

## Misunderstood Messiah: Following the Real Jesus

Luke 9:18-27

### Introduction

**Belief and Behavior:** What you believe about someone or something changes the way you act. If you think **Jurassic Park** is a fun amusement park *a la* Animal Kingdom, you're going to waltz willy nilly into a dinosaur feeding frenzy. If you think **AI** is the next step of cognitive evolution you will trust it to your demise (e.g. Tesla auto pilot crash, chatbot led investment losses, mistakes on your 7th graders math homework, amazon misogynistic resume sorter, etc.). It is also possible to miss out on something good because of your limited appraisal (e.g., **Apple** fired Steve Jobs in 1985, the **Beatles** rejected by Decca records, **Walt Disney** was fired for 'lack of creativity' from a newspaper early in his career, **Blockbuster** declined to purchase **Netflix** for \$50 million because it had no brick-and-mortar store: Blockbuster went bankrupt and Netflix has a market capitalization of \$180 billion).

- Understanding who Jesus is defines everything about how you trust and follow him.
- Who is Jesus? What does that mean? How does it change the way I live?

**Getting Jesus Right:** It's essential to get Jesus' identity and mission *right* because you imitate the type of Jesus you think he is, or at least live according to the principles you think he has set up. It is very easy to make Jesus who we want him to be rather than accepting, submitting to, and following who he really is (e.g., Quest for the Historical Jesus amde 19th c. white, European liberal academic). "Without the Bible, the remembered Christ becomes the imagined Christ..." shaped by the conscious or unconscious desires of his worshippers (Smart).

#### ○ If you think Jesus is a...

- **Cosmic Genie:** You'll think he is beholden to give you what you desire rather than what he thinks is best. You might go to him when there's a problem but you'll ignore him when things are good.
- **Mascot:** You'll be happy to be associated with his brand but he'll never change your heart. **He'll be a stand-in for your preferred way of life rather than calling you to follow his way of living.**
- **Sugar Daddy:** You'll treat the relationship as transactional, you serve him and he'll buy you fancy things.
- **Moral Guide:** His teachings become one option among many as long as you are a "good" (whatever that means) person. His ethics and morality define what is right and good, but not to flaunt moral superiority but as an outflow of his perfect love.
- **Prophet:** You'll think you have to be better and try harder. He's more than a prophet, he's the Savior. **Jesus doesn't just point the way, he makes the way.**
- **Teacher:** He is the wisest of teachers! But wisdom isn't a collection of tips and hacks for a successful life. It is personified in the person and work of Jesus and found in a relationship with him. In fact, the world frequently thinks the way of Jesus' wisdom is foolish.

Who you believe Jesus is determines how you follow him. You need to recognize him as the Messiah he truly is and not the Messiah you want him to be (it's not a choose your own adventure). When you recognize the Messiah as a suffering servant you will embrace the cross-shaped life to which he calls you.

<sup>18</sup> Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" <sup>19</sup> And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God." <sup>21</sup> And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, <sup>22</sup> saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." <sup>23</sup> And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

### 1. Jesus is the Messiah (vv. 18-20)

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**Debrief:** <sup>18</sup> Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"

- Finally, get that alone time that was interrupted by the crowds (which happened right after they came back from being sent out on their first "independent" mission). All of their experience with the crowds traveling and proclaiming the gospel along with the overarching question: "Who is Jesus?"
  - "Is not this Joseph's son?" (People, 4:22).
  - "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" (Pharisees, 7:49).
  - "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?" (Disciples, 8:25).
  - "Who is this about whom I hear such things?" (Herod, 9:9).
- They would know what the crowds say because they've been travelling without Jesus.

**Popular Opinion:** <sup>19</sup> And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen."

- There are various opinions: **(1)** Jesus is simply (?) **John the Baptist** resurrected. Even though Herod killed him (9:9). **(2)** The eschatological prophet **Elijah**. J the B was confused with Elijah as well. Because Elijah was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire

without dying, he was popularly understood to be one who would return in the last days. Why would it be easier to believe J the B was raised from the dead or that Elijah had returned than that Jesus was the Messiah?

- Jesus message was powerfully prophetic in character. They seem to be stuck on Jesus as another in the line of great Hebrew prophets. Saying he is a prophet is *good* but still falls short. It places him on the same plane as John and Elijah, and others and reveals that the people recognize something special about Jesus but are unable to fully grasp just how unique he is or how significant his mission is.<sup>1</sup> **It is possible to have a high opinion of Jesus and still fall short of recognizing his true identity, power, and purpose.**
- He certainly *is* prophetic. He fulfills Deut 18 as the perfect prophet (*a la* Moses). But he is **more than a prophet**; he is the Messiah, God's anointed Savior. He is the eternal Son of the living God. It's not that their understanding of him is so much *wrong* as it is *incomplete*.
- There is a serious difference between a prophet who speaks the words of God and a prophet who **is God, the Word**.
- It is undeniable that Jesus is **special** but how do they interpret that? The gospels make it clear that Jesus is the Messiah, but Jesus himself avoids the term up to this point, letting people draw their own conclusions. **What conclusions do they draw?**

**Messianic Moniker:** <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

- "Christ" (Χριστός) is Greek for Messiah. So, Christ is a translation from Hebrew into Greek and we've just transliterated into English (e.g., βαπτίζω, διάκονος, ἀπόστολος, etc.). Christ isn't his last name, it is a title. "Jesus the Christ" or "the Messiah." "Christ" occurs 531x in NT ("Christianity"); Messiah occurs 45x in OT.
- It comes from the word to mean "anointed" (both in Greek and Hebrew). In the OT, when a king or priest was installed in a special position they were "anointed" to signify their unique position.

**Personal Confession:** "Who do you say that I am? At some point, it doesn't matter who everyone else says Jesus is. **Who do you understand him to be?** They don't believe for you. They don't follow for you.

- Great, he's the Messiah. **So what? What does that mean?**

## 2. Meaning of the Messiah (vv. 21-22)

<sup>21</sup> And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, <sup>22</sup> saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

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<sup>1</sup> "All this is highly honorific, but Jesus' subsequent question reveals that it still falls short of the true estimate of his mission. It leaves him only on a level with John" (France).

**Surprising Command:** Jesus tells them *not* to tell anybody. Feels kind of the opposite of what the rest of the NT says (e.g., “go and tell”). **Why would he tell them not to reveal his Messianic identity?**

- Messianic expectations were real and heightened at the time. Everyone was looking for a (the?) Messiah. However, their understanding of the Messiah was limited and inadequate.
- The Israelites were under foreign occupation by the Roman Empire. They had grown up hearing God's covenants to Abraham and David, promises of a prosperous nation and a righteous king, the Israelites being God's ambassadors on earth. **But they looked around, and things didn't seem to go that way.**
  - The religious establishment was splintered. The political establishment was corrupt. The social order was confused. People were sick and hurt. There were rebellions and wars in the land.
- Most Jews who thought the OT prophesied a messianic figure (chosen one; **think Neo/Matrix, Po/Kung Fu Panda, Harry Potter, Anakin/Luke/Rey/Star Wars, etc.**) but thought this Messianic figure would be not only a religious leader but a political and military leader.
  - Surely, he would be a king, a prophet, a priest. He would be a righteous warrior, a prophet of the law of God, and a priest to restore the purity of Israel's religion. He would vanquish the enemies of Israel and unite the nation under his rule.
- They are still political terms. Jesus will teach them what it really means.
- Most people still hadn't put all the pieces of the **OT mosaic** (i.e., **tapestry, ugly threads, beautiful picture**) together to see the larger picture (though it is all there). They missed that the Messiah would suffer to save (rather than merely conquer with military power). They missed that God himself would become flesh (e.g., God became king).<sup>2</sup>

**Expectation:** They *expected* God to work a certain way (the way they imagined he *should* work). If we're not careful, we try to fit Jesus into our expectations rather than letting him shatter our paradigms for a better way. **We want Jesus to fix our problem but do it our way.** Jesus does things differently (but better!).

- They were unwilling to submit to Jesus' authority because they were unwilling to acknowledge his true identity. His true identity is more than just a human ruler, more than what they want or wish him to be. **How many people claim to be worshipping Jesus, but the Jesus they worship is a figment of their imagination?**
- Jesus is the Christ, but the Christ is not just a human king (even the best of human kings) but God himself becomes king.
- The reason they missed him is they expected a powerful general not a suffering servant.

**Suffering:** <sup>22</sup> saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

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<sup>2</sup> “Jesus' Davidic heritage and royal status have been made explicit in the infancy narratives (e.g., Luke 1:27, 32-33, 69; 2:4). Explicit statements that He is Χριστός (Luke 2:11, 26; 4:41) and by implication (Luke 3:15, 22; 4:18).” E.g., house of David, throne of David, city of David, servant David, etc.

- He must do for things:<sup>3</sup>
  - suffer many things
  - be rejected by the [religious leader] (elders and chief priests and scribes)
  - be killed
  - be raised (on the third day)
- This is *not* the Messianic path to victory the people envisioned. If they knew he was the Messiah, they would want to make him king and build an army. They would want a revolution, not a sacrifice. The expected human path to victory is power and domination.
- Jesus is teaching the true meaning of Messiah, and he will continue to show what this means throughout Luke. A full understanding will not be clear until after crucifixion and resurrection (cf. Road to Emmaus).
  - Jesus is a righteous warrior who will defeat evil, death, and Satan. But the path to victory goes through suffering, humiliation, and apparent defeat.
  - The way up is down. Salvation comes through Jesus giving his life away not taking the lives of his enemies. He does not avoid death but walks through it.

**Intentional Plan:** Certainly, we can talk, in some way, of Jesus' death as the result of the evil and wickedness of others. He was killed by the hands of lawless men (Acts 2:23). The schemes of sinners conspired to [kill] the Author of life (Acts 3:15). But their actions were always according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23). As Jesus said, "No one takes [his life] from [him] but [he laid] it down of [his] own accord" (Jn 10:17).

- If Jesus was only a victim of the powers that be, he could sympathize with our predicament but he couldn't save us and it doesn't mean he loves us, simply that he has experienced what we have experienced.
- **His choice to suffer in our place demonstrates the depth of his love; his resurrection is the clearest demonstration of his power.** Jesus' suffering is not an accident of political circumstances but a choice of love by our compassionate Savior.

### 3. Path of the Messiah (vv. 23-27)

<sup>23</sup> And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

**Follow Him Where?:** <sup>23</sup> And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

- The path of suffering that Jesus embarks on is the path he invites us to follow him. Discipleship is *not* adding Jesus to your existing life and values but following him where

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<sup>3</sup> Four infinitives.

he goes. "Disciples are following Jesus, who, although innocent, will bear the shame of rejection and death" (Bock)

- Jesus' path is our path! The glory that is coming is only on the other side of suffering. We should not seek suffering, but we also should not run from it. If we want the eternal life of Jesus then we must be willing to walk the path of suffering that he walks.
- Suffering becomes the peculiar path to glorification. "There is no greater comfort to a Christian than to be made like Christ by patiently suffering adversity, trials, and weakness. Jesus himself suffered pain; he was crucified before entering glory. Truly our way to eternal joy is to suffer here with Christ. Our door to enter into eternal life is gladly to die with Christ so that we may rise again from death and dwell with him in everlasting life. So your weakness, sickness, trials, and pain are profitable for you as they conform you to the image of Christ" (*Book of Common Prayer*, "Visitation for the Sick," adapted).
- Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed (1 Pet 4:12-13).

**Death to Life:** To take up his cross daily is to embrace death so that you can have life.

- I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:20)<sup>4</sup>
- There is a conditional nature to life in Christ. You can't have your way and his way at the same time.

**Daily Cross:** And the hardest death to die is the death to self (deny himself). let him = "must" deny and take up.<sup>5</sup> Self-denial is an issue of worship and trust.

- When you deny yourself, you reject the belief that you can manufacture life for yourself. You no longer trust your effort to secure a true life. You're saying, "I cannot choose the best path for myself, but you can."
- Following Jesus is only possible if we trust *him* (not ourselves) to provide.
- Following Jesus conforms us and shapes us to look like him (e.g., blacksmith heating and shaping metal). A new shape (cross-shaped life)! Because the cross is at the heart of the gospel, it is at the heart of our lives. Our discipleship takes a "cruciform" shape. Our love is conditioned by the nature of the sacrifice that Jesus made.
- Following Christ requires a radical reorientation of one's priorities.
- "To follow Christ is to deny oneself. For Christ did not please Himself but emptied Himself. How can you follow Christ if you refuse to deny yourself? For self-denial makes a disciple" (Ambrose).

**Lose to Gain:** <sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits

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<sup>4</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church (Col 1:24).

<sup>5</sup> 3rd sg impv

himself? The paradox of discipleship is that what seems like a loss is actually a gain. “Life’s comforts and the threat of losing them might keep one from coming to Jesus” (Bock)

- This is why the rich young ruler (Mt 16) went away sad from his encounter with Jesus. He wasn’t willing to give up his wealth for Jesus.
- Jesus invites us to life, real life, but that requires we let go of what’s in the way.
- “The dispossession is a prelude to something more: The essence of Jesus’ demand is not disinvestment but discipleship. It’s not just a trade of one treasure for another (though it is); it is a freedom from slavery to money, wealth, and stuff in order to be free to enjoy the treasure of belonging to God” (France).
- It requires a reorientation of what we hope for and the path we take, which is what Luke calls repentance and faith (Acts 11:17, 13:38-39, etc.).
- So much good stuff isn’t gain but loss. This is accounting language (cf. Phil 3). What we think is “profiting” our life bank account is actually “bankrupting” us spiritually. Take an **audit** of your life. What are the things you are **investing** in? Are they helping you love Jesus better? Where do you need to **cut your losses** so you can gain Christ? The worst thing you can do is spend your life investing in something that is worthless (e.g., Beanie Babies, Cabbage Patch dolls, etc.).
- “To lose worldly wealth for the sake of the soul is no true loss at all but the greatest gain” (Origen).
- Why did people kill themselves after the Stock Market crash of 1929? Because their life was in their money (modern examples continue).
- “The gospel is not a gimmick or a game. It’s not a set of rules by which we can manipulate God and get him to give us what we really want. If we do not ultimately want God, then we will not be able to enjoy anything else (at least not for long)” (Hambrick).

**Self-Discovery:** There’s an insidious lie floating around that the way you discover happiness is by looking inside and discovering your deepest desires and fulfilling them. True happiness is in self-expression and “finding myself.” **You’ll never find yourself by trying to find yourself, it’s only possible as a byproduct of a truer pursuit.** You don’t know who you really are or are going to be (but God does).

- In fact, if you never deny yourself, you will destroy yourself (e.g., Jim Carrey’s *Yes Man* and Jennifer Garner’s *Yes Day*; just because you can say yest to everything doesn’t mean you should; “some desires don’t need to be satisfied, they need to be crucified”; say yes to what truly matters and leads to life).

**Cost of Discipleship:** “Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace... Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross... Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl for which the merchant will sell all his goods to buy... Such grace is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son and what has cost God much cannot be cheap

for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not consider his Son too dear a price to pay for our life but delivered him up for us” (Bonhoeffer).

**Discipleship:** <sup>26</sup> 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.

- \*Son of Man is actual a divine title harkening back to the Messianic prophecy of Daniel which describes the one who will receive eternal dominion and worship (e.g., God).
- \* There is no separation between the person of Jesus and the words of Jesus.
- Will you reject the shameful path of Jesus’ defeat to receive the glorious gift of eternal life?
- Will you follow him down the path of suffering or sidestep his path for the temporary comforts of this world?

## Conclusion

**Do you know him?:** Do you know Jesus as he reveals himself to be? If you’ve never read (or listened 🎧) the Gospels’ (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) description of him then you should! We’re preaching through Luke (and have Matthew in the past), but I want you to sit with the stories of Jesus. I want you to follow in love with, follow, and worship the **real Jesus**.

**Will you follow him?:** Jesus is not the Messiah we create in our minds; He is the Messiah sent by God and explained in God’s Word, whose path to victory came through suffering and self-sacrifice. When we get Jesus’ identity right, it changes everything about how we live.

Are you ready to take up your cross, deny yourself, and follow Jesus?

- What is God calling me to let go of (stop doing, stop loving), so I can follow him and experience the life and joy only he gives?
- What is God calling me to embrace (start doing, start loving), so I can follow him and experience the life and joy only he gives?
  - Share it with someone.
  - Get in the fight together.