

A call to die

We too often focus on what we get out of following Jesus – our blessings, our peace, our hope, our wellbeing, and so on. However, was that Jesus' focus? They were perks of being in Him, but not what we were called to run after in life. What then did Jesus call us to do, if not to run after those things? He called us to die and follow Him. Follow Him in what? Follow Him in death.

Luke 9:21-27 Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. ²² And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

²³ Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. ²⁵ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? ²⁶ Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

²⁷ "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."

1) Jesus, an example to follow

- Before Jesus told His disciples what He expected of them, He told them what was going to happen to Him
- Jesus never expects us to do anything that He wasn't prepared to do Himself, including to suffer and die.
 - 1 Peter 2:21-24 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."
 - This is not only an example of following Him in His sufferings and death, but also following Him in the right responses to others within that suffering.
 - We aren't following in Jesus' footsteps if we suffer with Him, but are bitter and twisted against those causing our suffering
 - Even in the midst of His suffering while hanging on the cross, Jesus still cried out for the forgiveness of those who put Him on the cross. To follow His example in this way is truly following Jesus.
- Following Jesus means to live the lifestyle of Jesus i.e., living according to His character
 - 1 John 2:5-6 This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.
- However, we must be careful not to think that Jesus merely came as a good teacher to set us an example to follow.
 - I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (C.S. Lewis)
- As God, Jesus' sufferings and death were far more than examples to follow; they were far deeper than that. They were His sacrifice of Himself for the sins of the world and His resurrection breaking the power of death over all who would believe giving us the hope of eternal life.
 - We can follow Jesus' example of suffering and death with the right attitudes, but we can't die for the sins of the world and break the power of death over anyone.
 - We can only point to Him who can do that while following His example of life and godliness by being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit ourselves.

2) A call to die to live

- Luke 9:23-25 Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?
- The call to follow Jesus isn’t a call to know more about Him, to know His morals and ethics, to know about the culture in which He lived, or even to know the scriptures better, although all of those are good, necessary and beneficial in life.
- The call to follow Him is a call to die in order that we may gain life.
 - At the time of Jesus the cross wasn’t a religious symbol, but an instrument of death – a painful torturous death that the Romans used to execute their enemies.
 - So when Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses daily and follow Him, He means that we have to die daily.
- What does it mean to die daily?
 - It means that we have to die to our own desires and ambitions, to our yearning for anything worldly and sinful, to pride and self-centeredness.
- In dying daily, we then gain the life that Jesus gives when we follow Him
 - We gain righteousness, peace, and joy; we gain freedom from bondage, wholesome lives, and an eternal hope.
- Our choice is whether we want to save our own worldly self-centred lives that we’ll eventually lose, or lose that to gain what is so much better.
 - This choice is only by God’s grace and by the freedom that He gives at the cross.
 - He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose. (Jim Elliot)

3) Seeing beyond the here and now

- Luke 9:26-27 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.
- The way we live now will affect what happens in eternity
 - If we’re ashamed of Him in this life, He’ll be ashamed of us when He comes back again in all His glory
 - Be careful not to call Him Lord yet not do what He says
 - John 14:21-24 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?”²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.
- This is true for those who aren’t ashamed to refer to the name of Jesus, even calling Him Lord, but don’t align their lives with His will
 - They say they’re following Jesus, but haven’t denied themselves and taken up their crosses to follow Him.
 - They merely think they’re following Him within their own comfort zones, but in fact living their own lives and using His name for their own benefit
 - Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.