

Test Your Christian Faith.

Text: Luke 9:18-26

Suggested Hymns:
321, 610, 395, 205ALHB, 206

- 1) What do you believe concerning Christ?
- 2) Your willingness to deny yourself, to bear the cross, and to lose your life for Jesus' sake
- 3) Your ability to bear up under ridicule and scorn.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 9:18–26, ¹⁸ *And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, “Who do the crowds say that I am?”*

¹⁹ *So they answered and said, “John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again.”*

²⁰ *He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.”* ²¹ *And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one,* ²² *saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”*

²³ *Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.* ²⁴ *For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.* ²⁵ *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?* ²⁶ *For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“There are no atheists in foxholes,” we are told. As a matter of fact, there are few atheists anywhere. An atheist is a person who denies the existence of God.

Now, after all, all that someone has to do to know that there is a God is to open his eyes and look at the world in which he lives. Or if he is blind, he need but listen to the music of the birds and of the elements around him.

And if he be both deaf and blind, let him put his hand into his bosom and feel his heart beat and think on that, and he can know the existence of God.

No creature, nor any law of chance, ever made such things as these. St. Paul says that even the heathen know that there is a God. *“By nature”* they know His *“eternal power and godhead.”* Yes, even the devil knows that there is a God and trembles before His power.

We read in Romans 1:20–21, ²⁰ *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

The atheist is not the only one who is without the hope of salvation and a knowledge of his Redeemer. The Scripture says: *“The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.”¹* There are many people who do not say in their hearts, *“There is no God,”* but are likewise fools.

St. Paul, who says that the Gentiles know by nature that there is a God, also goes on to explain that such knowledge as they have is sufficient only to condemn them, but not to save them.

We read in Romans 2:14–15, ¹⁴ *for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them).*

So how are people saved? St. Paul writes in Romans 10:9, ⁹ *that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Of our Christian family who have faced death, we can say, *“These are saints of God.”* They have been washed white in the blood of the Lamb. They have

been called to be heirs of eternal life by the Holy Spirit. This is a truly comforting knowledge.

Christians are made by the Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God, learned at their mother's knee, heard from a Christian pulpit, proclaimed by a Christian chaplain, or read in their pocket New Testament. No person has ever been turned from sin to righteousness by force.

It is not sufficient for anyone to say that he is not an atheist, but a believer. One must actually believe in Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the one and only Mediator between God and man.

It is not sufficient for national leaders to call vaguely upon "*Divine Providence*." Jesus says "*whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.*"² It is not sufficient for you to say that you are a Christian or to recite the words of the Creed.

In our text Jesus says what is necessary if you want to lay claim to the name "*Christian*." According to His words *Test Your Christian Faith*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Test Your Christian Faith

What Do You Believe Concerning Christ?

First, the Evangelist tells of people who had wrong notions about Jesus. Some, like Herod, said that He was John the Baptist, recently beheaded, but now come back to life. Others thought that perhaps He was Elijah. Still others supposed Him to be one of the old prophets other than Elijah, perhaps Jeremiah.

Such ignorance concerning Jesus has still not been dispelled. Today some think of Christ as a great Jewish scholar and teacher, who has left for posterity such classics as the Sermon on the Mount and the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Some weep over His death because they count Him among the world's great martyrs. Still others mistake the mission of Jesus. They consider Him a great dreamer, born several thousand years too soon, who foretold a world ruled by brotherly love, to which the natural progress of man has not yet attained. They believe that He came to civilise and to socialise, but they do not know that He came to redeem and to save from sin.

But there were at least some people who knew who Jesus really is — the disciples. Peter, the fisherman, as spokesman for them all, truly and briefly said, ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”***³ ***“The Christ of God.”***

All people are “of God” by virtue of their creation. True believers are “of God” by virtue of regeneration. But Jesus is “of God” in a very special sense. ***“He is the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made.”***

He is the ***“Christ of God,”*** that is, the Anointed of God. He is the ***“chosen of the Lord and precious”*** the hymnist wrote.⁴ He is the One who was sent by His Father, because ***“God so loved the world,”*** to redeem a lost and sinful race; to die for the sins of all mankind, the Just for the unjust, to win us back to God.

What, then, do you think of Jesus? Here is the first test of your Christianity. Do you believe that He was John the Baptist? Elijah? Just another prophet in the history of man? Or is Peter’s conviction, ***“He is the Christ of God,”*** also yours? If you believe this, flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but your Father in heaven. Scripture says ***“No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”***⁵

Concerning the purpose of Jesus’ coming into the world, what do you believe? Do you believe that Jesus came as the Son of David to uplift the down-trodden Jewish people? Or do you believe that Jesus came as a great Physician of the body to heal the sick and give sight to the blind and restore the dead and give people an example of how they ought to live, in order that one day they might have a heaven on earth?

Or do you believe that before the foundations of the world were laid, God decreed the redemption of the fallen world by the suffering and death of His Son, born in the fullness of time of the Virgin Mary? This is the Christian faith.

Peter applied this Gospel to himself. He believed that when God sent His Son into the world He sent Him to suffer and die for Peter’s sins, for Peter’s unbelief, and for Peter’s doubting and threefold denial. He believed that God’s only-begotten Son was buried and then rose again on the third day for Peter’s justification.

Peter believed that Christ ascended into heaven to prepare a mansion for Peter, too. And, finally, Peter believed that his Lord would come again to receive to Himself a fisherman and Apostle by the name of Peter.

Is your faith also such a personal one? Do you believe that God sent His beloved Son into the world to be your Saviour, that He delivered Him for your offences and raised Him again for your justification, and that He is preparing a place for you in heaven? If this is your faith, then your faith passes the first test.

2. Test Your Christian Faith

Your Willingness To Deny Yourself, To Bear The Cross, And To Lose Your Life For Jesus' Sake

There is in this text another test of your Christian faith. Jesus says in our text, *“whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it”* and *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me”*

So this is the second test of your faith — your willingness to deny yourself, to bear the cross, and to lose your life for Jesus' sake.

Andrew gave his breathless report, saying to Peter, *“Come,”* and Peter came. Jesus says in our text, *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself,”* and Peter denied himself and followed Jesus.

In the Gospel reading for today Jesus said, *“Let down your nets,”* and Peter let them down.⁶ When Peter desired to walk to Jesus on the water, Jesus commanded him to come, and Peter came.⁷ With a look, Jesus recalled fallen Peter, and Peter repented of his denial and went out and wept bitterly.

Jesus commanded Peter to fish for men, and Peter fished willingly, with a heart full of love and enthusiasm, and he caught as high as three thousand souls in the Gospel net in one day. Peter denied himself, took up his cross, and followed Jesus.

Peter could have said “no” when Andrew said, *“Come.”* Or in that more subtle manner of refusing an invitation he could have said: *“Yes, I’ll be there tomorrow,”* which never comes. When Jesus said: *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself,”* Peter, like the rich young man, could have gone

away sorrowing, considering it too great a sacrifice to give up his fishing business.

When Jesus said to Peter, “*Let down your nets,*” Peter might have put up a stiff argument as a fisherman of long experience, but he cast his net, and he caught a multitude of fish. When Jesus told Peter to walk on the water, Peter might have looked at the water, and his knees might have knocked, but he looked at Jesus, and he walked on the water.

This, then, is the way in which we also must deny ourselves to prove our Christian faith. We must surrender our life, our will, our pride, and everything to the will of Jesus, our Lord.

For Peter and the other Apostles, whose faith Jesus was here putting to the test, denying themselves began with giving up a comfortable fishing business, a well-paying tax collector’s office.

In the end it meant giving up everything, including life itself. Tens of thousands of early Christians endured, in consequence of confessing Christ, imprisonment and shame and death.

Our faith today, in regard to self-denial, is not so severely tested as was the faith of the Twelve. In most places Christians can confess Christ today without risking their lives. Nevertheless, denying oneself is still a test of Christian faith. Christians must control their carnal appetites. They must strive to keep the Ten Commandments.

They must bring sacrifices of time, money, talent, and energy. They must seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. They must subordinate their own desires and plans to Christ and His commands. By this standard, measure your Christian faith.

3. Test Your Christian Faith

Your Ability To Bear Up Under Ridicule And Scorn.

There is yet a third test of faith. It is your ability to bear up under ridicule and scorn.

After Peter made his marvellous confession, Jesus commanded the Apostles that “*they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ,*”⁸ namely, that He is

the Christ of God. This should not disturb anybody, for Jesus is not giving a general command here that we should keep His identity secret.

At that time Christ's suffering and death still lay ahead of Him. He wanted neither a false enthusiasm for Him as a secular king, nor a premature hostility against Him to interfere with God's plans. He wanted to lay down His life at God's appointed hour, and was merely telling His disciples not to reveal "*that He was Jesus the Christ*" until His hour had arrived.

We must confess and spread abroad the great news of "*the Christ of God.*" Now that the work of salvation is complete, God definitely does not tell us to hold our peace, but to preach the Gospel in all the world as a witness unto every creature before the end comes.

Jesus' great work of salvation and all His deeds of mercy are the everlasting theme of the celestial choirs. And these great and wonderful tidings must likewise be the old story and the new song which fills the heart and mouth of everyone who desires to join that heavenly throng.

In fact, Christ says in Matthew 10:32-33,³² "*Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.*"³³ *But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.*

To confess Jesus among people who do not believe will lay you open to ridicule. Will you be able to "*take it*" for Christ's sake? When you are asked concerning your faith, and you mention that you believe that Jesus actually worked miracles at Cana, at Nain, at Capernaum, at Bethany, that He changed water into wine, stilled the storm, and raised the dead, your listener may not share your enthusiasm.

He may ask you an audacious question or two, or he may call your attitude old-fashioned and say that these miracles can be rationally explained. He may point out that Jesus possessed scientific knowledge far in advance of His time and that therefore many of His deeds seemed miraculous to those simple people.

Or when you explain to a person who asks about your church that you bow your head and confess your sins at every service and ask God to forgive you, he

may not ask you any questions at all, but with his look of silence he is obviously stamping you as one whom he thinks quite strange.

Can your faith stand up under such scorn? Remember for your encouragement that Jesus suffered even worse contempt than this. He was mocked and spit upon. They shot out their lips at Him and laughed Him to scorn even while He was dying upon the Cross for you and me.

Shall we, then, be ashamed of Jesus Christ whom God has anointed to be our Saviour? Shall we, from fear of ridicule and of contempt, deny Jesus who confesses us before our heavenly Father? Certainly not!

The Hymnist wrote,⁹

Ashamed of Jesus! that dear Friend
On whom my hopes of heaven depend!
No, when I blush, be this my shame,
That I no more revere His name.

Let us keep our eyes steadfastly upon the vision of the Son of Man, who shall come again in His own glory and the glory of the holy angels. Let us hold fast our faith that no one take our crown.

God has given us the gracious promise in Christ Jesus that He will uphold and sustain us in such faith so that that *“neither death nor life ... nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*¹⁰ For this gracious promise, blessed be His glorious name forever and ever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Psalm 14:1, Psalm 53:1

² John 16:23

³ Matthew 16:16

⁴ Hymn 248

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:3

⁶ Luke 5:4-5

⁷ Matthew 14:28-29

⁸ Matthew 16:20

⁹ 205 ALHB

¹⁰ Romans 8:38-39