

True Disciples Of The True Christ.

Text: Luke 9:18-26

1) The True Christ

Suggested Hymns:

2) Christ's True Disciples

206, 267, 336, 285, 351

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,

Many people in our country today claim to be Christians, disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. But at the same time many of these people do not really know who Jesus is, and what He has done. They have only a faint idea of what it means to follow Christ as His disciples.

Also some in the church often have only a hazy idea of what it means to confess Christ, and to follow Him as His true disciples.

We need to look at a Gospel text like the one before us today. This Word of God speaks to us very clearly and plainly about the true Christ and about our calling to be His true disciples.

This text does not tell us how to be saved, but rather the subject is how to be a disciple, a saved person who is standing in the service of Christ.

Jesus and His disciples were on the road to Caesarea Philippi. Jesus was preparing to enter the final stage of His public ministry. In just a few months He would be entering Jerusalem for the last time to deliver Himself up to crucifixion for the sins of mankind.

So now, as our text says, He stops along the way to pray — to pray for strength for Himself to face His mission of suffering; to pray, too, that His disciples might understand and be prepared for these coming days of trial. He asks for their confession of Him; He speaks to them about His cross and about the cross which they are called to take up after Him.

We have here a vivid presentation of what it means to be *True Disciples of the True Christ*. Let us consider what this means. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The True Christ

Ignorance of Christ and False Views of Christ

The first requirement is to know who this Jesus is. From the beginning of His ministry Jesus had been preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God with power. He had performed mighty miracles with divine authority. Yet many did not know of Jesus.

Others like the scribes and Pharisees refused to believe Him. Still others who had first started to follow took offence at His teaching and fell away. Jesus asked, *“Who do the crowds say that I am?”* And the disciples give the honest, but disappointing, answer, *“John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again.”*

Don't we hear similar answers today? Many, of course, do not know Jesus at all. Others who do speak of Jesus make of Him a great man, but nothing

more. They speak of Jesus as a personality with great persuasive power, a genius at handling people, a clever psychologist, a skilled manipulator of men's minds and souls, a prophet, a teacher, a miracle medicine man, a noble example of upright living, a fine model and pattern to follow; but here they stop.

Jesus, however, does not stop here. He asks the disciples, "***But who do you say that I am?***" And Peter answers for them all, "***The Christ of God.***" Here was a decisive Messianic confession. Jesus is the God-promised, God-sent Messiah, anointed by God Himself to be our Prophet, Priest, and King.

In the person of Jesus are fulfilled all of the Old Testament Scriptures. He comes from God Himself and is God with the Father. He has unquestionable authority and power. Such a statement of faith from the disciples was to impress upon them deeply the truth about Jesus' person and origin, and to strengthen them for trying days ahead.

However, the people were not ready for Christ, the Messiah; but even worse, the disciples were not ready, and yet it was their message that would have to make the Messiah mean what He should be to the people.

Jesus also asks us, "***But who do you say that I am?***" We live in trying times. Jesus is hated by some, ignored by others, falsely claimed by still many more. What do we say? Only the firm conviction that Jesus has indeed come forth from God as the Christ, the promised Messiah, will help us to cling to Him in life and in death.

The True Christ Is the Suffering Christ

After receiving the disciples' statement of faith, Jesus for the first time openly and formally spoke of the events which would occur at the next Passover, "***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.***"

He "must" do this, not as some fate that will happen to Him, not as some accident or chance happening that lies in His roadway. He "must" do this because this is the will of God, this is the divine decree from heaven. Christ's will is one with His Father's will. He is determined to follow this course of suffering, this prescribed path.

The disciples are to know that what will take place in our Lord's last days in Jerusalem is part of God's eternal plan for the salvation of man. "Yes, I am the Christ," Jesus in reality is saying, "but know what kind of Christ I am — the One who goes the way of glory by way of suffering, the one who receives His kingdom by dying.

I am the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. I am indeed the Son of Man spoken of in Daniel 7 who will appear in clouds and receive an eternal and indestructible dominion, but I am also the representative Son of Man who takes upon Himself the guilt and fate of all other people.

I am the Son of Man who comes in the form of a servant, in lowliness, poverty, and self-denial, and I give Myself into suffering and death for your sins.

Those very priests who are to prepare for the coming of the great High Priest will put Me to the test and reject Me and kill Me. But this death is all part of being Christ the Messiah to atone for your sins. On the third day I will rise again as the victorious, glorified Christ, and I will come again on the Last Day in glory to receive those who confess and follow Me as the crucified Christ."

The Suffering Christ Was Unexpected

This is the true Christ. ²¹ *And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one.* Is it any wonder that He commanded His disciples to silence? This came as a terrifying shock to them — that their Master must suffer and die.

The disciples still cherished hopes of a glorious earthly kingdom. If they had difficulty grasping this new idea of a suffering Christ, think of the rest of the Jewish nation. Their fevered hope and excitement were at a high pitch. Some looked for a political Messiah to free them from Rome. Some looked for a moral Messiah to impress again the law of Moses. Some looked for one great cataclysmic event from heaven to change the whole world.

A Messiah who would call people to repentance and who would suffer and die for their sins was the last thing they had in mind, the last thing they either expected or wanted. Jesus commanded silence because the people simply were not ready for this astonishing fact.

The Suffering Christ Is Our Only Saviour

But His disciples must be prepared. They would be with Him in those crucial hours of Holy Week. They must be strengthened for this trial. They must understand that the suffering of the Christ is a necessary part of God's plan to redeem man from destruction. Do we see this also?

Many people in our day do not like to think of Jesus' terrible sufferings as being endured for their sins. *"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing."*¹ But we know better. We learn here that the only Christ is the crucified Christ. He is our only hope of salvation. And so we say with St. Paul that the preaching of Christ's cross is to us *"the power of God."* And in 1 Corinthians 2:2, ² *For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*

2. Christ's True Disciples

Disciples Follow the Suffering Christ

If the one and only true Christ is the Christ of the cross, so only those are His true disciples who follow the Christ of the cross. When the disciples heard this hard-to-accept news that the Messiah must die, they were not to think of how to prevent His sufferings; rather they were to prepare for their own sufferings.

Jesus wants them to have no mistaken notions about the meaning of discipleship. So He right away tells them, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."* True discipleship entails all these conditions: self-denial, daily cross-bearing, and continually following Christ.

Discipleship Requires Self-Denial

This message, too, must have been hard for the disciples to bear. Here were men who had delusions of grandeur about sitting in positions of honour in Jesus' kingdom. Their only thoughts were those of an easy victory and a glorious triumph. But Christ's words were clear and unmistakable. They cut right across their thinking, right across much of the world's thinking today.

Today's world says, "Assert yourself." Jesus says, *"Deny yourself."* Today's world beckons us to develop our selfish interests, to go out after worldly gain, to enjoy a life of ease, comfort, and pleasure. And we often find ourselves yielding to this trend. We begin to admire our own shadow and we lean upon our

own ability and understanding. We seek our own things and become our own end.

We begin to fall in love with life here and think that maybe we can follow Jesus only half the time or with half a heart. Jesus here says otherwise: “Deny yourself. As My follower you renounce the natural man with your evil desires; you subdue the worldly desires of your flesh. You renounce confidence in yourself and you rely upon Me. You no longer seek only your own happiness; your one desire is to know Me.

You become dead to sin and the Law, and alive to God. You surrender to God your will and emotions, your body and soul. My disciples must give their lives to God as I have, must disclose the love of God to the world as I have.”

Jesus still faces us, His followers, with the necessity of choosing Him completely. To follow Jesus is a commitment; it cannot be done halfway. His call into the Kingdom is not a call to honour or to victory, as the world understands these terms, but a call to utter self-denial. Over and over again we hear of the tremendous cost of it. One leaves family, one will be hated, yes, persecuted and ridiculed by the world.

Discipleship Requires Daily Cross-bearing

Christ’s call to be His disciples is a call to take up our cross each day. This was a startling declaration to those disciples, for the cross meant nothing less than an instrument of painful, ugly death. *“Follow Me through suffering unto death if need be,”* Jesus said.

And He still says so. His cross is the pattern for the whole life of His disciples. This shatters all our dreams of world conquest and desires for human greatness. Here is our assignment to take the road of missionary suffering in the footsteps of our Lord.

We have no way but Christ’s way — to take up the cross. And do not misunderstand this word “cross.” It does not refer to ordinary human ills, sicknesses, griefs, poverty, death, and disappointment; this cross means specifically the daily hatred and persecution, the abuse and scorn, the ridicule and suffering which result from our faithful connection with Christ and our service to Him.

We are called to endure whatever is burdensome or trying or considered as disgraceful in following Christ. We do not go one step out of the way either to meet a cross or to miss one. We let it produce whatever shame, disgrace, or pain it may, but we bear it for Christ. We follow St. Paul, who endured suffering and weariness, pain and starvation, cold and nakedness, all for Christ's sake.

The cross of our Lord Christ can be given to the world today only by disciples who deny themselves, disregard their own advantages and comforts, and take up that same cross.

Discipleship Requires Following Christ Continually

The call of our Saviour is "Follow Me." Follow Him continually, loyally, unflinchingly, fully. We do not plan our own life; it is planned and directed by our Lord. We do not have Christ our own way or accept Him on our own terms. We are not His master. We are His followers — to obey.

Jesus makes it terrifyingly plain how far and how deeply a man commits himself when he confesses the Christ. To believe in Christ and to follow Him means a surrender of any attempt at mastering Christ or at mastering God. Furthermore, it means positively thinking the thoughts and will of God, being on the side of God, a complete "Yes" to God and a whole "No" to oneself.

Disciples Have a True Sense of Values

Our text continues, ²⁵ *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?* There is so much temptation today to try to "gain the world," as Jesus puts it here.

People seek after riches, profits, honours, and earthly goods. But what do they really gain by this? They do not find real life or even true and lasting happiness in these things. In fact, he who aims only at life in this world will lose the higher life in Christ, our Lord says here ²⁴ *For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.*

Rather learn to "lose your life," as Jesus puts it. Learn to say no to worldly pleasures and that which delights only your senses. Do not see how much you can possess, but how much you can be possessed by Christ Jesus. True disciples have such a true sense of values as to what is truly important, enduring, and eternal.

Disciples Confess Christ Before Men

Our entire life and action as disciples is under the tension of responsibility to a Lord who will come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead. When He comes again, He says that He will be ashamed of those who have been ashamed of Him.

Our text says, 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.* What do you do when you have the privilege of speaking about your Lord to someone who does not know Him or want Him? Do you hide your faith and light under a bushel?

What do you do when people ridicule your Lord, your faith, your church? Do you keep silent and seek to escape? Are you ashamed of the fact that the Christ was lowly and poor, that He endured mockery, contempt, and suffering?

This Christ suffered, died, and rose again for you that you might be His redeemed disciple. Confess Him. Say with Peter here: You are *“the Christ of God.”*

This Christ of the cross is your only Saviour for all eternity. Rejoice in the cross you can carry for Christ as His true disciple. If the first disciples were to keep silent for a time, you are not to remain silent.

Speak of the Christ to others. Say with your fellow disciple St. Paul, as we read in Philippians 3:8, ⁸ *Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.*

When you make such a confession of Christ, this is a real commitment. This is a confession that binds you as His disciple, and discipleship is your only and greatest goal. Christ shall come again in His glory to receive all such disciples into His eternal presence. May you, by God's grace, be found among them! Amen.

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

¹ 1 Cor. 1:18