

FOLLOWING AFTER JESUS

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Luke 9:18-27

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INTRO.

-- The passage that we're dealing with today took place at Caesarea Philippi. About 30 years ago Carol and I were given the marvelous opportunity to travel to the Holy Land, and Caesarea Philippi was one of the places we visited. It's in a picturesque location in the northern extremity of Israel, at the foot of majestic Mt. Hermon, near the ancient OT city of Dan. It was a site for pagan worship in Jesus' day, and you can still see the arched niches that had been carved into the stone mountainside. Little statues of various pagan gods were placed in the niches, and the pagan worshipper could choose which one (or ones) he wanted to worship. It's the kind of a place that contemporary, post-modern Americans would love - a place of religious diversity and inclusiveness, where the gods were on the same plane.

-- It was here that Jesus chose to make one of His most important declarations about who He is and what it means to be His disciple. As we study what happened at Caesarea Philippi, we're going to see that there are two critical aspects of discipleship.

I. Disciples Must Understand and Confess who Jesus Is. (vv. 18-22)

A. Jesus' Questions (vv. 18-20)

-- Jesus asks His disciples two questions here at Caesarea Philippi.

1. The First Question (18-19)

-- The first question Jesus asks is, "Who do the crowds say I am?"

-- The disciples replied that there were a variety of speculations about Jesus. Based on the Disciples' replies, there were some strange ideas. Some thought He was John the Baptist; that was the superstitious speculation of King Herod, that the spirit of the prophet that Herod had beheaded had somehow migrated into Jesus. Others were inclined to believe that the OT prophet Elijah had returned to earth in the person of Jesus. And still others thought that Jesus was an OT prophet who had come back to life.

-- Now, these are all high opinions about Jesus, even if they are a little wacky, like something you'd see in a supermarket tabloid: "Ancient Prophet Returns as Miracle-Working Carpenter." But the problem with all of these high opinions is that they aren't high enough, which is what we will see in the second question.

2. The Second Question (v. 20)

-- What others say about Jesus isn't nearly as important as what you say about Him. In fact, this is the central question in Christianity - who is Jesus? Everything else in your faith depends on how you answer this question.

-- It's not too surprising that Peter was the one who spoke up first and answered for the Disciples. What is surprising is that Peter nailed the answer.

v. 20b

-- When he says that Jesus is "the Christ," Peter uses the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term "Messiah." Both words mean "anointed one," the one chosen or designated by God to save us, to deliver us from the penalty and power of sin, to redeem us from the state of being alienated from God, to turn God's judgment wrath away from us.

B. Jesus' Surprising Response (vv. 21-22)

-- Jesus' response to Peter's great confession is quite surprising.

1. Prohibition (21)

-- First, Jesus prohibits the Disciples from disclosing His true identity to anyone else.

Why would Jesus make such a seemingly strange prohibition? Because the Disciples, like the rest of first century Israel, didn't yet understand the true nature and mission of the Messiah. The Disciples, like the other Jews, were expecting the Messiah to be an earthly King, a political and militaristic deliverer who would free them from Roman domination.

-- It's rather common in contemporary America with its disdain for anything that smacks of absolute or propositional truth, to find people, even in churches, who bemoan any emphasis on doctrine and offer instead a feel-good sentiment like, "Why can't we all just get along and just love Jesus?" But Jesus won't have any of that. Jesus wants us to know that we can't really love Him if we misunderstand who He is. Jesus wants the Disciples to first understand who He is before they declare His identity to anyone; so He proceeds to make a clear assertion about exactly what it means that He is the Messiah.

2. Assertion (22)

-- Jesus affirms Peter's response and then proceeds to clarify it, explaining that the way He would provide for forgiveness and salvation would be through suffering, death and resurrection.

a. This is, of course, exactly what Isaiah had prophesied about the Messiah.

Isaiah 53:4-6 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

-- What Isaiah is telling us here is that the Messiah's, the Christ's, death would be what theologians refer to as a "substitutionary atonement." Jesus' death was substitutionary, meaning that He died as our substitute, He died in our place.

b. And Jesus' death was an atonement, meaning that it reconciles us with God by satisfying His wrath against our sin.

Romans 5:6, 9-10a You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ... 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

c. The Christian life begins when you come to this understanding of who Jesus is - that He is the only One who can put you right with God because He alone died in your place and took the judgment for your sin - and when you through repentance and faith make this your personal confession.

Unfortunately, this is where many want to stop, with confessing Jesus as Savior. But Jesus tells us that this is just the beginning. All those who confess Him as Savior must also follow Him as Lord.

v. 23

II. Disciples Must Follow After Jesus. (v. 23)

-- What Jesus tells us here is that discipleship means not only confessing Him but also following Him and that following Him is a three-fold process.

A. Deny Yourself

-- The first step in following Jesus is more of a prerequisite, a necessary pre-condition that must be in place before we can follow - to deny yourself. Denying yourself means taking yourself off the throne of your life, ceasing to be your own god, turning away from a life based on self-will, self-interest, and self-sufficiency. Denying yourself means that you recognize that you belong to God.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

-- To deny yourself is to take the attitude that Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." To deny yourself is to say along with Jesus what He prayed in the Garden: "Not my will but Thine be done."

B. Take up Your Cross

-- Again, this step is a prerequisite, a step that you must take as preparation for following Christ.

The cross was, of course, a means of execution in the Roman Empire. Everyone in Jesus' day was familiar with the practice in which the condemned criminal would carry the crosspiece on which he was about to die to the crucifixion site. The expression "dead man walking" refers to a condemned prisoner walking to the electric chair or the gas chamber. Jesus says that His disciples are likewise "dead men walking." As Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in his magnificent book *The Cost of Discipleship*, "When Christ calls a

man, he bids him come and die."

-- The NT emphasizes that we cannot follow Jesus without first "dying" to our self-oriented way of living.

Romans 6:3, 6 (NLT) Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? … ⁶ We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin.

Galatians 5:24 (NLT) Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.

-- Notice that Jesus says that we are to take up this cross of death to the self-ruled life "daily," stressing that this is a lifestyle, the way we are to live our lives every day.

C. Follow Christ.

-- Following Christ means obeying Him. What we see here in this verse is that we can't live a life of obedience to Christ until we have first died to self.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

-- Following Jesus means that Christ is living and reigning in your life, that He is leading and you are following. It means that your greatest desire is the same as Jesus' - to please God the Father in all your ways. Following Jesus means that every day of your life you are seeking to live by His power and to His glory. As J.I. Packer writes in *Your Father Loves You*:

"What will it mean to put God first? This much at least. The 101 things I have to do each day and the 101 demands on me which I know I must try to meet will all be approached as ventures of loving service to him, and I shall do the best I can in everything for his sake."

CONCLUSION

When Jesus leaves Caesarea Philippi, He begins a journey to Jerusalem and to His crucifixion death there. In chapter 14 He is being followed by large crowds that are growing every day. They are following because of Jesus' miracles - feeding the multitudes with a few loaves of bread, healing lepers, giving sight to the blind. But Jesus knows what they don't. Jesus knows that what lies ahead of Him in Jerusalem are rejection, suffering and death on a cross. So Jesus turns to the light-hearted crowds and makes a shocking declaration about what it takes to follow Him.

14:27 Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

-- The same thing that Jesus told the 12 Disciples at Caesarea Philippi, He also says to this crowd and to all would-be disciples as well: that we can't really follow Him until we have taken up the cross of self denial and self-sacrifice. Following Jesus isn't fun and games; it's denial and death. But remember that when we are following Jesus, the journey doesn't end with the Cross but continues on to the new and glorious life of the Resurrection.