**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**LIVING BY DYING**

**Luke 9:18-27**

**INTRODUCTION**

Please open your Bibles to Luke 9. Today we continue our series in the Gospel of Luke called “Finding Certainty in a World of Doubt”.

What is the good life? What does it mean to truly live well? Answers to this question range from the absurd to the typical. For an example of the absurd, take David Patchell-Evans, the founder of Goodlife Fitness, the largest chain of fitness centers in Canada. Mr. Patchell-Evans has made it his mission not only to help Canadians exercise, but to teach Canadians everywhere about what the good life looks like. In his book, *Living the Good Life*, he says this:

“What is the good life? It’s about health. It’s about feeling at home in your body. It’s about allowing your body to become the best it can be.”

Really? The good life is all about the health of your body? When I think about the “pursuit of happiness”, I don’t naturally think about the pursuit of bigger biceps.

Here’s a version of the good life that I think is more typical of how people think today. It comes from the mother of all self-help guru’s herself: Oprah Winfrey. In an interview, Ms. Winfrey described herself as living her best life now. She said,

“I am actually doing it. I really only do what I want to do when I want to do it. That’s the best life.” (Interview with ABC News, June 16, 2016).

The good life is doing what you want to do, when you want to do it. Does that sound familiar? It should. It sounds like Satan tempting Eve in the garden, promising her that, if she ate the fruit from the forbidden tree, she would become like God. And what does it mean to be like God? To be able to do what you want, when you want.

This vision of the good life is actually at the heart of sin. It’s what leads us to reject God’s authority over our lives, because the only authority we want in our lives is our own. Doing what we want, when we want, may lead us to feel like life is good now, but it won’t end that way, because life apart from God can never be good.

In our text today, Jesus is going to show us the true path to the good life. Unlike the world’s view of the good life, it doesn’t involve ease, but pain. It doesn’t involve making our own choices, but giving up our choices to embrace God’s choices for us. And it doesn’t involve living our best life now, but waiting in hope for the eternal life that is to come.

The title of this message is **Living by Dying**. My aim today is to show you that **Christ Lived to Die so that Christ-Followers would Die to Live.** We will have two points today:

1. **Christ Lived to Die**
2. **Christ-Followers Die to Live**

(1) **CHRIST LIVED TO DIE**

Our text today follows a remarkable series of miracles Jesus had performed stretching back to Chapter 8. It began with a display of his authority over nature in 8:24, when Jesus calmed the winds and the waves on the Sea of Galilee. Then it was authority over spiritual forces in 8:32, as Jesus casted out an entire legion of demons from a demon-possessed man. Next, he showed his authority over disease and death when he healed a woman with a bloody discharge in 8:44, and raised a dead girl to life in 8:54. Lastly, Jesus showed his authority to provide in 9:16, feeding more than five thousand people with five loaves and two fish.

All the things that have plagued humanity since the beginning of time were bowing to Jesus’ authority. Natural disasters. Demons. Disease. Death. Hunger. It didn’t matter. All of it was subject to the power and authority of Jesus.

This was beginning to raise questions from every corner of society. From common villagers to kings, people were asking themselves, “Who is this? Who is this who even commands the wind and the waves, and they obey? Who is this who raises the dead to life?”

Up until this point in Luke’s gospel, Jesus had left the crowds to speculate as to his identity. But here in our text, we reach a turning point. For the first time, Jesus is going to address the question himself.

Luke tells us in verses 18-21 that, “[A]s he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say that I am?’ And they answered, ‘John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.’ Then he said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ And Peter answered, ‘The Christ of God. And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one…”

Who is Jesus? The people thought he was a prophet. The prophets were extremely important in the Old Testament. They spoke with the very authority of God. Their words were God’s words, and several of them had the words they spoke on God’s behalf inscripturated for all time. The prophets predicated future events, they rebuked kings for their sin, and they called the nation of Israel to return to God. These were big responsibilities carried out by special men. But God’s people needed more than a prophet.

Think about what the prophets did and didn’t do in the Old Testament. They called God’s people to follow God, but they never called God’s people to follow them. They predicted the deliverance that God would bring to his people, but they had no power to bring that deliverance about.

The Christ, however, would be different. He wouldn’t just speak about God’s works to save his people. He would *do* God’s works of salvation. He wouldn’t just call people to follow God. He would call people to follow God *by following him, the Christ*. In other words, the Christ wouldn’t just speak with God’s authority. He would wield God’s authority to accomplish his plans of salvation. There were many prophets throughout salvation history, but there would only ever be one Christ.

So when Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am?” and Peter replied, “You are the Christ of God”, Peter was making a massive statement. He was declaring that Jesus was the Messiah, the Chosen One, the One sent by God and anointed by the Holy Spirit to finally bring about the salvation that God’s people had waited for thousands of years to see. And this salvation would not be a temporary one. It would be a salvation that would last forever.

Here’s the question our text today asks every single one of us: who do *you* say that Jesus is? It’s not asking you who your parents say Jesus is, or what your church says about who Jesus is. It’s asking you who *you* say Jesus is. It’s so easy for people, especially young people, to go through life thinking, “I’m a Christian, because my parents are Christians”. Or “I’m Christian because I’ve always gone to church”. We treat the question, “Who is Jesus?” as if it can be answered for us by someone else. But it can’t. It must be answered by you. The crowds can say one thing, but Jesus wants to know what *you* say. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ of God? Do you believe that he is the fulfillment of ancient prophecies, the Chosen, Anointed One who has come to accomplish God’s plans of salvation?

My hope and prayer is that you will say “yes”. You will be able to say, without hesitation or doubt, that Jesus is “The Christ of God”. There is no question more important in this life that you will ever be asked than this one, because your whole life turns on how you answer.

But why? Why should the identity of Jesus matter so much to us? Because of what Jesus says next in verse 22: “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.”

This is the first time in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus speaks about his death. It has been alluded to, like when the prophet Simeon told Mary after Jesus’ birth that a sword would pierce her heart, but never spoken of like this. Jesus is going to die? How can it be that the Christ of God, anointed by God to bring God’s kingdom into the world, should suffer and die?

It didn’t seem to make much sense to the apostles. Indeed, when Jesus tells them a second time that he must die later in Chapter 9, Luke writes:

“But they did not understand this saying and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.” (verse 45)

Try putting yourself in the apostles’ shoes. They had just seen Jesus display his absolute authority over every part of creation. They had even tasted that authority themselves when Jesus gave them authority to cast out demons and cure diseases themselves. And now, Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Christ of God. From the apostles’ perspective, they were on an upward, unstoppable trend. The days of darkness were finally over, and the dawn of God’s kingdom was finally upon them.

But now Jesus was saying that dark days were still to come. He wasn’t just going to keep healing people, casting out demons, and preaching the gospel until the whole world was made right again. He was going to suffer and die at the hands of men. How was that even possible? How could the One who makes legions of demons tremble in fear suffer at the hands of lowly men? How could the One who has authority over death itself ever suffer death himself? It didn’t seem to make any sense.

The only way it did make sense is if it was *his choice*. Death could never force itself upon him. It could only take hold of him if he let it. And that is what he did. He willingly chose to suffer and die at the hands of men, even though he had the power to never suffer at all. As Jesus said in John 10:

“…I lay down my life…No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” (verses 17-18)

This is what God sent Jesus into the world to do. The Christ lived to die. His death was the ultimate purpose of his life. Why? Because it was only through his death that God’s plans of salvation could be fulfilled.

Israel wasn’t ready for this, because they had different ideas of what the Christ had come to do. They thought that the Christ had come to save them from their external enemies, political enemies like Babylon, Rome, and the like. They believed that the Christ would lead them in triumphant, military victory over their enemies, so that they could finally be free to live in peace.

But Jesus had another mission. One day, he would bring peace from their external enemies, but first, he had to save them from their internal enemy: sin. It was this greater enemy within that they really had to fear, because that enemy made them enemies of God. And in order to save them from their sin, Jesus had to come not as a military leader, but as a Passover lamb. He lived in order to die, not so that we could be saved from our enemies, but so that we could be saved from being God’s enemies.

The same is true for us. Apart from Christ, we are all enemies of God. We have all sinned against a holy God and deserve his holy wrath. But in Christ, we have a Saviour, one who would save us from God’s wrath by paying the penalty that we deserve by dying in our place. And if we believe that Jesus died for our sins, all our sins are forgiven by God. His wrath against us is satisfied, and he reconciles us to himself as his people.

This was Christ’s ultimate mission. One day he will save us from external enemies, but first he must save us from our internal enemy. The Jews didn’t understand this, which is why Jesus ordered his apostles not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. If the masses knew that Jesus was the Christ, then they would have stopped coming to him to heal their souls and would instead have turned to him to heal their land.

Who do you say Jesus is? Do you say, with Peter, that he is the Christ of God? If you do, then you must take him as he is, not how you want him to be. We can be just like the Jews, creating a Messiah of our own liking, shaped and molded by our own expectations. We expect him to make our lives easier. We expect him to keep us from suffering. We expect him to fulfill our dreams of the good life and grant us what we want. But that’s not what Jesus came to do. He came to suffer and die at the hands of men for the sake of your sins. If we are to have Jesus, then we must take him as he is, and accept what he came to do by faith.

(2) **CHRIST-FOLLOWERS DIE TO LIVE**

Jesus calls us to faith, but that’s not the only thing he calls us to. He also calls us to follow. And if we are to follow him, then we must suffer with him. This leads to our second point: Christ-Followers Die to Live.

Have you ever spoken to a salesman before? Salesmen have a gift. They’re able to convince you that you have a problem you were never aware of, and then they convince you that what they’re selling is just the thing you need to solve that problem. They want you to buy their product, or sign up for their program, and they do that by talking on and on about all the benefits of doing so.

Salesmen love to talk, but do you know what they don’t like talking about? They don’t like talking about the cost. They like talking about what you’re going to get. They don’t like talking about what you’re going to have to give up to get it.

When it comes to sharing the gospel, we can be just like salesmen. We want unbelievers to sign up to our program called “Christianity”, and we approach it like a sales pitch. We show them that they have a problem (aka “sin”), and then we convince them that Jesus is just the thing they need to solve that problem. How do we do that? By emphasizing all the benefits that Jesus will give to them. We tell them that Jesus will forgive their sins. We tell them that Jesus can fix their marriage. We tell them that Jesus will keep them safe and provide for all their needs. We tell them that Jesus will do this and do that and make life so much better!

There’s nothing wrong with talking about the benefits, but there is something wrong when we fail to talk about the cost. We’re afraid that, if we start talking about the cost, then our sales pitch will be ruined. Why is that? Well, why does any salesman avoid talking about the cost? Because they’re not confident in the value of what they’re offering. They’re concerned that, if people truly grasped how much the product cost, then they would never buy in.

We do the same thing. We don’t tell people about the cost of following Jesus because we’re not confident in the value of what we’re offering. To our shame, we question whether Jesus is really worth it.

But Jesus never questioned. He knew with unshakeable confidence that he was worth it. Here he is in verse 23, inviting people to sign up for his program, and he doesn’t just speak plainly about the cost. He starts with it! “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.”

Jesus is plainly saying that, if you want to follow him, it’s going to cost you everything. He makes no apologies for it. He provides no qualifications. There are no sales tactics at work here. This is plain speech coming from the One who had nothing to hide. Following Jesus will cost us our very lives.

What does this look like? Jesus says in verse 23 that the one who would follow him must “deny himself”. What does that mean? When I read this phrase, I immediately assume that Jesus is saying that I must deny myself *of certain things*. I must deny myself of excessive junk food. I must deny myself of watching crude shows. I must deny myself of profane language. All this may be true, but that’s not ultimately what Jesus is saying. He says the one who would follow him mustdeny himself. Period.

We’re not just denying ourselves of *things*. We’re denying ourselves of *ourselves*. We aren’t just giving up the right to determine what we eat or watch or say. We’re giving up the right to determine our lives, to live the way that we want to. In other words, we are denying ourselves of the ability to do what we want, when we want.

This is why Jesus says that we must “lose our lives” in verse 24. When we deny ourselves, we are losing what every human being who lives apart from Christ claims to be the essence of true life. We are losing the right to do what we want, when we want.

Before I became a pastor, the world would have said that I had everything going for me. I was a lawyer, working downtown in the city’s financial district, getting my name on some high profile cases. I had the right connections, and I had the work ethic and the skill to succeed. But when God called me to pastor this little church in King City, I gave it all up in a heartbeat. Why? Because my life is not my own. It is no longer for me to do what I want, when I want. It is for Jesus to tell me to do what *he* wants, when *he* wants. That is what it means to live as a follower of Christ.

If you are to follow Jesus, you must deny yourself. You must lose your life and give it to Jesus.

But there’s more. Believe it or not, following Christ costs more than our very lives. Jesus says in verse 23 that the follower of Christ must “take up his cross daily”. Notice that Jesus doesn’t say that the follower of Christ must “die on his cross”. He must “take up his cross”. We know that the cross was one of the crudest forms of execution ever invented, and we know that Jesus eventually died on a cross. But before he was nailed to those wooden planks, Jesus had to carry his cross up the hill to the place of his execution. It was there, on the journey towards their death, that he was mocked, jeered at, and humiliated.

In other words, following Christ means being willing to suffer rejection by the world. For many of us, we can’t imagine a life of rejection. We live to be loved. Acceptance by others is what gives our life meaning. Without it, we don’t know how we would survive. But if we are to follow Christ, then we must walk the same path he walked. He said in verse 22 that he must be “rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes”. That was the way of Christ, and so it must be the way of the Christ-follower as well. Jesus didn’t just say “take up your cross once or twice”. He said “take up your cross *daily*.” The way of Christ is the way of rejection. It won’t always be so. There is coming a day when every mocking mouth will be stopped, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. But until that day comes, we must walk the way of rejection.

So why should we pay this immense cost to follow Jesus? Why should we give up our own self-determination and take on a life of rejection?

The answer is found in verse 24: “whoever would save his life will lose it”. This is the ultimate irony. Following Christ requires you to pay your life. But if you choose not to pay it and decide to save it instead, you end up losing it anyways.

What does this mean, that “whoever would save his life will lose it”? Jesus tells us in the next two verses, starting in verse 25: “For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”

If you refuse to hand your life over to Jesus and choose to save it for yourself instead, you will have some gain in this life. There is some gain to doing what you want, when you want. Who wouldn’t want to be able to hop on a private jet to fly off to vacation wherever you want, whenever you want? Who wouldn’t want to be applauded and commended by the rich, the powerful, and the influential people of this world? There is gain in saving your life for yourself.

But in verse 25, Jesus is saying that, however much you may gain in this life, it does not and cannot compare to what you will lose in the next. Even if you gained the whole world, your end profit would be a big fat zero. You could be the CEO of every company in the world, and the President of every country in the world, but *if you did not have Jesus*, then all of it would mean absolutely nothing.

How can that be? Jesus tells us in verse 26: “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.” Jesus is talking about the day to come when he returns, not as Saviour, but as Judge.

On that day, he won’t appear as he did to the apostles in our text, like just an ordinary human being. He will appear as he truly is in the kingdom of God, the awesome and mighty Son of God who is the radiance of God’s glory. Jesus promises in verse 27 that some of his apostles “will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God”, a promise that would be fulfilled immediately in verses 28-29:

“Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.”

One day we will stand before Jesus as he truly is, and he will pronounce eternal judgment on every single person who has ever lived, including you and me. And when he does, the only thing that will matter is whether he is ashamed of us or not.

If we lived this life ashamed of Jesus – meaning we refused to hand our lives over to him and chose to live for ourselves instead – then he will be ashamed of us. If we live our lives saying, “I never knew Jesus, and I never will”, then on the Day of Judgment, Jesus will say, “I never knew you, and I never will.” There are no more terrifying words than these. We need Jesus to stand with us, not against us. We need him to advocate for us, not advocate against us. We need him to say, “I died for your sins! Your penalty is paid in full! Now come and enjoy an eternity with me.” Jesus is willing to say that for anyone who trusts him as their Lord and Saviour. But if we live this life unwilling to speak up for him, then we will have shown that we never trusted him in the first place.

But if we are not ashamed of him, then he will not be ashamed of us. If we live this life standing with Jesus, then on that day, Jesus will stand with us. He will plead our case, declaring that we are innocent, because his death paid the penalty for our sins, and we will be pronounced “not guilty”.

Saving our lives and refusing to follow Christ is really a lose-lose situation. We lose the life we tried to save for ourselves, and we lose the life that Jesus died to give us. Do we really think that any of our worldly accomplishments done for our own selfish benefit will mean anything in God’s eternal kingdom? Let’s not deceive ourselves. All of it will mean nothing. The only thing that will mean anything is whether Christ stands with us as our advocate.

So are you willing to stand with Christ? Then you will have to deny yourself. You will have to take up your cross daily. You will have to die to all your own selfish plans and to the applause of the world. But that is the path to life. Christ-followers die to live. We die to the lesser life of living for ourselves, so that we can live the greater life of living for Jesus. As the Apostle Paul put it so powerfully in 2 Corinthians 5:15:

“…and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”

**CONCLUSION**

We live in a time when it is becoming increasingly difficult to stand with Jesus. The cross we have to bear daily is real. Christians lose their jobs for standing with Jesus. We are called ignorant bigots. The day is coming when we will be kept out of the professions. These are the times when we will be tempted to deny Jesus rather than deny ourselves. Doing what Jesus wants is hard. Doing what we want, when we want, is so much easier, and it comes not with rejection but with the acceptance and applause of the world.

But Jesus is worth it all. He is worth our very lives, because he gave his life for us.

Is there some area in your life today that you’ve been unwilling to give up? Maybe it’s a relationship. Maybe it’s a future goal. Maybe it’s your love of the applause of others. Maybe it’s simply your independence. Whatever it is, are you willing to give it up for Jesus? Are you willing to give it up to follow him on the path of rejection? You won’t regret it, for “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for *his* sake will save it.”