

PETER'S CONFESSION OF CHRIST

TEXT: LUKE 9:18-27

INTRODUCTION:

1. Tonight we will look at Peter's confession of faith (9:20b).
2. There is a slight difference in the different Gospel accounts. Matthew records our Lord's famous response to Peter's confession, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18), but this verse is not found in the other Gospels.
3. The name Peter (*Petros*) means, "little rock." The Greek word translated "rock" in Matthew 16:18 is *petra*, which means a "large rock."
4. The *Scofield Study Bible* says, "There is in the Greek a play upon the words, 'thou art Peter (*petros*-- literally 'a little rock'), and upon this rock (*Petra*) I will build my church.' He does not promise to build His church upon Peter, but upon Himself, as Peter is careful to tell us (I Peter 2:4-9)."
5. Jesus is the Rock. First Corinthians 10:4 says, "that Rock was Christ."
6. Peter himself said Christ is "a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word" (I Peter 2:8).
7. It is crucial to understand this, because this passage deals with the important question, "Who is Jesus?" (cf. 9:18-20).

I. OUR LORD'S QUESTION (9:18).

1. The answer to that question reveals our understanding of God. First Timothy 3:16 says the Lord Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh.
2. Isaiah 9:6 says Christ is "The mighty God."
3. Hebrews 1:8 says, "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom."
4. So it is very important to know who Jesus is.
5. A person can be wrong about certain things and still make it to heaven, but if he is wrong about Jesus, he will die and go to hell.
6. For example, a person may have erroneous views on baptism but still go to heaven.
7. A person may have erroneous views on Bible prophecy and still go to heaven.
8. But if a person is wrong about who Jesus is, he is going to hell.
9. For example, Unitarians say, "Jesus is the supreme teacher and leader of humankind, and salvation is to be achieved through conforming one's life to his teaching."

10. Sometimes, while driving in my car I hear an advertisement for a radio program called, the "Christian Science Sentinel." They refer vaguely to Jesus, but their Jesus is not the Jesus of the Bible.
11. Muslims believe that Jesus was a "Messenger of God," but not the Son of God.
12. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus was "Jehovah's first creation," and they also believe that Jesus Christ and Michael the archangel are the same person.
13. Mormons believe Jesus is the "spirit brother of Satan."
14. All of these people are very religious, and they may be very sincere, but they are sincerely wrong. They do not know who Jesus is. Therefore they are lost and will surely go to hell.
15. Our Lord asked His disciples, "Whom say the people that I am?" They answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again" (9:19).
16. That is an interesting answer. There were many people (including Herod – cf. 9:7) who thought that John the Baptist had risen from the dead (9:19).
17. Some thought our Lord was the resurrected John the Baptist; while some thought He was Elijah or one of the other prophets (9:8, 19).
18. Malachi 4:5 says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD."
19. People thought our Lord was Elijah or some other great prophet with supernatural power. But our Lord asked His disciples, "But whom say ye that I am?" (9:20).
20. This question was put to the disciples in order for them to make a confession of faith – that they did believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah and the Son of God.

II. PETER'S CONFESSION OF FAITH

1. Peter was the boldest and most outspoken of the disciples, so it is not surprising that he would speak out and declare, "The Christ (Messiah) of God" (9:20b).
2. Mark and Luke do not mention our Lord's commendation – "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17).
3. However, Mark and Luke do record our Lord's instructions (9:21). They were not to proclaim His deity at that time.
4. After telling them not to tell others what they had learned, our Lord told them about His impending death and resurrection (9:22).

5. Prior to this He had made similar statements but they were not as clear (cf. John 2:19-21; Luke 5:33-35).
6. But now as the time of our Lord's crucifixion drew closer – it was about six months away at this point – our Lord was speaking more plainly to His disciples about the order of events leading up to His death and resurrection (9:22).
7. Matthew and Mark tell us that Peter actually “rebuked” our Lord at this point (Matthew 16:22, 23; Mark 8:32, 33).
8. In Luke’s account, he passes over our Lord's commendation of Peter, Peter's rebuke, and our Lord's rebuke and immediately proceeds with the test of discipleship (9:23-27).

III. THE TEST OF DISCIPLESHIP (9:23-27).

1. This test can be broken down into four parts.
 - (1) Self to be denied.
 - (2) The cross is to be taken up daily.
 - (3) Christ is to be followed.
 - (4) Our life is to be lost.
2. This is the test of discipleship, not the terms of salvation (cf. John 3:16; Romans 10:9).
3. It is not the cross of Christ that the follower of Christ is to take up. No one but the Lord Himself could take that cross.
4. Our Lord said, let him “take up his cross daily” (9:23). This means there is a cross for you and there is a cross for me.

*Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
 And all the world go free?
 No, there's a cross for everyone,
 And there's a cross for me.
 How happy are the saints above,
 Who once went sorrowing here!
 But now they taste unmingled love,
 And joy without a tear.
 The consecrated cross I'll bear
 Till death shall set me free;
 And then go home my crown to wear,
 For there's a crown for me.
 Upon the crystal pavement down
 At Jesus' piercèd feet,
 Joyful I'll cast my golden crown
 And His dear Name repeat.*

*O precious cross! O glorious crown!
O resurrection day!
When Christ the Lord from Heav'n comes down
And bears my soul away. – Thomas Shepherd*

5. I often hear people refer to “their cross to bear” and oftentimes it is obvious they do not really understand what Jesus meant.
6. Our Lord is not referring to the common sufferings experienced in life, but to that suffering and shame which the Christian assumes because of his relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.
7. It is a willingness to suffer for Jesus and for the Gospel’s sake. The cross symbolizes the shame, persecution and abuse which the world heaped upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The hymn writer referred to the cross as “the emblem of suffering and shame.”
8. The second stanza says, “Oh, that old rugged cross so despised by the world...” The cross was the symbol of the hostile hatred of the world – the malignant, malicious, cruel treatment of mankind toward the Lord Jesus Christ.
9. The cross not only represents the hatred this world has for Jesus, it also represents the hatred this world has for true Christians.
10. And it is this fierce animosity that causes many sinners and even many Christians to avoid the offence of the cross.
11. The apostle Paul refers to “the offence of the cross” in Galatians 5:11.
12. The offence of the cross is referred to in Hebrews 11:26 as “the reproach of Christ” (cf. Heb. 11:25, 26).
13. When you tell certain sinners they cannot get to heaven by their church membership or their baptism or their good deeds they often get angry. Paul was persecuted because he preached the cross (Gal. 5:11).
14. But there are very few preachers like Paul today. Today preachers seem more concerned with making Christianity popular and appealing to the flesh than they do about preaching the cross (Luke 9:23-26).
15. Pastors today are following the advice of marketing professionals, who promote a worldly principle: give the people what they want.
16. But the Bible teaches the exact opposite -- give the people what they need! They need salvation. They need to get right with God.
17. In Scripture, the gospel is not something that people want, but something they need.
18. The test of discipleship can be broken down into four parts.
19. Self is to be denied (9:23). Charles Finney explained what self-denial is, and what it is not.

What self-denial is not: It is not the giving up of one form of selfishness for the sake of another form; it is not breaking off from any form of sin, for fear of the consequences of indulgence to self; for this, after all, is only consulting self-interest. It is not breaking off from any form of sin, from the expectation of reward. It is not forsaking any form of indulgence for prudential reasons, such as regard to the health, wealth, reputation, etc. This is not self-denial, but only a regard to self-interest. It is only one form of selfishness triumphing over another. Self-denial does not consist in either doing or omitting any thing whatever from selfish motives. For it is impossible to deny self for selfish reasons. It is absurd to talk of denying self to promote self-interest; for this is not self-denial, but is only denying self in one respect, for the sake of gratifying self in another respect. Self is after all at the bottom. And self-interest is the grand reason of every change of this kind. Nor does self-denial consist in giving to others that for which we have no use, or the use of which could be of no service to us. There is no denying self in this. Nor does self-denial consist in giving or doing that which subjects us to no privation, inconvenience, or trouble. What self-denial is there in this? Nor does it consist in that which subjects us to any degree of expense, inconvenience, trouble, reproach, or even death itself, if it be for any selfish reason; for in this case it is only self-interest and self-indulgence, instead of self-denial.

What self-denial is:

It is the denying of self, not for the sake of a greater good to self, but for the sake of doing good to others. This is really denying self. Self-denial is a real sacrifice of self-interest, from disinterested motives; that is, from a singleness of eye, to glorify God, and do good to others.

20. The cross is to be taken up daily (9:23). This means death to self. Galatians 5:24, 25 says, "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

21. Romans 6:11 says, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

22. Christ is to be followed (9:23). This is impossible without the previous two steps: Self must be denied, and the cross must be taken up daily (9:23).

23. Life is to be lost (9:24). This is a paradox.

24. Frederic Godet said, "No axiom was more frequently repeated by Jesus; it is, as it were, the substance of His moral authority." Godet mentioned how in Luke 17:33, our Lord applied this to His second coming, when "it will be fully realized" (*Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*).

CONCLUSION:

All unannounced and mostly undetected there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. It is like the old

cross, but different: the likenesses are superficial; the differences, fundamental.

From this new cross has sprung a new philosophy of the Christian life, and from that new philosophy has come a new evangelical technique – a new type of meeting and a new kind of preaching. This new evangelism employs the same language as the old, but its content is not the same and its emphasis not as before.

The old cross would have no truck with the world. For Adam's proud flesh it meant the end of the journey. It carried into effect the sentence imposed by the law of Sinai. The new cross is not opposed to the human race; rather, it is a friendly pal and, if understood aright, it is the source of oceans of good clean fun and innocent enjoyment. It lets Adam live without interference. His life motivation is unchanged; he still lives for his own pleasure, only now he takes delight in singing choruses and watching religious movies instead of singing bawdy songs and drinking hard liquor.

The accent is still on enjoyment, though the fun is now on a higher plane morally if not intellectually. The new cross encourages a new and entirely different evangelistic approach. The evangelist does not demand abnegation of the old life before a new life can be received. He preaches not contrasts but similarities. He seeks to key into public interest by showing that Christianity makes no unpleasant demands; rather, it offers the same thing the world does, only on a higher level.

Whatever the sin-mad world happens to be clamoring after at the moment is cleverly shown to be the very thing the gospel offers, only the religious product is better.

The new cross does not slay the sinner, it redirects him. It gears him into a cleaner and jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. To the self-assertive it says, "Come and assert yourself for Christ." To the egotist it says, "Come and do your boasting in the Lord." To the thrill-seeker it says, "Come and enjoy the thrill of Christian fellowship." The Christian message is slanted in the direction of the current vogue in order to make it acceptable to the public.

The philosophy back of this kind of thing may be sincere but its sincerity does not save it from being false. It is false because it is blind. It misses completely the whole meaning of the cross. The old cross is a symbol of death. It stands for the abrupt, violent end of a human being. The man in Roman times who took up his cross and started down the road had already said good-bye to his friends. He was not coming back. He was going out to have it ended. The cross made no compromise, modified nothing, spared nothing; it slew all of the man, completely and for good. It did not try to keep on good terms with its victim. It struck cruel and hard, and when it had finished its work, the man was no more.

The race of Adam is under death sentence. There is no commutation and no escape. God cannot approve any of the fruits of sin, however innocent they may appear or beautiful to the eyes of men. God salvages the individual by liquidating him and then raising him again to newness of life.

That evangelism which draws friendly parallels between the ways of God and the ways of men is false to the Bible and cruel to the souls of its hearers. The faith of Christ does not parallel the world, it intersects it. In coming to Christ we do not bring our old life up onto a higher plane; we leave it at the cross. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die.

We who preach the gospel must not think of ourselves as public relations agents sent to establish good will between Christ and the world. We must not imagine ourselves commissioned to make Christ acceptable to big business, the press, the world of sports or modern education. We are not diplomats but prophets, and our message is not a compromise but an ultimatum.

God offers life, but not an improved old life. The life He offers is life out of death. It stands always on the far side of the cross. Whoever would possess it must pass under the rod. He must repudiate himself and concur in God's just sentence against him. What does this mean to the individual, the condemned man who would find life in Christ Jesus? How can this theology be translated into life? Simply, he must repent and believe. He must

forsake his sins and then go on to forsake himself. Let him cover nothing, defend nothing, excuse nothing. Let him not seek to make terms with God, but let him bow his head before the stroke of God's stern displeasure and acknowledge himself worthy to die.

Having done this let him gaze with simple trust upon the risen Saviour, and from Him will come life and rebirth and cleansing and power. The cross that ended the earthly life of Jesus now puts an end to the sinner; and the power that raised Christ from the dead now raises him to a new life along with Christ.

To any who may object to this or count it merely a narrow and private view of truth, let me say God has set His hallmark of approval upon this message from Paul's day to the present. Whether stated in these exact words or not, this has been the content of all preaching that has brought life and power to the world through the centuries. The mystics, the reformers, the revivalists have put their emphasis here, and signs and wonders and mighty operations of the Holy Ghost gave witness to God's approval.

Dare we, the heirs of such a legacy of power, tamper with the truth? Dare we with our stubby pencils erase the lines of the blueprint or alter the pattern shown us in the Mount? May God forbid. Let us preach the old cross and we will know the old power. A.W. Tozer (The OLD CROSS and the NEW)