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Luke 9:23-50 – The Encouragement and Cost of Followership

And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One, listen to Him!” -- Luke 9:35

This week we follow Jesus’ journey toward the cross with the first mentions of a cross in this gospel. **Read Luke 9:23-36.** Jesus had just revealed to His disciples that he would suffer, die, and be raised (v 22). Then He declares to all—the crowd around them—that to be His disciple requires three actions: 1) self-denial, 2) taking up the cross daily, and 3) following Him. This is another very radical teaching from Jesus. To deny yourself is to disregard every instinct of self-preservation we have from birth. But then to take up the cross is an incredible addition. At that time the cross was only seen as a gruesome Roman (i.e., Gentile) implement of execution (it is estimated by the historian Josephus the Romans had executed tens of thousands by the time of Christ). Jesus had not yet borne His cross, upon which redemption hinges, making it the symbol it is today, so this would have been a “hard teaching” for the hearers.

So we do not miss that Jesus truly means we have to die to ourselves, figuratively and possibly literally, to follow Him, v 24 should dispel any confusion: “Whoever would save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” Losing our lives for His sake is a command given six times in the gospels, and ten of the 12 hearing this repeatedly will be martyred for His Name. This is a great paradox: In order to save your life for eternity, you must be willing to sacrifice it for Jesus’ sake (and to benefit others) in this life. The primacy of Christ must be truly your first priority, even over life itself. Each day we are to say to ourselves, this life is secondary to the mission so I put my desires aside, take up the cross to willingly lay down my life as Jesus modeled, and then, and only then, can we truly follow Jesus. Nothing can be more important in this life, even if we owned the whole world (v 25)! What a shame to have treasures and miss the greatest treasure—eternal life with God. “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”¹ (Bonhoeffer)

As Jesus lays this very heavy teaching on them, He explicitly points them to the eternal life and the kingdom of God as an encouragement. Our stand for Him means He stand for us in the court of heaven. The setting of that scene is glorious. Jesus speaks both of His glory and the glory of the Father, and then He mentions that that glory will soon be witnessed by some there in His hearing, before they die.

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Our desire is to witness God’s work in transforming hearts.
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Verse 28: Eight days later Jesus took His select three of the 12, Peter, James, and John (the same men who witnessed the raising of Jairus' daughter in Luke 8) up a mountain to pray. Luke tells us that as He prayed "the appearance of his face altered". Matthew's account in Matthew 17 says "he was transfigured before them", using the Greek word from which we get "metamorphosis". His face, His clothing literally flashed white, letting us know the immediacy of the change. But then Moses and Elijah also appear, and discuss with Jesus His upcoming departure (Gr: *exodos*) to take place at Jerusalem. What we need to see here is that Moses and Elijah are also glorious, which inspires Peter to blurt out, "we can build three booths" to commemorate the event. Peter once again gets out too far over his skis and is corrected by the majestic voice of God the Father directing their focus only, ever onto Jesus, His Beloved Son (see 2 Peter 1:17-18). There is a lot going on in this scene. Amidst our takeaways that Moses, the giver of the Law, and Elijah, a major prophet of God, are aware of Jesus' sacrificial death on a cross, we must also realize that they shared in Jesus' glory. Glory is the true end of our road as believers, not death; it is the reason for the lifelong process of sanctification, so that we can enter glory before the throne of God. For this reason, the transfiguration event points at the *humanity* of Jesus, not His deity. This represents the glory He shares with us for eternity (2 Cor 3:18). This is also why Jesus had referred to Himself (v 26) as "Son of Man". God's deity is not shared; His glory is. How encouraging!

But do not miss that in this scene both the Law and the Prophets testify to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus because He fulfills them both. In the divine pronouncement English Vicar Michael Wilcock notes we have three elements pointing back to the Old Testament: "My Son" reminds us of the royal psalms (Psalm 2:6-7) where the king of Israel is a son; "Chosen One" means Isaiah's chosen servant of the Lord (Isaiah 42:1); and the command to "Listen to Him!" points to Deuteronomy 18:15, when Moses prophesied that God would raise a prophet like him from the Hebrew nation². Lastly, God's statement finally settles the questions of Herod and the people about who Jesus actually is!

Coming down from the mountain the next day, Jesus is confronted with the failure of the other nine disciples to cast out a demon. **Read vs. 37-45**. In vs 41, Jesus rebukes those disciples before rebuking the demon! Matthew 17:19-20 gives more details about their lack of faith being the reason for failure, then He delivers the boy from the demonic spirit. Astonishment moves through the crowd but Jesus reminds the 12 again that despite His power, He will soon be delivered unto death (see vs 22)—the cross predominates over exorcism.

Between this event and another discussion about demons, the disciples actually start jockeying for position within the group (**read vs. 46-50**)! Jesus puts their childishness in its place using a small child. Children held no position and were overlooked by others but Jesus expects us to receive the overlooked and small. God uses the small and weak of the world for His purposes (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). John then speaks up that someone not of their group was successfully casting out demons in Jesus' name, to which He said do not stop that one, he must be for us if not against us. Perhaps a good reminder for us with our denominationalism?

Questions To Ponder Further: *Do you see yourself as a citizen of the kingdom of God? If you have surrendered your will to Jesus in faith, His grace saves you and His power sanctifies you for future glory! Are you willing and prepared to pay the cost to truly follow Him?*

1. Bonhoeffer, D., *The Cost of Discipleship*, Touchstone, 1959, pg 89.
2. Wilcock, M., *The Message of Luke*, Intervarsity Press, 1979, pg 110.

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