

Scripture Readings:

Luke 7:18 “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. **27** "But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God."”

Romans 3:21 “ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, **22** even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25** whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, **26** to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Confessing Jesus as The Suffering Savior

Once again we have gathered in response to God's call to worship: We have confessed our sins and heard the promise of His forgiveness declared. Now we have ascended before the very presence of God in heaven where He will minister to us in Word and Sacrament: Accepting our gifts and sending us out to serve Him in the world.

One of our distinctives here at Church of the King is that we practice communion each week with the full participation of all the members of God's covenant, including our children. We believe that it is Biblical and proper that the Devine worship service include both Word and Sacrament. In many churches the Saints often hear the preached Word without the Sacrament, which we believe weakens the service, and thus we gently encourage our brothers to restore the Table to its proper place in the weekly Lord's Day worship. Sadly, other churches have focused on the Sacraments to the point of almost losing any real preaching of the Word and that is much more dangerous because there should never be sacrament without the Word which brings the proper wisdom and power to the Sacraments -- *And those with neither who are NOT churches!*

We come to two lessons from Luke which teach & confirm our conviction that the Lord's Table should be celebrated each Lord's Day:

- The importance of proclaiming His death until He comes!
- Proclaiming Jesus as the suffering Messiah who HAS saved His people from their sins!

In the passage before us, we see Jesus confront His disciples, and us, with a very pointed and personal question: The most important question we will ever give an answer too: "Who do you say that I am?"

- The answer to that simple question has very significant temporal and eternal consequences!
- After the right answer is given Jesus quickly explains how He must be the suffering Savior, describing His death and Resurrection.

Next week, Lord willing, we will see Jesus in all His majesty as He is transformed on the mountain and visited by Elijah and Moses

- **In the midst of this glorious event we learn that the discussion again was centered around the death and resurrection of Jesus**

This week the disciples see Jesus as the Son of Man humbly praying – Next week they see Him standing on the mount in His glory as the Son of God!

Both of these accounts come just before Luke explains that when the appointed time had come, Jesus will set Himself to go to Jerusalem to be offered up as the great sacrifice for the sins of His people!

With this context in mind, let's look more closely at this morning's text:

- **Jesus begins the discussion with His disciples by asking who the people were saying that He was:**

We should note that the answers are exactly the same as what Herod had been hearing: John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets! Luke continues to remind us that what people thought was going on was not the same as what Jesus was really doing!

- **Now the time has come for Jesus to more fully explain His mission to the disciples**

So Jesus turns to them and asks, “But who do you say that I am?”

Peter gives the right answer on behalf of the disciples: The Christ of God – The promised Messiah! We know it is the right answer because in Matthew's account Jesus tells Peter it had been revealed to him by the Father. It is the answer that any who desire to be saved must give as John clearly states near the end of his Gospel: “30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

- **But then Jesus immediately warns and commands the disciples to tell no one!**

Verse 21 is not so mysterious if we understand the context that Luke has been pointing out with the reports sent to John the Baptist, rumors heard by King Herod and now the same wrong answers given by the people to this important question of who Jesus is:

The right answer was given by Peter and it stands in stark contrast to all the commotion about “the Jesus Show” that the crowds are spreading and it is likely that Jesus does NOT want His disciples adding to that confusion or those rumors:

- **Jesus did not come to put on a show, but rather to save His people from their sins and to establish His Kingdom!**

And so the Disciples must begin to learn how Jesus has been sent to be the suffering Savior

- **They are told He must be rejected by the religious leaders of His day**
- **They are told He must be crucified**
- **They are told He will be raised in victory on the 3rd day!**

We know from Matthew and Mark that Peter reacts very badly to the part about His suffering and we will consider that a bit more when we gather at the Table this morning. But here we want to focus on the fact that we must know who Christ is and what He came to do:

- **James reminded us in his Epistle that even the demons believe there is one God and in the Gospel accounts demons often proclaim Jesus to be the Christ**
- **Saving faith must see Jesus as the suffering & victorious Savior!**
- **The Apostle Paul explains the importance of Christ’s suffering clearly in Romans 3, where we find that BIG word propitiation**

In verse 21 Paul proclaims the Gospel: “ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.”

- **We like that “apart from the law” part: Paul goes on to proclaim in chapter six: “We are not under law but under grace!” We like that too!**
- **However, we must be careful not to make the very same mistake that Peter did, wanting Jesus as the Messiah but rejecting or even just ignoring His need to suffer...**

- **The point Paul is making is that Jesus MUST suffer or there can be no grace... We would still have to face the wrath of the Law!**

Paul had already shown that all of Adam's race are under the penalty of sin and he repeats it here: "For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"

- **Yes, our redemption is in Jesus – BUT it comes at a great cost to Him as He bears the full penalty of our sin!**
- **Remember, God's just wrath against our sin MUST be propitiated... It is NOT a matter of winning God over to our side, but fully satisfying His just wrath**

3:25 "whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

ONLY if Jesus goes to the cross as the spotless Lamb of God, taking on Himself the full penalty of our sin, can God FREELY justify us and still be the just God that He is! What a glorious Gospel!

The fact that the Messiah must suffer was something that was clearly witnessed and foretold in the Law & the Prophets as Paul pointed out:

- **Adam sees animals killed so he can be covered**
- **Abel believed that a lamb must be sacrificed**
- **Abraham told his son that God Himself would provide the sacrifice and learned that it would be a substitute when the ram takes Isaac's place on the altar.**
- **God's people saw this again when the blood of the lamb placed on the door posts of their home meant the death angel passed over their household**
- **And of course, all the washings, preparations and sacrifices and offerings of the Law tell us over and over again about the gracious salvation that would be ours when Jesus went to the cross to propitiate God's wrath that was rightly & justly aimed at OUR sin!**

After Jesus rebukes Peter, He continues His instruction in another of the most misquoted or misapplied verses in the New Testament: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” Jesus is not suggesting that we have some pretty ugly and depressing “works” to perform if we want to follow Jesus and be accepted by Him. [give Luther’s example]

Jesus does not want us to parade through the stations of the cross or even keep Him on the cross as the Catholics do with the crucifix

- **Here Jesus is DIRECTLY dealing with the problem that Peter was rebuked for: We must not draw back from seeing Jesus as the suffering Messiah**

There is only one way of salvation: We must give up ALL efforts to save ourselves or hope that something we can present to God is worthy: We must “deny ourselves!” We must die daily, remembering that we died in Christ, being saved ONLY through the finished work of Christ on the cross: The very thing Peter recoiled against!

Then and only then are we ready to follow Christ & to understand v. 25: “Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it!” Here is where the rubber meets the road for us as individuals, as families, as a church and even as a nation...

In each of these areas, we must learn that IF we want life and life abundant, we must be willing to deny ourselves, looking ONLY to the finished work of Christ, who will then give us such life!

We could think of the Christian life as a journey: One that is pictured in this passage as our being willing to say farewell to self, taking up the cross as our baggage, and setting out as Jesus says follow me!

- **Saying farewell to self means REALLY leaving behind all that we have and all we can do in the flesh as filthy rags in order to gain Christ!**

For us it means NOT bringing Christ along side to help, NOT sitting as the judge who will decide IF Jesus is right for me, NOT even following Jesus because that is what is expected of me or what we have always done: We do NOT get to stay home in our comfort zone & take a journey with Jesus at the same time!

- **Taking up our cross DAILY means that we never say “I have arrived” ... or have an attitude that we have everything under control**
- **Short of glory, there is always more of the influence of the world, the flesh and the devil that needs to be put to death!**

It means that we must ALWAYS be willing to learn: The Bible is revealing the great plan of salvation given and carried out by an infinite God: There is always MUCH more that we as mere creatures can learn, and how sad it is when we often don't want to bother...

- **Getting a little more sleep rather than time in God's Word**

I could make a lot of applications in the areas I mentioned, but let me focus on the family: *[pun intended!]*

The CREC elders had an interesting discussion this week on how the various churches handle communion and a large part of the dialog revolved around how to treat our families. Are they at the center of God's plan of salvation or were they part of the old creation under Adam, with all of us being part of the new family with Christ as the head over His Church?

- **Much of the struggle revolved around the question of who is charge: The elders or the dads?**
- **Strong elders means a shepherding church w/ wimpy men argues one side: Strong dads undermine the proper authority of the Church argues the other!**

To me this is exactly what Jesus is trying to get us to understand here: This is not an either or situation: The battle should not be over whether the father or the elders are in charge of the family: The question to ask is: “Has that family denied themselves to follow Jesus?”

IF they have then the family would have come under the submission of the Church seeing each member as a sinner in need of the suffering Savior and all that the Church offers including the preached Word, both Sacraments & Church discipline!

Any family that does not “deny themselves” in this way is asking for problems for themselves, risking eternal damnation for its members, and would likely bring many problems to any church they join!

- **However, IF that same family willingly submits to the suffering Savior and His commands, then He will give them life and life abundantly in His Church!**

They WILL grow and mature as a family, in the roles that God has ordained with strong Fathers, faithful wives and obedient children!

- **Understanding what Jesus is teaching here results in strong Elders AND strong fathers!**

These are discussions that can continue over lunch and for years to come! The same principle applies to how we approach Jesus as individuals or as a Church. They apply to how we live out our calling in this life in our homes or work places and also must be seen in the civil realm as well...

- **Something we should certainly ponder in an election year!**

And finally, our passage ends with a sober warning about just how serious these instructions really are:

Luke 9:25 “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.”

- **There should be no confusion as to what Jesus is referring to here: In Revelation chapter twenty we are given a fully picture of this final judgment**

Remember that important question that Jesus asked:

“Who do YOU say that I am?”

- **We must believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God!**
- **In believing this, we MUST understand and accept that He came as the suffering Messiah who would take the full punishment for His people's sins -- Propitiating God's wrath!**
- **We can and will stand fully righteous in the day of God's final judgment IF we believe this!**
- **Or we can stand before God choosing to be judged by our own standards and works!**

With that in mind, listen to what John saw in Revelation chapter 20:

“11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

A sobering passage indeed:

- **Believing in Jesus is not a mere intellectual ascent – demons do that!**
- **Believing in Jesus is not adding Him to your life’s plan, just making some room in your heart for Him, just having a ‘decision card’ as an insurance policy against the fires of hell –**

Jesus said we must DENY ourselves! We must give up all hope of salvation in ourselves and look ONLY to Jesus!

- **We should recoil at the thought of being cast into the Lake of Fire!**
- **We rejoice that our names ARE written in the Lamb’s Book of Life**

Believing in Jesus means that we know Him as the suffering Savior who saved us from our sins – He TOOK the full wrath due us upon Himself!

- **This is what it means “to proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes!”**
- **This is WHY we should do so EACH Lord’s Day at this Table!**

Believing and proclaiming this truth about Jesus is what will change...

Our lives

Our families

Our homes & workplaces

Our local Church body

And even our nation!

Those who understand and embrace this are truly those who have FOUND life and life abundantly.... Both now and for all eternity!