

Luke 9:23-27 – Taking up the cross (being a true disciple)

Jesus had told his disciples that he would be rejected, suffer and die. He would not receive his kingdom, without the cross. Then, he would rise again in great glory. He had not come to fight with earthly or political weapons. He had not come to win a political redemption. He had come to defeat sin, death and hell. To win that, he must go to Calvary. Now, he began to tell his disciples how to follow him.

1. What is being a disciple? (v23)

A disciple is a student; a follower or learner who is taught by and obeys his master/teacher. A Christian is a follower and student of Christ. Lots of people are baptised, or in churches, or born in church-going families – but they are not true disciples of Jesus. Here, Jesus tells us what we must do. We must deny our self, take up the cross, and go the way he went. To take up the cross in those days meant to die. It meant that you no longer had your own plans and goals in this world – you had given them all up. Here, it means that we must place Jesus over and above all things. We must give up all our plans to him, and allow him to change or cancel them, and give us different ones. We must give up all to him. Jesus suffered and was rejected and died to obey his Father. We must do the same in following him. Christianity is not about seeking and claiming blessings of this life. It is to be ready to be humbled for Jesus' sake – every day. This is the only way. Only people with new hearts can do this.

2. Why must we be disciples this way? (v24)

What is at risk? Why does it matter? The cost of being a disciple is high – but the cost of not being a disciple is higher. There is such a place as hell. It is possible to lose your life – eternally. You can be lost and destroyed forever. Jesus warns us in love. Who loses everything? The person who will not carry the cross to follow Christ – the person who lives for their own desires and pleasures. The person who is saved and will live in the new world is the person who gives everything up to Jesus; he says no to sin and does not spare himself.

3. Is it worth being a disciple? (v25)

Is it worth it? Is it not better to just try to enjoy this life? Jesus asks us. What if you gain the whole world, but lose your soul? Is that worth it? You enter this world with nothing; you will leave it with nothing too. If you gained the whole world, you must leave it behind. What then of your soul? If you go to hell, then it will not matter whether your life here was easy or hard. It is much better to take up the cross and follow him.

4. Why should we listen to what Jesus says about being a disciple? (v26-27)

One day, Jesus will come in glory. He came at first in a low way, to be rejected. But one day he will come in the glory of the Father to judge the world. He will give his verdict on all of us. He will measure our obedience. Did we honour his word? Or were we ashamed of it? Did we not wish to suffer because of Jesus' word? Was he not worth it? He will be ashamed of such people, and send them away forever. But he will bring glory and honour to his own people who followed him. Jesus encouraged his disciples to believe that they would see his kingdom come with power. Judas died and never saw it. But others saw him pouring out the Spirit at Pentecost, and sending the gospel to the nations. Today we can see what he has done – and we should believe.