

## **“The Ultimate Question”**

*February 16, 2020*

Luke 9:18-27

### **I. Introduction**

From the beginning, the 12 Apostles had hoped Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God. In [John 1:41](#) Andrew told his brother Simon Peter, “We have found the Messiah.” And later in [verse 49](#) “Nathanael declared, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.’” After Jesus had directed His future disciples to a large catch of fish in [Luke 5:1-11](#), Peter “fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me Lord; I am a sinful man.’” But it is here in [Luke 9](#) that the Twelve, through Peter their spokesman, stated the truth with greater conviction and confidence than ever before. Although Luke records Peter’s confession right after the feeding of the 5000, [Matthew 14:22-16:12](#) and [Mark 6:45-8:26](#) record several other things that happened between these two events, i.e., Jesus walking on the water, the animosity of the Pharisees growing as they questioned Jesus about keeping their man-made laws, Jesus feeding 4000, as well as multiple healings.

Though “Jesus was praying in private,” “his disciples were” nearby. By this time, they had been with Jesus nearly 2 ½ years, observing His life and ministry, and being taught and disciplined by Him. They had seen overwhelming evidence that Jesus is God, possessing divine power, knowledge, and insight. After all that they had seen and heard, the Lord’s question to them in today’s Scripture amounted to their final exam.

According to [Matthew 16:13](#) and [Mark 8:27](#), the setting for this question was Caesarea Philippi. Caesarea Philippi was 25 miles north of Bethsaida and the Sea of Galilee, and it was at the foot of Mt. Hermon. The town was as far north as one could go and still remain in Israel. The city was largely populated by Gentiles and was filled with pagan idols. Here Jesus and the Apostles were able to escape the hostile Jewish religious leaders, the oppressive crowds, and the threat of Herod Antipas. It was here

that Jesus planned on revealing to His disciples what would happen to Him at Jerusalem. He had given hints before, but now He would explain plainly.

## II. The Question

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had prayed all night before choosing His disciples (Luke 6:12-13) and now He prayed before asking for their personal confession of faith. Jesus asked a two-part question—the first part being “Who do the crowds say I am?” Not surprisingly, there were a variety of opinions—it is the same today. Some like Herod Antipas considered Jesus to be John the Baptist raised from the dead. But John had come bringing judgment and Jesus came in meekness and service. John performed no miracles (John 10:41) while Jesus was the miracle worker. Others thought He was Elijah—in Malachi 4:5 God said, “I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.” Others thought He was one of the prophets, maybe even Jeremiah himself (Matthew 16:14). The people recognized Jesus’ divine power, so He must be someone special. But since He didn’t come as a military deliverer to overthrow the pagan rulers of Rome and establish an earthly kingdom, they were unwilling to declare Him to be the Messiah. In the people’s eyes, Jesus was more than a common man, but still someone less than God.

Jesus then asked the disciples the second and all-important question, “What about you? Who do you say I am?” There may have been a moment’s silence, while in the minds of the disciples came thoughts which they were almost afraid to say out loud. Then Peter, as the leader of the disciples and the outspoken one, declared, “The Christ of God.” Matthew records Peter’s complete statement in Matthew 16:16: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

In this answer, Peter really had a whole sermon. By calling Jesus the Christ, he was saying that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed One promised by God, God’s King over all people. By calling Jesus “the Son of the living God,” Peter was saying that Jesus was divine—He was God. John 1:14 summarizes what Peter was saying, “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of

the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” After more than 2 years of following Jesus, the Apostles’ doubts about whom Jesus was had vanished. Being human, they would still have times of failure and weakness, but they had come to know that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God.

### III. God’s Plan for the Messiah

Full of faith and emotions, the Apostles were probably ready to go right then and tell everyone the good news that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” but “Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone.” Jesus strongly commanded them not to spread the news that He was the Messiah. Jesus hadn’t come to start a revolt against Rome—a revolt based on false expectations of the Messiah’s mission.

As Jesus prepared to return to Jerusalem for the last time, the time had come to teach the Apostles plainly, so Jesus told them God’s plan for the Messiah: “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.”

Jesus’ words must have stunned the disciples. They had had visions of majesty and cheering crowds as the Messiah, their Lord and King, came to rescue downtrodden Israel. If He was indeed the Christ of God, why would He be rejected by the religious leaders? Why would they kill Him? The Old Testament Scriptures and the religious teachers promised a Messiah that would defeat all their enemies and establish a glorious kingdom for Israel. There was something wrong somewhere; the disciples were shocked by Jesus’ announcement. Even though Jesus went on to say that God’s plan would end in victory—a time of triumph and glory as Jesus is “raised to life on the third day”—I suspect that neither Peter nor the other disciples heard anything after Jesus said He must die. They didn’t hear Jesus say that He would be raised from the dead. They were amazed and bewildered by what He had said—He was going to be killed—“He must be killed.” This isn’t what they were expecting for the promised Messiah!

### IV. Discipleship

But Jesus didn't stop with a private announcement about His own death and resurrection. Though Jesus and His disciples had met in private, the crowds were not far away. So Jesus called the crowd to Him and taught them along with His own disciples—"Then He said to them all." Here He laid out the demands and expectations of true discipleship and a cross for every disciple.

## A. The Demands

**1. A disciple must deny himself.** First, Jesus said that the person who wished to follow Him must "deny himself." Self-denial admits that one cannot earn entrance into heaven through any means and instead relies on the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Acts 4:12 says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." But more than that, those who wish to follow Christ must be willing to disown themselves and give up everything for His sake, i.e. they must surrender themselves to Christ and determine to obey His will. Turn to Philippians 3:7-9.

To be a disciple of Christ, to be a Christian, not only requires accepting Jesus as one's Savior but also submitting to Him as Lord—Rom. 10:9 says, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Galatians 2:20 should be the words of every Christian, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

**2. A disciple must take up his cross daily.** Jesus then said that anyone who wished to be His disciple must "take up his cross daily." Bearing one's cross means denying one's own agenda, seeking to serve God and follow Him. Romans 12:1 puts it this way, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your true and proper worship." Jesus' point was that those who desired to be His disciples, rather than seeking their own prosperity and ease, must be willing to endure hatred, rejection, persecution, shame, hardship, and

even the most horrible death for His sake—Jesus said in [John 15:20](#), “Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” Not every believer will die as a martyr, but “*to take up the cross*” means to be willing to pay any price in thankfulness for the gift of eternal life that Jesus gives. [2 Cor. 4:17](#) says, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” Turn to [1 Peter 4:12-16](#).

**3. A disciple must follow Christ.** Finally, Jesus said, “Follow me.” A disciple must follow Christ. In [John 10:27](#), where Jesus described believers as His flock He said, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” Like sheep submitting to the voice of their shepherd, genuine followers of Christ lovingly obey Him and His Word. In [John 14:15](#) Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey my commandments.” [1 John 2:6](#) says, “Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” A disciple must follow Christ and His example.

**B. A Paradox** Jesus then offered a paradox regarding saving one’s soul: *To save one’s life, one has to lose it.* Nothing a person acquires or does in this life can ransom his/her soul from hell—[Isaiah 64:6](#) says that “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” The world and all it contains will pass away. But those willing to abandon everything for the sake of Christ will receive eternal life—[Philippians 3:8](#) puts it this way, “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ.” To gain the whole world but to reject Christ is to lose one’s soul to hell. But to give up everything this world offers for the sake of following Him is to gain eternal riches, i.e. heaven. *Everyone has a choice.* You can be short-sighted and go for the “now” and lose “forever;” or you can be far-sighted and forsake your life now and save your life forever. There are only two choices: hell or heaven. Choose wisely!!!

**C. A Warning** Jesus closed His teaching with a warning. “Whoever 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.” Jesus is coming back. The first time Jesus came, He came to suffer and die as the only

sacrifice acceptable to God. But some future day, He will return as sovereign to rule in triumph and judgment. **Turn to Revelation 20:11-15.** Whoever rejects Jesus in this life, i.e. is ashamed of Him and His Words, will be rejected by Him at the judgment. True believers are recognized by brokenness, humility, and sorrow that lead to repentance. Unbelievers are ashamed, not of themselves, but of Christ. They love their sin and the approval of the world. They see no need for the Gospel or Jesus Christ—in fact, as **I Corinthians 1:18, 23** say they find the message of the cross to be offensive and foolish.

## V. Conclusion

The question that Jesus asked the 12 Apostles is the most important question a person can answer. The answer has eternal consequences: “*Who is Jesus Christ?*” The eternal destiny of every person depends on the answer—**turn to John 3:16-18.** What is your answer? “*Who is Jesus Christ?*” Is your name written in the Book of Life?

In comparison to the man-centered, feel-good platitudes that fill contemporary so-called Christianity today, the gospel preached by Jesus is a call to self-denial, suffering, and absolute surrender to Him. Discipleship means that our attention is turned to how we can follow Jesus, not how we can make Him follow us. False gospels entice their followers with promises of material prosperity, physical healing, earthly success, self-esteem, and an easy life. This is not the true gospel. The Lord Jesus calls His followers to humble brokenness, a life of self-sacrifice, and a willingness to endure hardship for His sake. We need to guard ourselves that we don’t get caught by the enticements of the devil—“*I can do it my way.*” Those who follow Jesus Christ must do so on His terms, not theirs—remember Jesus said in **John 14:6**, “**I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.**”

It is important to remember that self-denial, cross bearing, and obedience are not things one does to earn salvation; these are not a set of steps that lead to an eternity in heaven. Self-denial, cross bearing, and obedience are the results or characteristics of being saved, being a child of God; **Ephesians 2:8-10** says, “**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of**

God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" Turn to Galatians 5:19(22) – 26.

It is easy to say that Jesus is your Lord and Savior, but what does your life say about your Christianity? Discipleship is a full-time job, not just a weekend activity. As a lifestyle and commitment, it never takes a holiday. That is why Jesus said we should bear our cross daily. Are you any different from the world around you? Do you acknowledge Jesus and serve Him and bring glory to His name or do you act like you are ashamed of being a Christian?