still matters today: “*Who do you say that I am?*” Peter answers correctly— “*The Christ of God. God’s Messiah.*” He has come to suffer and die for our sins

and to rise from the dead in order to redeem us. But Jesus makes it clear that knowing who He is isn't just about saying the right words or doing the right works. It's about following Him, even into suffering and sacrificial love.

Jesus talks about suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. He doesn't sugarcoat it. Following Him will not always be easy. Faith doesn't remove hardship, but it does give it meaning. Jesus wants His disciples to know the truth up front—this road will cost something. This is where it's time to get comfortable being uncomfortable.

But Jesus doesn't stop at suffering. He promises resurrection. Pain is not the end of the story, although sometimes it may seem like it. Loss is not the final chapter. God is always working, even when life feels heavy, confusing, or overwhelming.

This passage reminds us that real faith is lived out daily. It's choosing to trust Jesus when things are hard, to keep following when answers are unclear, and to believe that God is still at work even when we can't see it yet.

So, the question for us isn't just *who* Jesus is—but whether we're willing to follow Him, one day at a time, trusting that He will carry us through whatever comes next.

If you do not know Jesus, make today the day that you put your trust in Him as the Lord and Savior who died for your sins. And if you do know Jesus, commit yourself to being willing to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him, that you might find in Him life to the fullest.

Let me close in prayer.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We thank You for Your Word and for the truth it speaks into our lives.

We thank You that You are patient with us, that You meet us where we are, and that You never ask us to walk alone.

Lord, help us answer Your question honestly: "*Who do you say that I am?*"
Give us faith that goes beyond words—faith that trusts You in hard seasons,
faith that keeps walking when life feels heavy,
and faith that believes You are still working even when we don't understand.

When trials come, remind us that You are near.

When we feel weak, remind us that You are strong.

And when the road feels difficult, help us remember that resurrection always follows the cross.

We place our lives, our struggles, and our hopes in Your hands.

We trust You, Lord.

In Jesus' name, Amen.