



Luke 9:18-36

“Who’s Worth Listening To?”

December 1, 2013
First Sunday in Advent

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“Following Christ from City Center”

VI. C, C', B': LUKE 9:18-22, 23-27, 28-36

"WHO'S WORTH LISTENING TO?"

C. 9:18-22 THE IDENTITY OF JESUS CLARIFIED: CROSS AND RESURRECTION.

Mk. 8:27-33. Omits 6:46-8:26, Brings Feeding, Confession Together

1) v.18a Introduction: Jesus At Prayer (Setting For Fresh Divine Revelation).

18 Jesus prays *Now it happened that as he was praying alone* Scene Opens In Prayer; Spiritual, Not Geographical Setting
the disciples were with him; Their Job = *With*, Jesus' Prayer (3:21, 5:16, 6:12, 11:1, 22:40-41, 44, 46, 23:46)
Jesus Lives In Radical Dependence/Communion

Impressions **2) vv.18b-19 First Question: Public Opinion.** Same Crowds (9:11:12, 16) At Feeding
and he asked them, "Who do *the* crowds say that I am?" Question 1: A Public Opinion Poll

19 Prophets And they answered, "John the Baptist; Peached Kingdom/Repentance, Prophetic Categories
but others say, Elijah; Miracle Working Prophet, What Crowds Say
and others, that one of *the old* prophets *has risen*." 8:25 Disciples, Echo of Herod: 9:7-9
Prophet/Spokesman Not Adequate, Not One Among Many

Challenge? **2') v.20 Second Question: Personal Interview.** Political Hopes Not Enough
20 And he *said* to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Question 2: A Personal Interview
Deliverer/Messiah = *Anointed Of God*

Confession And Peter answered, "The Christ (Messiah) *of God*." 1:32-33, 69, 2:11, 26 What Peter Says
Herod Missed It, Son Of David, Rules Messianic Era

1') v.21 Conclusion: First Passion Prediction: A Messiah Who Suffers And Is Raised.

Correction 21 But he rebuked *and commanded* them to tell *this* to no one, (22) *saying*, 4:35, 39, Story Not Yet Complete
Suffer "The Son of man *must* suffer many things, Dan. 7:13, 3rd Person, What Jesus Says About Himself
Rejection and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, Ps. 118:22, Unified Jerusalem Leaders
Cross and be killed, p.v. (passive voice) = By Romans, Temple Leaders
Resurrection and *on* the third day *be* raised. Hos. 6:2, 1 Cor. 15:4, Cross & Resurrection (p.v. = By God)
Passion Predictions: 9:55, 17:25, 18:31-33

C' 9:23-27 THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION APPLIED TO THE DISCIPLES.

5 Radical Sayings = What Discipleship Means, Mk. 8:34-9:1

1) v.23 Introduction: Call To Discipleship And Self-Denial For All Hearers. 5 Images:

23 Church Makes Disciples And he said *to ALL*, Dead To World, Walk A Different Road **Execution** (1)
"If any man would come after me, Come After Three Imperatives
let him deny himself Deny Not Stuff But Self
and take up his cross *daily* Take Up Cross Bar, Long Haul
and follow me. Follow (continually)
Cross Reserved For Slaves/Terrorists

2) v.24 Whoever: On Losing And Saving Life (Paradox). **Battlefield** (2)

24 Decision For whoever would save his life Save Life Conform, 6:22, 18:29
will lose it; Lose It
and whoever loses his life for my sake, Lose Life Focus
he will save it. Save It Long-Term Thinking
Not Modern Self-Actualization

3) v.25 What? Central Question About The Next, New World.

25 Possibility Of Loss For what does it profit a man Central
if he gains the whole world *and loses or* forfeits *himself*? Question **Marketplace** (3)
True Fulfillment

2') v.26 Whoever: On Being Ashamed Of Me & My Words. **Courtroom** (4)

26 Judgment For whoever is ashamed Not A Private, Inward Matter
of me and of my words, (1st person) Ashamed Now: Loss Of Status
of him will **the Son of man** (3rd person)
be ashamed Ashamed Later: Loss Of Future
Return when he comes in *his* glory *and* the glory of *the* Father *and of* the holy angels. Embraces All Reality
Re-evaluate Present Commitments

1') v.27 Conclusion: Promise Of Seeing The Kingdom (As Preview). End = **New World** (5)

27 Kingdom of God *But* I tell you truly, Not Parousia But Preview
there are some standing here Kingdom Anticipated In Jesus Transfiguration
who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God." Mark's *with power* Is Omitted

B' 9:28-36 JESUS' FUTURE GLORY REVEALED IN HIS PRESENT TRANSFIGURATION.

1) v.28 Introduction: Jesus On The Mountain In Prayer (2 Peter 1:12-18). //Mk. 9:2-10

28 Now **about eight days** after these sayings
he took with him Peter and John and James,
and **went** up on the mountain **to pray**.
Jesus Is Unique, Worthy Of Sustained Attention
Idiom: Inclusive Rendering Of A Week, God's Presence As Glory
5:10, 8:51
v.18, //3:1-22, 2nd Prayer Scene, Revelation Of Suffering, O Glory

2) v.29 First Manifestation: Jesus Transfigured. Ex. 34:29-35, Jesus Is Divinely Arrayed

29 And **as he was praying**,
the appearance of his countenance was altered,
and his raiment became dazzling white.
Prayer Mediates Presence, Through Jesus Prayers They See!
Repeated Emphasis, Prayer As Context For Religious Experience In Luke
p.v. Something Happened To Him: Heaven Descended
Dan. 12:3, The Glory Of God Engulfs Jesus' Humanity
Anticipates Jesus' Divine Vindication In Resurrection/Ascension

3) vv.30-31 Appearance Of Moses And Elijah.

30 *And behold,*
31 *two men* talked with him, Moses and Elijah
who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure (Gk. *exodos*),
which he was to accomplish (fulfill) at Jerusalem.
Jesus Fulfills Their Roles (water, food, healings, raise dead, rejections)
Both Had Mysterious Ends
24:4, 27, 44, Dt. 18:15-18 Moses, Mal. 3:1, 4:4-5 Elijah
Departure in Cross/Resurrection
The Holy and Rebellious City

4) v.32 Center: Awakening Of The Disciples, Faithless // Gethsemane.

32 *Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep,*
and when they wakened they saw his glory
and the two men who stood with him.
22:45, Out of Touch

3') v.33 Disappearance Of Moses And Elijah.

33 *And as the men were parting from him,* Peter said to Jesus,
"MASTER, it is well that we are here;
let us make three booths,
one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"
—not knowing what he said.
Peter Tries To Control/Manage The Holy
Disappearance of Moses and Elijah
We Cannot Control The Holy, Prolong The Appearance
Tabernacles Feast, Peter Advocates Equal Billing
Pluralism? Not Three Booths But One Voice!
Ignorance Noted
Discipleship Means Following, Not Stopping

2') vv.34-35 Second Manifestation: Divine Affirmation Of Jesus. Jesus' Words = God's

34 *And as he said this,* a cloud *came and* overshadowed them;
and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.
35 And a voice came out of the cloud, *saying,*
God's Call "This is my Son, *my Chosen*;
listen to him!"
Dan. 7:13, Ex. 13:21-22, 24:15-18
God's Presence As Cloud (Conceals/ Reveals)
Terror At The Numinous
Dt. 18:15, Political Endorsement! 2x Divine Speaking
Ps. 2:7, Is. 41:9. 42:1, 43:1, 44:1 // Baptism 3:22, No Equal Billing!
2 Cor. 3:18, 4:4, Acts 3:22-23, Listen To Him, Not Fickle Public Opinion

1') v.36 Conclusion: Jesus Alone.

36 And *when the voice had spoken,*
Jesus was found alone.
And they kept silence
and told no one **in those days** anything of what they had seen.
He Is The Focus!
Saw What Could Not Yet Be Understood
Not All Is To Be Blabbed!

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 9:18-22, 23-27, 28-36

At the center of the essay (C. 9:18-22 // C' 9:23-27) are two closely coordinated thought units. Together they highlight the two key themes of 9:1-50 which are Christology (i.e. Who is Jesus?) and Discipleship (i.e. What does it mean to be his follower?). *Son of man* is a title in both units (v.21b // v.26b). Jesus marks out the path his apprentices must follow. He sets them against the world, and this means suffering.

The identity of Jesus is clarified in C. 9:18-22 which has a ring structure (1-2-2'-1') with two questions at the center: 1) v.18b, “Who do *the crowds* say that I am?” 2) v.20a, “But who do *you* say that I am?” The crowds place Jesus in the prophetic tradition. Since, like John the Baptist, he preaches repentance, it fits. Since, like Elijah, he heals lepers and raises the dead, is this a better choice? A third option is more general, “one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” *Arisen* is a metaphor for *another of the same type at a later time*, not reincarnation. To the crowds Jesus is the next spokesman, as in 7:16, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” “And God has visited his people.” An answer to the second question is given by Peter, “You are the Messiah of God,” which is a different category. Jesus is the ultimate Jewish politico who banishes oppressors and restores the nation (Acts 1:6). The frame (1. v.18a // 1' v.21) gives the source and content of Jesus’ obedience. Luke highlights the prayer of Jesus (e.g. 3:21, 5:16, 6:12, 11:1, 22:40-41, 44, 46, 23:46) since prayer is the context for religious experience and divine revelation. Jesus is not an independent operator but radically dependent. Here he receives knowledge of his future and courage to embrace it. He must *suffer many things, be rejected and killed*, then *be raised*. This is not the typical Messianic resume. That Peter is *rebuked* and silenced means his answer is as inadequate as the crowds. Jesus fulfills and goes beyond inherited Jewish categories. He has his own kingdom politics.

The next thought unit (C' 9:23-27) clarifies the cost of discipleship in five statements arranged in a ring pattern with a question at the center (1-2-3-2'-1'), “For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” The unit opens and closes with brief introductions, “And he said to all” (v.23) // “But I tell you truly” (v.27). The phrases “for my sake” (v.24b) and “of me and my words” (v.26b) stand in parallel in 2//2'. The first setting is an execution scene (v.23) where Jesus’ cross becomes an image for two types of daily suffering: 1) the denial of the self’s deep desire for self-enhancement, 2) the voluntary embrace of suffering for the good of others. Every day is Good Friday for disciples. The second is a battlefield where those who break rank are the first killed. But to lose ones life in and for Jesus is to save it (v.24). The next venue is the marketplace with its P & L statements (v.25). The world’s goods and the self are not comparable commodities. The question is not, What do I control in the short term? but, What kind of person am I becoming in a world where only God knows true worth? The fourth image is a courtroom where Jesus claims or rejects me (v.26) based on my testimony. If I did not stand for him and his words when on trial, why should he not be ashamed of me when I stand before the great tribunal? In the final statement, a benefit is promised. There are glimpses of glory this side of the kingdom (v.27).

The transfiguration fulfills the promise of v.27 for an inner circle. The format is a 7:1 ring pattern (1-2-3-4-3'-2'-1') with the sleep and waking of the disciples at the center (v.32). The phrases “Now about eight days after” (1. v.28) and “in those days” (1' v.36d) are inclusions. Visual and aural theophanies (2. v.29 // 2' vv.34-35) are in parallel, as are the arrival and withdrawal of Moses and Elijah (3. vv.30-31 // 3' v.33). Again, prayer is the setting for religious experience. Jesus is prepared for his soon exodus, and because God says of him *my Son, my Chosen*, he’s the one we listen to. His identity forms the shape of our obedience as his apprentices. We who are asleep must be awakened to who he is and listen.

WHO'S WORTH LISTENING TO?

*“For what does it profit a man
if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”*

LUKE 9 : 2 5

Jesus' warns against mindless consumerism and soul-deadening materialism.

William Borden finished high school in Chicago in 1904. As heir to the Borden Dairy estate, he was wealthy. As a graduation present, his parents gave him a trip round the world, which meant steamships and trains. As he traveled through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, he felt a growing burden for hurting people and wrote home, "I'm going to give my life to prepare for the mission field," and wrote in the back of his Bible, "No reserves." During his college years at Yale, he became a leader in the Christian community. An entry in his personal journal from those years simply says, "Say no to self and yes to Jesus every time."

As a freshmen Borden started a small group that gave birth to a movement. By the end of his first year, 150 freshmen were meeting for weekly Bible study and prayer. As a senior, 1,000 of Yale's 1,300 students were meeting in such groups. Something similar happened at Wake Forest in the early 70's; it's why I'm here today.

Borden strategized with others to make sure every student on campus heard the gospel; he was often seen ministering to the downtrodden of New Haven. Once he narrowed his missionary call to the Kansu people in China, Borden never wavered.

Upon graduation, Borden wrote two more words in the back of his Bible: "No retreats." In keeping that commitment, Borden turned down several lucrative jobs, enrolling in seminary instead. Upon graduation, he immediately went to Egypt to learn Arabic because of his goal to work with Muslims in China. While in Egypt, he contracted spinal meningitis. Within a month, 25-year-old William Borden was dead.

Prior to death, Borden had written two more words in his Bible. Underneath the words "No reserves" and "No retreats" he wrote, "No regrets."¹

¹ *Daily Bread* (12-31-1988); *The Yale Standard* (Fall 1970); Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Borden of Yale* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1988).

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That we are telling his story a century later shows the impact of Borden’s life. Someone grabbed his attention, and in response he listened. Borden lived by three principles: *No reserves; no retreats; no regrets*, and one Rule of Life: *Say no to self and yes to Jesus every time*. They are as good a commentary I know on two of Jesus’ sobering statements that are before us today. Note that his use of the word *whoever* shows the audience is universal. He speak to his disciples and the crowds with one voice.² Jesus sets the knowledge of who he is above every concern:

“For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life *for my sake* will find it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”

It is part of Christian piety to admire such statements because they come from Jesus, but do we believe them enough to rearrange our life around them as true insight? Was Jesus spouting spiritual platitudes so years later we could paint them on plaques to be hung as inspirational reminders, or was he telling us *how it is in this world*. If it’s all about saving and enhancing my life, about me and my goals and desires and security, then the self turns in on itself in a tight little knot. This what a lost life looks like because we were designed for more. But to lose my life, to freely surrender to Jesus’ comprehensive supervision is, in the backwards logic of the kingdom of God, to secure it forever, precisely because it’s linked to him, and he alone has abundant, death-defying, resurrection life! What he has, we need, and he’s the only one with the credentials. The future is his; he is the world’s future as revealed in his transfiguration, which is a preview of his resurrection which finally establishes him as the one worth listening to before all others. Jesus is the only one God stamped fully approved: *my Son, my Chosen, the one who shines in glory, the crucified and Risen One, the one the Jews were waiting for, the one who fulfills the law and the prophets by catching their goodness up into something greater, the one who now rules history as Lord and stands at history’s end as its judge*. The accolades and promises concerning him are many, and they are conveniently summarized in the brevity of the Apostles’ Creed. And Jesus, whatever you presently think of him, says there is a path to lose your life in yourself and thus lose it permanently, and there is an alternative way to lose your life in a way that saves it; and after all- when you think of it- your life is all you have. At death all the stuff

² 9:18-22 is directed to the disciples alone, but that vv.23-27 is for the disciples and the crowds as indicated by Luke’s explicit, “And he said *to all...*,” as confirmed by the repeated *whoever* in v.24 // v.26.

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goes back in the box; what goes with you is you, the self you have become, an accumulation of your Yes's and No's to God's grace.

But let's admit what we all know; Jesus' logic is counter-intuitive and against the our world's default way of thinking. It's a minority report based on two questions none can avoid: Given that I have a life, *What matters?* And secondly, *Where shall I invest it?* Jesus announces to whoever's listening that it's not the baggage we accumulate that matters, whether money or education or achievements or experiences or privileges or power- the stuff that shows up in resumes and obituaries; it's what we become along the way, and what we most need- which is to become a new kind of person- can only be gained in the company of Jesus and his followers in the school of discipleship.³ To gain the whole world, as Jesus said, then lose your life to God's just judgment because you totally missed the point, is not a good deal! Instead of what is ephemeral and passing, Jesus invites us to ground our lives in what will endure through history and into a heaven that eventually opens up into the kingdom of God and the healing of all creation, and that is a trusting relationship with him, and through him with the Father and the Spirit. Jesus comes to heal our relationship with God; he invites us into a circle of love and life that is the Holy Trinity, and to show how far he's willing to go to draw us back, the Innocent one- freely embraces the worst we can do to him out of hatred and ignorance as the full weight of human sin and rebellion torture and crush him. The governments and the faith and the mobs converged to kill Jesus. This is who we are. And what does he do? He surrenders in the promise they cannot stop him or his movement. The outline is given in verse 21 from his lips, "The Son of man *must suffer* many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed," and then an action only God could do which is why it's in the passive voice, "and on the third day *be raised.*" Jesus cannot be stopped; he will have his way with out world. He wants it all back, and he'd like for you to be included in the package!

The great promise of this faith is that we get to know the God of holy love who made us and who pursues us daily, and the burden of this faith that makes it both intellectually and morally offensive, is that we claim the truth of God has been revealed to us as nowhere else and that what in other religions that does not line up

³ A book I return to again and again is Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teaching On Discipleship* (San Francisco, CA: Harper SanFrancisco, 2006), also Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006).

with Jesus is not from God. We didn't make this faith up; we didn't find it because we were diligent and creative, so good and noble and sincere and worthy. No; it walked onto the stage of history without asking anyone's permission in order to put its truth and promises on display. Jesus is God great interruption, and either he commands your attention, or he does not; either you listen to him as God's voice, or you find other voices more appealing.

Partial And Full Identity (vv.18-22)

More than the other gospels, Luke presents Jesus as a man of prayer. At his baptism, in regular retreats to the wilderness,⁴ and before choosing the twelve Luke highlights Jesus' prayer. It is Jesus' prayer that gives rise to the questions of verses 18 through 20, and it is Jesus' prayer on the mountain that is the occasion for the transfiguration. We might say that *the outside* of Jesus' ministry was his travel, his preaching, his entourage, his healings and exorcisms- things you could observe, but that *the inside* was prayer, a constant dependence on the One he trusted as *Abba/Father*. At every turning point, and the first announcement of the cross is surely one of those, we find Jesus praying. It kept him in touch with the other world out of which he lived. In prayer he reported in and received fresh instructions and resources.

In Luke prayer is often associated with religious phenomena and energies from beyond. At his baptism the Spirit descends; when he prays over bread and fish they multiply; in prayer the revelation of his destiny as the one who will die and rise is revealed; in prayer on the mountain his whole being is immersed in God's glory; Old Testaments saints appear out of heaven to prepare him for what's ahead; the cloud that both conceals and reveals God's presence envelopes the disciples, and the Father's voice is heard. Prayer is the place where communion is established, where guidance is received, where fresh experience of God is nurtured. It's an opening into another world that occasionally becomes visible. If it was essential to Jesus, how can we be his people without it? It is humility and courage combined in one activity. Prayer is also the place where we learn to ask important questions. After the prayer of verse 18 Jesus was full of questions, "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?" "Who do you say I am?"

It's not so much that the answers they gave were wrong as that they were

⁴ 4:42, 5:16.

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partial. The category in which most of the people understood Jesus was *prophet*, the next in a line of messengers who spoke God’s Word. But how do you account for the displays of divine power that operate through him in healings and exorcisms and miracles of nature? The word on the street was that Jesus was empowered by the same spirit of one of the prophets, maybe even John the Baptist, only recently martyred. This is not an argument for reincarnation. It’s a way to account for the fact that unusual powers are operative in this man Jesus. He’s a prophet from God who mediates truth and power from the other world. That’s what the polls revealed, “Who do the crowds think of me?” I like the fact that Jesus engaged the needs of people before he gave a theological exam. You didn’t have to understand him perfectly or have the right doctrine to receive help, then or now. He interacts with us; we then try to figure out who he is. Like the Lone Ranger, he shows up out of nowhere, takes care of the bad guys, and when he leaves with Tonto in a blur to the cry of “Hi, Ho, Silver, away!” the townspeople ask, “Who was that masked man?”

But then it got personal. The disciples had heard and seen a lot by now, and what was their conclusion thus far, “But who do *you* say that I am?” Peter spoke up for the rest, “God’s Anointed One, the Messiah of God.”⁵ The one to whom the Scriptures point, the king who finally restores us as a nation. Peter is a step beyond the crowds, but Jesus does not let it stop there. He’s not just about power and will not be trapped by political dreams of greatness. He’s about something much bigger. He’s about to enact an event through which the world will be offered a chance to see and know the depth of God’s love for this lost and rebellious world. But for now it remains a secret for insiders, verse 21, “But he 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.’” Yes, Jesus is the source of marvelous healing and liberating power. A true prophet. Yes, in him the historic hopes of Israel are brought into focus. Messiah. But what he says of himself, a revelation that came in prayer, is that power will be laid aside. Jesus will trust the Father as he takes into himself the hatred and misunderstanding and violence of this world. Only then, after suffering and death, can he be properly vindicated in a one-time, one-man-only event: bodily resurrection and convincing appearances. Ours is a Savior who freely embraces the worst about us.

⁵ For a summary of research on Peter’s confession, see Darrell Bock, *Who is Jesus? Linking the Historical Jesus With The Christ of Faith* (New York, NY: Howard, 2012), Chapter 7, “Jesus’ Declaration at Caesarea Philippi,” by Michael Wilkins, 93-102.

In a BBC documentary on Jesus, the presenter Jeremy Bowen intoned:

"The important thing is not what he was or what he wasn't; the important things is what people believe him to have been. A massive world wide religion, numbering more than two billion people follows his memory; that's pretty remarkable, 2,000 years on."⁶

The patronizing comments of Bowen could not be more wrong. Who Jesus is and what he did is the foundation of classic Christianity. In the Scriptures, in the Creeds, in our architecture and in our hymns and testimonies we proclaim who Jesus is: the Messiah of the Jews and the Son of the living God who stands in opposition to all paganisms- ancient and modern, and all syncretisms- then and now, and all systems that do not lead through him to the Father. To the church are given the treasures of divine revelation, and as we display the treasures, the Holy Spirit illumines people to confess Jesus Christ as Lord, receive his benefits, and begin their long journey as his followers along with all the other stumbling followers.

In his move to place Christianity alongside all the other religions because he believes- with many of his peers, that they're all man-made, thus merely sociological, Bowen misses what Jesus said about himself. He accepted the titles Prophet and Messiah and modified them with fresh news of his coming suffering and resurrection. He accepted God's accolades as *my Son, my Chosen*. He spoke of himself as the judge of all when he returned *in his glory*. It's what he first said about himself that matters, and only secondarily what others said about him.

The church is an imperfect container for the treasures of divine revelation, and too many in our day miss the treasure because the vessel is so much less than what it contains. But how could it be otherwise? God doesn't have much to work with, does he? Just folk like us. From Pope Francis all the way to local pastors like me, the raw materials are compromised and bent out of shape, often to the point of public failure; we crack and crumble. The perfection of the church so the container matches the treasure is not present but future. To use another image, one day the bride will no longer wear rags; I'm told she will be beautiful indeed. Jesus' glory, shown on the mountain, shall suffuse and permeate us all in love.

Against the backdrop of all the religious options of the world, then and now,

⁶ PreachingToday.com search under Mt. 16:13-28.

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Jesus stands supreme. Those who claim to know God apart from Jesus Christ do not yet know God as God wishes to be known. That is a truth claim the church cannot surrender, and where it does surrender this bold claim of Jesus as the human face of God, it ceases to be apostolic and moves off into all sorts of sideline pursuits to justify its existence. The preaching changes to “Come help us with noble projects” rather than calling all to follow Jesus Christ and in his company to become a new kind of human being for whom goodness is an overflow. The order is reversed. *Do good* replaces *Become God’s so you know what the good is*.

All that is gracious and true in other faiths is brought to completion only in Jesus Christ; he is the one God has approved by alone raising him from the dead. Not Buddha. Not Mohammed. Not Confucius. Not Moses or Elijah. Not Elvis or the Maharishi *Whoever*, but Jesus only. To say this is not to say that Christians are morally superior to others, because often we are not; it’s simply what we must say if our account of divine revelation is true, and that depends on what God did with Jesus after Friday. If bodily raised, we’re on the right track. If not, why bother?⁷

How Then Are We To Follow (vv.23-27)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the young German theologian who was hung in a Nazi prison camp only weeks before the war ended, wrote a warning over the doorway into discipleship, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”⁸ We live in a culture saturated with pop-psychology that makes it almost a moral obligation to focus on the self. The self must be fulfilled and actualized. We are encouraged to express ourselves, indulge ourselves and fulfill our desires through a million products designed to enhance and beautify the self, and in its most blatant expression it involves the worship of the self. That is our recent cultural journey. Become your own religion and discover your hidden divinity. My pleasure, my schedule, my life, my hope and dreams, my agenda become the be-all and end-all. Watch an afternoon of talk shows and you will see how trivial and shallow life becomes when self is the center. Social commentator Os Guinness says we have too much to live with and too little to live for, that everything is permitted and that nothing is important.⁹

⁷ For a defense of an historical, bodily resurrection, see N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection Of The Son Of God* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 2003).

⁸ *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: McMillan, 1963), 7.

⁹ *The American Hour* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1993), 398.

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But Jesus has a cure. Not the eternal enhancement of self but its wise denial. Say No to its incessant demands. Say Yes to freely entering into the suffering of someone else. Don't run from human pain and suffering, your own or another's; engage it! Give up an afternoon and go listen and write letters in a nursing home. Call up a Main Street widow and offer an afternoon of home repairs. Give a single parent a night out. Train to sit at the bed of the dying as a Hospice volunteer. Sign up to build a Habitat house. And if we don't, then our sinful self will make incessant demands and take up all our time and energies and money. There is only one way to follow Jesus Christ, and that is day by day, every day, to say No to the unending demands of self and then in the space created by the No to say Yes to the suffering around us. Isn't this the plain meaning of what Jesus said? "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Not a one-time heroic martyrdom, not a great blast of courage, not a once and for all, but daily dying. Life becomes a living sacrifice, joyfully offered because it's the way to life and in it we experience Jesus' presence, which welds joy and meaning into one.

But this is not the same as losing all boundaries by saying Yes to every demand that comes along. Jesus retains personal control over us, as he said, "whoever loses his life *for my sake*." Each day we should expect from him some clear leading to say No to self, some clear leading to engage in voluntary service to others to whom he directs us. It makes life a daily spiritual adventure, not the following of abstract principles but living interaction with a risen Lord who is full of surprises and hidden resources.

Jesus warns that the way we choose has consequences. He's not above issuing threat and warnings, first in the form of a probing question, "For what does it profit a man if he gains the world and loses or forfeits himself? then this charge, "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of man be ashamed when he come in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

How he treats us then depends on how we treat him now. If we never mention his name in conversation, if we never stand up for his interests in controversial matters, if we keep our religion private and personal instead of bold and public, if we are sort of ashamed or fearful to be known as his follower, then why should he stick up for us and claim us as one of his own at the end? If you treated your wife that way, as someone you were ashamed of, she'd divorce you if she had any sense.

At the end of World War II French collaborators who had it easy during the war were ridiculed, whereas the French resistance, who had it hard during the war, were

lionized as heroes. If you give yourself over to the fads and trends and mindset of popular American culture, to the easy way; if it sets your agenda and priorities, I have no hope for you. You will become trivial because that is the goal of pop culture: to distract and de-sensitize. Thus programmed, you will say Yes to self, No to Jesus and his demands, and at the end receive bad news. The Lord will say, “You were ashamed of me and of my words; now I am ashamed of you. Why didn’t you listen? Was I not worthy of your trust? Did I not prove myself? Why did you believe a lie?” “Follow me,” says Jesus, “and listen to my words.”

Glory On The Mountain (vv.28-36)

No one knew exactly where God buried Moses, and Elijah streaked to heaven in a fiery chariot, so both had unusual transitions from this world. So would Jesus in resurrection. Moses had been dead twelve hundred years, Elijah nearly eight hundred, and yet here they are as contemporaries, standing in the presence of Jesus and having a conversation concerning his *exodus*, his coming departure from life in Jerusalem. Yes I believe in the communion of the saints across time. I see it here displayed. Yes I believe personal identity is not destroyed but enhanced after death. Grace fulfills nature. I see it here displayed. Yes we will know one another. I see it here displayed. Yes there is life after death for the faithful. I see it here displayed. Yes, there are assignments from God in the next life. I see it here displayed. Yes, the human Jesus needed encouragement. I see it here displayed. What a tender thing for the Father to send two old friends to prepare the Son! I see it here displayed.

The other world, the parallel kingdom of the heavens, is not far from us. It’s different but not distant. hidden just beyond sight. When we pray we are entering for a time into a communion with the saints and angels and martyrs who see God face to face. The veil grows thin. This is why we sometimes become disoriented in prayer and lose our bearings in space and time. We’re at the seam of two realities, and the boundaries become blurred.

I know a woman who twenty-eight years ago came to prayer meeting one night for help, one of her issues being alcoholism, as she reported to me. It was fifteen years prior to my arriving at Duncan in Georgetown as its pastor. She’s a nurse with a Master’s degree and widely respected. She told me that on the way home, the visible glory of God filled her car so that her flesh, as seen in her arms and hands, seemed be perfused with light and shining from the inside. At first she thought it was the overhead light and reached up to turn it off. It was not; it was a brief pulling back of the veil that had profound effects. She laughed and told me she was not drunk!

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It's one the great privileges of being a pastor to hear such stories, and if on other grounds I find the person sane and credible, I believe them here as well. I've seen to much to let methodological skepticism have the dominant voice. That night her love affair with alcohol ended as the light of heaven detoxed her flesh and took away the desire to numb the pain of her soul with liquor. Dealing with the pain was not easy, but with the memory and experience of God's glory, she muddled through. Seeing the light did not immediately perfect Peter, and it did not perfect Susan in an instant. Not everyone is fortunate to have such a visit, but there are times when the glory becomes visible and the effects are remarkable. For her the glory came, then it was gone, and when she pulled in the driveway she knew she was free.

I have a theory about the sleep of the disciples in verse 32. There is a *weight* to the glory of God, a still and pregnant heaviness that can be felt. You don't want to move; it feels as if time has become irrelevant; a sense of peace presides and presses down. Everything is stilled. In such moments it's easy to fall asleep, or at least to pass into another form of consciousness that resembles sleep. Mystics speak of falling into a *trance*. You sense the Holy One because you bear his image. When this happens, it's good to be silent and listen, not chatter like Peter.

This is what may have happened to the three disciples as Jesus began to pray with intensity. It was not that they were physically weary and dozed off. As God came near, as the glory of God's holy presence broke through, they slept or entered a trance, as when people do today when they are *slain in the Spirit*, or to use a gentler term, *rest in the Spirit*. It's happened to me twice, and it's a quite remarkable experience. One of the effects of the Holy Spirit may be to make you woozie, which is why I prefer people sit down when I pray for them. There may be chemical changes in the brain, but it is God-induced. It doesn't leave you hung over but deeply refreshed with a new awareness of God's love for you as a person. Think of it as the grace of divine anesthesia before surgery on the soul, and it's often associated with the imparting of spiritual gifts and deep deliverance and healing. The presence of God is often noted by its physical effects. The effect on Peter, James and John was trance; the effect on Jesus was visible transfiguration: verse 29, "And as he was praying," writes Luke, "the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white." Heaven and earth kissed atop that mountain.

By my count four separate conversations occur. Jesus with the Father: prayer. Jesus with Moses and Elijah: preparation and encouragement. Peter with Jesus: stupidity. And finally the Father with Peter: heavenly correction. What a shock to go to sleep and wake up in the brightness of God's glory. This is something like what

happens when Christian die. Go to sleep in one world, wake up in another.

Peter’s response was to try to capture the moment, to memorialize and extend it. Three monuments, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, as if they were on the same level of honor. The glory came, and Peter wanted to start a building program. Build a shrine and charge admission. What a goober! I laugh at Peter’s marvelous sense of the inappropriate, but I admire his passion. He was a transparent man, and if it came across his mind it was likely to come out his mouth.

It was, as educator’s say, a *teachable moment*. From trance to surprise to babbling to terror to hearing the voice of the Father. This was Peter’s ten second journey. They were swallowed in the visible presence: verse 34, “As he said this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’” And with the last echo of the voice they were back in this world. Between blinks it was gone, the vision now a memory. Alone with Jesus on the mountain top. Everything is the same, and everything different because of a glimpse of the glory. On the way down it was silent; they knew that some things cannot be communicated in words. Verse 36, “And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silence and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.” Jesus is unique; he represents God in a way Moses and Elijah do not. They are servants; he alone is Son. He’s worth listening to. God said so.

A Messiah who has power and voluntarily gives it up in order to suffer for people like us was not expected. A daily life that says No to self and Yes to the suffering of others is not what the world ordered on its self-serving religious menu. And if the disciples are to follow, they will have to listen to Jesus and not to all the other distracting voice that clamor for attention. The transfiguration says Jesus is the one we listen to, even when he speaks about strange things like Messiahs who suffer and that to save our life we must lose it for his sake. A church that dares to listen to Jesus will soon become something other than a religious club. It will pray. It will serve. Phenomena will occur. Together we will learn the way of the cross and savor the glimpses of glory God sends as encouragements to keep us on the path.

Conclusion

I am sorry but I cannot get away from it. I believe it is God’s desire to bring a renaissance to this church, a spiritual awakening and a missional and institutional flourishing. I cannot stop believing it, and if I’m wrong, years from now you will

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speak of me as a dreamer and a fool. “Remember that guy, Phil, wasn’t he a goober?” We must learn to listen to Jesus together and become so rooted in his written words that we can spot his living words which he whispers to us in prayer and in circumstances. Speak Lord, and we will try to listen. We want to honor and obey you. We want to see your glory on each other’s faces.

**Luke Essay VI, 9:1-50
Surface Structure (a-b-c // c’-b’-a’)**

A. 9:1-11 SUCCESS OF THE DISCIPLES ON JESUS’ KINGDOM MISSION.

- 1) vv.1-6 Jesus Sends Them Out With His Own Authority (Twelve Healing Apostles) **All**
- 2) vv.7-9 Herod Raises A Theological Question: Curiosity And Resurrection Power.
- 1’) vv.10-11 Return of The Twelve and Display of Jesus’ Love and Authority.

B. 9:12-17 JESUS’ GLORY REVEALED IN THE FEEDING OF THE 5000+.

- 1) vv.12-14 The Problem: Too Little Food. **All**
- 2) v.16 Jesus’ Eucharistic Prayer: Four-Fold Action (22:19-20, 24:30).
- 1’) v.17 Solution: More Than Enough Food. **All**

C. 9:18-22 THE IDENTITY OF JESUS CLARIFIED.

- 1) v.18 Setting: Jesus At Prayer. **Jesus prays**
- 2) vv.18b-20 First Question: Public Opinion.
- 2’) v.20 Second Question: Personal Interview.
- 1’) v.21 Conclusion: First Passion Prediction: A Messiah Who Suffers, Is Raised.

C’ 9:23-27 THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION APPLIED TO THE DISCIPLES.

- 1) v.23 Introduction: Call To Discipleship And Self-Denial. **All**
- 2) v.24 *Whoever*: On Losing And Saving Life.
- 3) v.25 Central Question.
- 2’) v.26 *Whoever*: On Being Ashamed.
- 1’) v.27 Conclusion: Promise Of Seeing The Kingdom.

B’ 9:28-36 JESUS’ FUTURE GLORY REVEALED IN HIS TRANSFIGURATION.

- 1) v.28 Introduction: Jesus On The Mountain In Prayer. **Jesus prays**
- 2) v.29 First Manifestation: Jesus Transfigured.
- 3) vv.30-31 Appearance Of Moses And Elijah.
- 4) v.32 Center: Awakening Of The Disciples.
- 3’) v.33 Disappearance Of Moses And Elijah.
- 2’) vv.34-35 Second Manifestation: Divine Affirmation Of Jesus.
- 1’) v.36 Conclusion: Jesus Alone.

A’ 9:37-50 FAILURE OF THE DISCIPLES ON JESUS’ KINGDOM MISSION.

- 1) vv.37-43a The Disciples Failure: Exorcism After Earlier Success. **All**
 - 2) vv.43b-45 The Disciples Misunderstand The Coming Passion Of Jesus.
 - 2’) vv.46-48 The Disciples Misunderstand Worth And Greatness. **All**
 - 1’) vv.49-51 The Disciples Failure: Spiritual Competition.
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