

A Jesus For One

Luke 9:18-27

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I. The Christ

II. The Cross

III. The Cost

If you've just joined us today for the first time, this is the portion of our service we give the most time to, the study of God's Word. We're a church that loves the Bible. We believe that it's not only the words of men but also the Word of God and that in it God has given us everything we need for this life.

So our normal practice is to just read through books of the Bible on Sundays and talk about what's said. This year our church is reading through and studying The Gospel of Luke.

Last week we looked at the story of one of Jesus' most famous miracles, where He fed over 5,000 people with just a few loaves of bread and a couple fish. In that we learned that Jesus has a wide scope, He cares for many people. Jesus vision and mission on earth was and is for the human race.

This week, as we're following along in the book of Luke the next section Jesus attention and focus shifts from the many to the one. What we're going to see today is that Jesus specifically cares for and each and every individual person, who they are, what they believe and where they are headed. He is a Jesus who is not only for the many but is also for the one. So my sermon title for today is, "A Jesus For One".

Let's just go ahead and kick things off and get started by reading our passage for today. Why don't you go ahead and stand with me in honor of the Bible being God's book, His special words He had written for us. I'll read the text and then pray over it.

Luke 9:18-27

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?" 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, 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."

And he said to all, "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.”

- Pastoral Declaration: This is the Word of the Lord.
- Congregational Response: Thanks Be To God.
- Pastoral Prayer

A Jesus For One. There is perhaps not another time in all of human history where we have been more exposed and become more aware of how much is out there. With technology like video, phones and the internet our view of the world has widened.

The world is a big place. Nearly 7.5 billion people live on the globe in over 196 countries speaking nearly 7,000 different languages. We live in the information age. With a click of the button we have access to more information than anyone could ever have dreamed was possible.

You want to know anything, all you gotta do is ask Siri, or Alexa, depending on which way you swing. How do you think I got those numbers? I said, “Hey Siri, how many people live on the planet?” And she answered, “7.442 billion people.”

When I graduated high school in 1996 the internet was just getting off the ground, it wasn't really available yet. If you ever wanted to find out the answer to a question like that your only option was to go to a library. And you know what you had to do there? You had to use this thing called a “card catalogue” where you would have to do this thing called “research” to find anything out. Now card catalogues are extinct. They died.

But this sense of the bigness of the world and us feeling small has always existed, even before technology. You ever felt it like say at a big concert or maybe a big convention where there are literally hundreds and hundreds of people all around you...and you just feel small? Small and insignificant.

During the period when the century turned from the 1800's to the 1900's and shortly afterward a number of significant things were happening. Some of the most powerful telescopes ever made were built and enables us to see the vastness of the universe. From that Albert Einstein developed his theory of relativity. The first major world war ensued. And a number of philosophers, like Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre began to write about a feeling of estrangement, lostness and meaninglessness in light of a vast and weary world.

Their ideas are summarized well by Donald Crosby in his book, “The Specter of the Absurd”. He says, “Strut, fret, and delude ourselves as we may, our lives are of no significance, and it is futile to seek or to affirm meaning where none can be found.”

It's in the midst of that feeling, in the midst of that experience, of feeling small, insignificant

and unimportant that Jesus speaks and says, you matter. Who you are, what you believe, how you live and what happens to you eternally matters. That's what we're talking about today. If there's one line you walk away remembering from today it's this, "You matter to Jesus." You matter. You. Specifically you as a unique individual, created in the image of God, valued in His sight, you matter.

To help us see that, hear that and learn that from Jesus I've got three points for us to walk through today that are straight from our text, "The Christ", "The Cross" and "The Cost". Let's jump into our first point for today, "The Christ".

I. The Christ

Throughout the course of our lives we will have many questions about many different kinds of things. If we are wise we will ask questions and ask good questions.

I believe this is the most important question a human being can ever ask. It's the question Jesus poses to his disciples and really to ever one of us, verse 20 "Who do you say that I am?"

Who do you say that I am? What do you think about Jesus? Who do you think He is?

Jesus and his disciples had just come off a whole day of ministering to thousands of people. It was a great crowd. Coachella status. Jesus spent all day teaching, preaching and praying for people and at the end of the day Jesus magically made some food so that they could all share this huge feast together.

Now, the next day or shortly afterward it's just Jesus and his 12 main disciples and Jesus starts up this discussion with them reflecting on the crowd and what happened. In verse 18 he ask them what the crowds are saying about him.

Now, I don't think this is Jesus being self-conscious, insecure and overly concerned about His image. This isn't Jesus stressing about how many followers and likes He has on Instagram and Facebook.

Jesus repeated taught that His miracles were simply signs, simply sign posts meant to lead people to a belief in Him as a savior. The miracles were simply a means to that end. So Jesus is wanting to know if after His sermon, His healing and His miraculous provision of food if people have decided to put their faith in Him and follow Him.

Sadly, the disciples' response about what the crowds are saying and posting online is that in large, they aren't. Instead there's all kinds of weird speculation. Like maybe he's possessed by the spirit of John the Baptist, or Elijah from the Old Testament or one of the other famous prophets. That had to be discouraging to Jesus...that they just didn't get it.

I could be wrong here, but I imagine His tone when He follows up that question asking His disciples what they think was likely a sad tone, almost like, "Is that what you guys are thinking

too?" But He wants to know. He wants to know if these guys are starting to get it and starting to believe. So He says, "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter speaks up and it's a sweet sweet powerful moment. I'm gonna read it from the account in Matthew's book. Matthew was also there and recorded more of the words that were said.

Matthew 16:16 "Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

When Peter says this Jesus is overjoyed. He's so stoked. Matthew records His response and Jesus just kind of goes off in excitement, unleashing this slur of praise to God and encouragement to Peter.

He's says:

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Jesus is stoked. So I want to take a minute for us to ask the question, "Why was Jesus so stoked?" Why was it such a big deal to Jesus that Peter recognized and believed that Jesus was, "the Christ"?

First off, Christ is not Jesus last name. It's a title meaning "anointed one" or "savior".

Back in the old times of Jewish religion whenever they'd crown someone as king or install a priest or officially recognize a prophet of God they'd have this ceremony where they would pour a whole jar of oil over the dude's head "anointing" him. Oil was a sign of God's Holy Spirit so it was a symbolic ceremony saying this person has been selected and set apart by God for this special service.

Now what happened is that God's people had not had a real king in a long long time, hundred of years and no prophets either. That's why it was such a big deal when John the Baptist came on the scene as a prophet. There hadn't been one in hundreds of years. On top of it the Jewish people had been ruled over and oppressed and by various kingdoms for all of that time and longer, really ever since their temple was first destroyed and they were carried off into slavery in Babylon about 600 years before this.

What helped the people and enabled them to hang on to hope is that one day God would send a Christ, an anointed savior who would deliver them. They held on to several passages of prophecy from the Bible which said a Christ would come.

So now maybe you get it, why it as such a big deal that Peter said this and why Jesus was so stoked. Jesus came to be the Christ. Peter recognized that and that was a big deal. What He didn't recognize is that Jesus didn't come just to be a savior from corrupt political

governments, but that He came to save the soul, He came anointed by God to save specific people.

We'll talk about that more in our next point, but before we do I want us to try and put ourselves in this place, in the story and hear Jesus ask us this question, "Who do you say that I am?" Who is Jesus to you? Do you see Him just a good teacher? Or some ancient wonder worker? Or do you see Him as the Savior and see yourself as a person who needs saving?

God cares what you think. You are not some meaningless cog lost in the midst of wide wide world and vast universe. Jesus knows that we feel estrangement from God. And that's why He came. To be the Christ. To save us. And to connect us to the God of heaven and earth. You matter to Jesus. More than you could ever know.

In the next scene and discussion Luke inserts Jesus' forecast and prediction of what He would do to show us how much we matter to Him, so let's transition to our second point, "The Cross".

II. The Cross

What we have here in verse 22 is one of the clearest statements from Jesus that not only shows that He knew what was going to happen to Him in dying on the cross, but that it was His plan and purpose all the way along.

Now people are skeptical about this prediction of Jesus for a couple of reasons. Some say Luke is writing after everything happened so it's just him going back and trying to make Jesus sound and seem all special and supernatural, that He knows the future. Others think Jesus couldn't have said this because if He did then the disciples would surely have understood and not been so confused, scared, abandon Jesus and go into hiding when He was crucified.

A couple things on that. Besides the fact that Luke was a medical doctor and says at the beginning of his book that his main concern was for truth and accuracy according to what actually was said and happened...besides that I think there's both a human nature and human plausibility thing going on here.

On human plausibility, real simple, people who die do not come back to life three days later. That's not even on the radar for these guys as something that could even happen. So they probably assume Jesus is just speaking figuratively about some big battle they are going to have to fight, and they'll take some loses but rise victorious. That's one thing going on.

Here's the other, the human nature thing. Many of the Bible prophesies about this Christ Savior who would come talk about Him suffering. For example, Isaiah 53, which was like one of the main Christ prophecy passages recognized by everyone says that this savior would be, "wounded for our transgressions...and crushed for our iniquities (Is 53:5)." So there's this sense in which the disciples should have known and that we should know...that the way of salvation is the way of suffering.

And that's what gets us in our human nature. Because we don't like suffering. Understandably. Nobody wants to suffer. We don't think of success or the way of achievement as being through a path of suffering. We want the least painful, least stressful, least difficult path to salvation and happiness.

But that's not the way of the Christ. The way up for Jesus is the way down. The way to victory is the way of defeat. The way to resurrection is the way of condemnation. The way to salvation is the way of suffering.

It's just hard for us to get our minds around. Even if we admit we need a savior, that we need a hero, we want a strong hero, a mighty one, not one who suffers and is rejected by the leaders and killed. That doesn't make sense. We want a Goliath, not a David.

What we fail to see is that it takes far more strength to endure suffering than it does to simply be impervious to it.

So Jesus says, as the Christ, in order to be the Christ savior...He's gotta die. He doesn't say specifically how, He just says He'll be killed. But in the next section He'll allude to it when He starts talking about crosses.

Jesus died on a cross. Have you ever wondered why? And I don't mean the theology of it, that Jesus had to die in our place in order to pay the eternal price to God for our sins. That's true. But I mean, why die on a cross?

There have been many forms of capital punishment throughout the ages. We've got lethal injection and electric chairs in our country. Other means have been shooting squads, beheading, hanging. But God picked a cross.

One of the things the Bible teaches us is that God specifically chose the time period in history that He sent Jesus His Son into the world. I think one of those reasons is because it was the time period of the cross.

Experts say that crucifixion is hands down the most painful and most drawn out ways to die. I've recently had six screws attach a metal plate to my arm and I can testify, that hurts. I can't imagine being nailed to a cross. Crucifixion would normally take days because the way it works is that a person hangs on the nails in their wrist and feet and at first are able to push and pull up to get air. But as time goes by they get weaker and weaker until they can no longer get up to get a breath and you die of suffocation.

So I think one of the reasons is God wanted us to know how much we matter to Him in that He would undergo the most painful ways conceivable to die for us. And there's also some other interesting things.

The story of the Bible says that things first went wrong with the human race in the beginning, losing life at a tree. The promise of the Gospel is that humans are given new life and made

right because Jesus was bound to a piece of wood from a tree. On the cross, God nailed Himself to earth and the plight of human beings.

The goal of cross was to bring God's wayward children to home. To overcome the distance created by sin and to make a way that people might come to know God as a loving Father, sons and daughters brought home in loving relationship with Him.

It may not be coincidence that the first movement of every baby is to reach out their arms in crucifix form, looking for connection with their mother and father.

The cross. Christ is the Christ of the cross. It's at the cross where we see Jesus strong, in His glory, suffering for us in our place so that be forgiven and healed and brought near to God. The cross is our symbol. The symbol of our Christian faith and identity.

We don't get to Jesus apart from the cross. So the question before us today is, "Have we laid down our lives at the foot of the cross?" Our church name comes from a passage in the Bible in 1 Corinthians 2:2 which says, "I have resolved to know nothing except Christ and Him crucified."

Do you know the Christ of the cross? On the cross Jesus stretched out His arms saying I love you this much. Do you know the love of Christ today? Do you know how much you matter to Him? If He was willing to give up His life for you there is nothing He would not do to show you His love. You are loved and valued by God. You matter to Jesus.

Today if you're wondering if God still loves you, if He still cares about you and your life, you have no further to look than to look at the cross. Look at the cross and see His sorrow and love flow mingled down for you.

Well, we have one last point for today and I'll just warn you, it's not an easy point. It's one I'd rather not preach on because it's where Jesus says if we really want all of His goodness, what He offers, then we're going to have to die on a cross too. So here we go, our third and final point for today, "The Cost."

III. The Cost

Let me re-read verses 23-25 just to get it fresh in our heads.

Luke 9:23-25:

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?"

Verse 23 is the very first verse from the Bible I ever memorized when first became a Christian in 1996. Which by the way is a good thing to do. Psalm 119:11 tells us it's really good for us to memorize God's Word.

The reason this was the first verse I memorized as a Christian is because I realized what it required in order to really become a Christian and it wasn't easy. What Jesus says here is that it literally costs us everything.

Normally when a person was crucified they would do it outside the city gates and make the people being crucified carry their cross out to the site on their backs. Jesus did it for part of the way, until He stumbled because He was so weak after being whipped, so this guy named Simone of Cyrene carried it the rest of the way for Him.

What Jesus is saying is that believing in and following Him as Savior requires a dying to self every single day. It requires nailing the untrue, sinful things that have attached themselves to our person to a cross. What Paul calls in Romans 8:13 putting to death the misdeeds of the body.

Now we need to understand this. Because denying and dying to self does not mean that we are all supposed to become these sort of zombies for Jesus who don't have any unique sense of self, personhood, interests, talents and life. Jesus isn't into cookie cutter Christians who all look, act and dress the same way all doing the same things. That's not what He's talking about here.

What He's getting at is that every person is created in the image and likeness of God, created with some special and unique aspect of God that reflects Him and is best enjoyed when we are in healthy relationship with Him. And that's the core of our being, our true self, the most true thing about each and every one of us.

But what happens in life is that we begin to add things to that self. Our own wanderings and unhealthy desires, the hurtful and harmful things done to us, the pain of living life in a fallen world...it just piles and piles on. And in that we lose our truest sense of self, we adapt and develop this false self...both out of a desire to protect ourselves and a desire to fix ourselves. Either way it's a false self, it's not who we really are.

I've used it before but I've just got to use it again today, Rich Plass & Jim Coefield say this in their book, "Relational Soul: Moving From False Self To Deep Connection",

"The false self is an image we create. Most of us create an image that is socially appropriate. As a result we receive affirmation and praise. Yet at it's core, our construct is still an image, a facade. It is foreign to our truest identity as being created in the image of God.

But it's really hard to recognize something is false when we've spent our entire life creating it. Over the course of years it becomes our 'me', the image we want others to see.

In our desperation each of us forms psychological defenses to protect ourselves from exaggerated shame, fear and guilt. We do this to feel safe and secure, because we are alone and no longer trust God completely.

We are masters at creating an image, but we are novices at recognizing and repenting of the image we have created. Thus we are caught in patterns of mistrust with God and others. And when our identity is meshed in our image, the soul is in dangers of even greater self-absorption and self-reliance. Our situation is far more desperate than dealing with a few sins.”

This false self is what Jesus says we must deny and daily crucify. And everything hangs on it.

The parallel passage in Matthew says it this way, Matthew 16:26 “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”

Everything hangs on us recognizing this false self, denying and putting it on the cross. We have one life to live and everything around is telling us to try to gain the world with it. Do this, do that, become this, become that. We look here and there and everywhere for hope and happiness and we’re just piling on false self junk onto our true self.

1 John 2:15-16 says it this way, “ Do not love the world or the things in the world. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.”

This is our daily battle friends. You see it’s not just a one time thing. That’s why Jesus says it’s a daily thing. Because it’s all around us. Everywhere we look in the world.

Here’s my confession friends, family. I fall in love with the world. Lust of the flesh. Desires of the eyes. Pride in possessions. Every one of them. Sex, money, stuff, an easy comfortable life. All of it. And here’s the thing. Every time I start to buy into those lies it just brings death to my soul. There’s a cost to sin and it’s the cost of the soul.

John Calvin says it this way in this newly printed “A Little Book On The Christian Life”. There’s a chapter called “Self-Denial”. In it he says this,

“Once self-denial has occupied the heart, it crowds out the evils of pride, arrogance, and pretentiousness as well as greed, lust, gluttony, cowardice, and everything else that is born of self-love. On the other hand, where self-denial does not reign, the worst vices thrive shamelessly.”

You see we need what Thomas Chalmers called, “the explosive power of a greater affection.” You can’t stop trying to sin. We just need our hearts filled with a greater desire and joy, the love of God and His people.

The hard thing is that to get there we have to follow Jesus and the way of Jesus. The way where up is down. The way where the path to victory is accepting defeat. The way where new life is the way to death. Picking up our crosses.

It's ain't cheap or easy. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called other ways, "cheap grace" where we try to get the good things of God without forgiveness, without repentance, without confession and without Jesus.

Here's what I'm calling you to today...It doesn't seem smart as a pastor who likes that our church is growing and doesn't really want to offend anyone and have them leave...But like Jesus says in verse 26 if we're ashamed of Him and His words then there's really no hope for us and there is eternal consequences.

So I'm standing here banking my own life on Jesus words and calling you to today...you need to die. We've got to stop living for ourselves and die. We got to deny ourselves in pursuit of the greater glory and start nailing all the sinful false self desires to the cross.

Our lives are not our own they belong to God. Now I'm going to upset some of you, so just know that but I think it needs to be said...

Some of you are so busy with all the stuff in your life don't have time for real biblical community to actually love other people.

Some of you think of your house as your house and not a mission outpost where the hospitality, kindness and grace of God's Spirit might be experienced.

Some of you don't think you're racist but you're not willing to actually get to know someone who's skin color is not the same and what they've lived.

Some of you think of your job as just a place to make money or further your career instead of a mission assignment where you get to interact with people in places I can't even get into as a pastor.

Some of you think of your money as your money, instead of mission ammunition that can blow big holes in the gates of hell.

Some of you just want comfort and ease and don't want to sacrifice anything instead of seeing yourself as a servant of Christ who has called you to lay down your life and serve others.

Hear me today, I'm not saying these things to try to be mean. I simply don't think I would be a faithful servant of Jesus words today if I didn't press us a bit where it might hurt.

And here's the thing. We've all failed at all of this and none of us will ever be perfect at it. That's why Jesus actually died on the cross for us, so we don't have to.

I think the reason Jesus is so bold here to call each of us to die to ourselves is because He cares so much for us. Jesus doesn't want anyone to lose their soul. Jesus doesn't want anyone to be sent to hell by Him and His angels when He returns. Jesus wants you to experience life, not death and have joy in and through Him.

Jesus cares about you and the direction of your life. You matter to Jesus. Each and every one of us must decide individually whether we're going to live our lives for Jesus or we're going to live our lives for our selves. There's really only two choices.

May God help us to choose life and be willing to give up everything to gain it. It's a high cost, but worth every penny.

Conclusion

Well, let's conclude. The Christ, The Cross and The Cost. A Jesus For One. You matter to Him.

One of the ways we as a church deny ourselves and pick up our crosses and follow Jesus is that each week after hearing about the good news of Jesus from His book is that we respond by coming to one of the tables throughout the room and there at those tables what we're really doing is coming to the cross of Christ.

We take a piece of bread as Jesus perfect life and we dip it in the wine or the juice as His blood shed on the cross and by doing that what we're saying is Jesus, you are the Christ, you are my savior, my life belongs to you, once again I give up and surrender everything to you.

So we're going to do that. I know this week's sermon has been a little heavier than normal. Preacher's literally joke and call this kind of sermon "a go die" sermon. The good news is that when we die to ourselves we serve a God who raises us to life.

Let's prepare our hearts to respond, expecting Him to do that and work in us by reading some words of confession and followed by some words of pardon and assurance. Why don't you stand with me and read these words out loud.

Confession

Lord, we confess we have lived for ourselves and not for you and that it kills our souls. Forgive us and help us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow you.

Assurance

Jesus is the Christ who died on the cross for all of our sins and rose again. He saves our souls, gives us new life and an eternal inheritance in His kingdom.