

Following Christ the Right Way
Luke 9:18-36
Encountering Jesus Today

By Dave Urbanski

In our continuing study in the Gospel of Luke, Pastor Don on Sunday brought us through chapter 9, verses 18 through 36 — and brought up the danger of doing the “bare minimum” in life and in faith.

As the Bible says, by grace we are saved through faith — it is God’s free gift to us. Salvation cannot be attained through our own efforts, so that none of us can boast. While that wonderful gift from the Lord can set our minds at ease and give us peace as we ponder eternity, Pastor Don said sometimes we can get complacent and comfortable as we live out our faith.

By contrast, Jesus in this passage emphasizes that as believers in him, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him every day.

In the passage, Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do the crowds say that I am?”

Interestingly, the answers — one after the other — include a bunch of things Jesus is NOT: “John the Baptist ... Elijah ... one of the prophets of old has risen.” (v. 19) Then comes what is becoming my favorite question Jesus has ever asked: “But who do you say that I am?” (v. 20)

That question resonates even today, doesn’t it? It’s a question every human being, whether they’re cognizant of it or not, must ultimately answer. Each person who has ever lived or will ever live has no choice but to respond in their own way and in their own time — and what comes out of each person’s mouth has eternal implications.

As we know, often the answers in our culture and society are safe and soft and forgettable. You know ... Jesus is “a prophet” or “a good man” or a “great moral teacher.” Peter answered Jesus’ question correctly: “The Christ of God.” Jesus then reveals to his disciples his future suffering and death and resurrection but warns them to not disclose to anyone what is coming.

In the next several verses, Jesus describes what it means to be one of his followers — the heart of discipleship. Let’s look at them once again: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 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? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly,

there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”

We all are in sin and deserve eternal separation from God. But Jesus willingly suffered and died in our place as payment for our sins, a once-and-for-all sacrifice. He wipes our slate clean; we owe nothing. All we have to do is accept Jesus’ free gift. But incredibly, many do not and will not accept this gift — they push it away. And if you’ve had experience broaching the subject to others, it often can be explosive. Many people not only don’t want to hear their good works and moral behavior mean nothing when it comes to entering heaven, but also they can get angry. They can turn on the messengers — you and me — and call us judgmental or hateful, incredulous that God would care what humans — his creations — believe about him.

Yes, sharing the gospel can be daunting and difficult; we know what kind of reception it often will get. But that’s one important aspect of denying ourselves — in this case our comfort and safety — and taking up our cross and following Jesus.

Pastor Don added that denying ourselves also means giving up and putting away things that separate us from following Jesus completely. Have we turned away from worldly things? Are we resisting them with Jesus’ strength at our disposal? Are we actively living in repentance when we fail? Are we spending time praying, serving, and giving? As Pastor Don said, following Jesus is a “whole life commitment” — and discipleship is at the very center of our lives in Christ.

The remainder of the passage details the incredible moment that Peter, James, and John witness Jesus’ transfiguration. Christ’s countenance transforms into a dazzling, glorified state; Moses and Elijah appear with him and speak with Jesus about the sacrifice he’s about to make; and a cloud forms around them as a voice tells Peter, James, and John, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” (v. 35) With that, everything returns to normal. It would seem this experience may have been a way to prepare the disciples for what would soon be happening to Jesus in Jerusalem. Pastor Don observed that Jesus’ transfiguration certainly reminds us of who he is.

Let us remain on the road of discipleship. It’s not easy, but it’s our best path. And certainly let us not do the “bare minimum” in our Christian lives. Yes, if we believe in Jesus and trust in his finished work on the cross for our salvation, we will enter the kingdom of heaven when our lives here are over. But do we want the “bare minimum” of heaven? Or do we want to store up for ourselves “treasures in heaven” with eternally oriented efforts while on this planet?

Time moves on, and it’s short. Let’s use the years, days, hours, and minutes we have now to give Jesus our all for our eternities.