



Unashamed

Jesus expects His followers to forsake all else for Him.

LUKE 9:18-27

Some people prefer to follow Jesus from a distance. Like Nicodemus, they would rather come to Him in the middle of the night with no one watching. They may want to fit in with a specific group, so they keep silent. They may be worried about the ramifications of publicly declaring their faith in Jesus, wondering what family, friends, or coworkers might say. Jesus' death on the cross was a public event, and He calls His followers to live a public life for Him.

Why might a person hesitate to identify as a follower of Jesus?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LUKE 9:1-62

Jesus was ready to give His followers some “on-the-job training” in ministry. Since they would be the ones carrying His message to the world after He went back to the Father, they needed to be prepared. So He sent them to the surrounding villages but not without a warning (Luke 9:1-6). They needed to rely on God’s power, not on the material things that might provide comfort along the way.

Jesus caught the attention of some powerful people, most notably Herod (9:7-9). While Herod knew about the power of John the Baptist’s preaching—and executed John because of it—he was now intrigued with Jesus. Luke wrote that Herod wanted to meet Jesus, something that eventually happened during Jesus’ trial before His crucifixion (23:6-12).

After their ministry in the villages, Jesus took His disciples away to a quiet location for rest and retreat, but the crowds followed them. Once He saw the crowd’s desperate need, He began teaching them. He also used a small boy’s lunch to feed a large crowd, which numbered at least five thousand men (9:10-17).

Finally finding some time alone, Jesus instructed His followers about what it truly meant to be His disciples. While Peter correctly acknowledged Him as the Son of God (9:18-22), Jesus knew they still had much to learn about suffering and becoming more like Him (9:23-27). The disciples proved this to be true. After some had seen His glory during the transfiguration (9:28-36) and the rest had witnessed His exorcism of a demon (9:37-43), they still managed to get into an argument over which of them was the greatest (9:44-48).

Twice in Luke 9, Jesus predicted His death and resurrection (9:21-22,44-45). This did not hinder Him from starting His journey toward the cross (9:51). Along the way, He encountered three would-be followers (9:57-62). Jesus made it clear that discipleship comes with a cost that His followers must be prepared to pay.

Read Luke 9:18-27, circling Peter’s confession and underlining Jesus’ directives. How does Peter’s confession lead to the directives given by Jesus?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONFESS HIM (LUKE 9:18-20)

¹⁸ Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?” ¹⁹ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”

²⁰ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”

VERSES 18-19

Sometime after feeding the five thousand, Jesus and His disciples found a quiet place to regroup. Luke noted that Jesus had been spending time *praying in private*. Luke often showed Jesus in prayer prior to key decisions or major events. His *disciples were with him* and were likely learning from His example.

After this time with the Father, Jesus turned His attention to His disciples by asking a simple question: *Who do the crowds say I am?* His disciples had spent a lot of time with the crowds. Most recently, they had served food to the multitudes and cleaned up after they were done. They certainly had heard opinions about Jesus.

Some believed Jesus was *John the Baptist*, though Luke pointed out that Herod had already executed John by this time (Luke 9:7). Still, Jesus’ powerful preaching had convinced many that John had been raised from the dead and returned to His ministry through Jesus.

Others thought Jesus was the prophet *Elijah*. This was another rumor that had made its way to Herod as he wondered about Jesus’ identity (9:8). Elijah had gone to heaven without tasting death, and Jewish tradition stated that he would return to earth as a prophetic precursor to the Messiah (Mal. 4:5). Ironically, this led some to believe Jesus was just an opening act for the real thing.

A third group saw Jesus as one of the other *prophets of long ago* who had come back from the dead. His message of repentance and the kingdom of God reminded the people of the bold preachers they had learned about in Israel’s history. While Jesus certainly was a prophet, this designation did not fully describe His identity or His mission. Jesus was much more.

How do the answers given by the disciples compare to how people view Jesus today?

VERSE 20

Jesus may have found these opinions interesting, though He probably already knew what the crowds were thinking. His main focus was on the disciples—what did they think of Jesus?

His first question in verse 18 was just a tool to lead up to His main question: ***But what about you? ... Who do you say I am?*** Luke used an emphatic for *you*. It was also plural, showing that He was talking to all the disciples. The opinions of the crowds were one thing. But if the disciples accepted insufficient explanations, they would continue struggling to understand the Messiah's mission and the part they were called to play in it.

Peter answered for the group, stating that Jesus was ***God's Messiah***. The disciples had seen Jesus' works and heard His words. They might not have understood all the implications of this confession, but they believed He was the One their nation had waited centuries to see and was their hope for deliverance.

The people's misunderstanding might be traced to their misunderstanding of the messianic role. The Jews were looking for a military leader who would overthrow Rome and create a new Israel. Jesus was not that kind of Messiah. He had come to set people free from sin, not from a Roman dictatorship.

ACCEPT HIS RESURRECTION (LUKE 9:21-22)

²¹ 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."

VERSE 21

Once Jesus established that His disciples knew who He was and what He had come to do, He quickly told them to keep these facts to themselves. Luke said that He ***strictly warned*** them to avoid telling

anyone about Him being the Messiah. Jesus wasn't trying to hide His true identity. He simply knew that not everyone was ready to hear and respond to the truth. As noted, many Jews believed the Messiah was going to be a military leader. If those individuals accepted Jesus with that expectation, it could disrupt His true mission.

In addition, any public proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah could create tension and potential conflict with the Roman authorities. Obviously, the Romans would play a role in Jesus' crucifixion, but those events would happen according to God's timing and His plan. So, while Jesus understood that Peter's confession was correct, He also understood it was incomplete. Jesus knew His mission came with a cruel cross instead of an earthly crown.

VERSE 22

Jesus again reminded His disciples that His true mission would involve glory only after suffering. For the third time in chapter 9, He predicted His crucifixion and resurrection. To emphasize that this was the Messiah's purpose, He used the term ***Son of Man***, a title that Luke often used when writing about Jesus' suffering and one that Jews closely associated with the Anointed One.

Jesus said He would ***suffer many things and be rejected*** at the hands of the religious leaders. As Luke had noted, they were already scheming against Jesus. Rather than misinterpret His role as Messiah, they would outright deny Him—and kill Him. Luke described them as a collective group, united in their desire to silence Jesus once and for all.

Jesus emphasized this suffering was necessary. It was not an accident or a tragedy. It was the fulfillment of God's plan for salvation. But He added that the cross would not be the final word because He would ***on the third day be raised***. Unfortunately, the disciples forgot His words until after the resurrection. In fact, the religious leaders remembered His words more so than His closest followers (Matt. 27:62-64).

The Jewish religious leaders defined Jesus through their own filter. What filters do people use today that gives them an unclear understanding of who Jesus is?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion (Luke 24:44-46).

FOLLOW HIM UNASHAMEDLY (LUKE 9:23-27)

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.”

VERSE 23

Jesus told the disciples that He would suffer, but He also wanted them to realize that suffering was not reserved only for the Messiah. As His followers, they would need to **deny** themselves. Their own ambitions and desires would need to be shelved in favor of Jesus’ demands. This would include any sense of security they might draw from earthly positions. For a group who may have held aspirations of power and glory, this would have been a hard pill to swallow.

Next, Jesus called each of them to **take up their cross**. Being a disciple isn’t simply a matter of self-denial. It involves a lifestyle that consistently puts the needs of others first—even to the point of death, which most of these disciples would come to personally understand. What’s more, this is not a one-time commitment. Jesus said we are to die to ourselves on a **daily** basis.

Finally, disciples **follow** Jesus. It is one thing to give Jesus lip service. It is much more to let Him set our agendas. True believers rely on Him as their compass. Luke used a present imperative verb, which means following Jesus is a continual, ongoing command.

What does it look like for a person to deny self, take up his or her cross, and follow Jesus?

BIBLE SKILL: *Identify the imagery in a verse or passage used in other passages.*

Paul employed the metaphor of the cross to help believers understand what it means to be a follower of Christ. Read Romans 6:6; 7:4; Galatians 2:19-20; 5:24; and 6:14. How does what Paul wrote compare to what Jesus said in Luke 9? How would you describe how Jesus' followers understood what Jesus said about taking up a cross?

VERSES 24-25

Jesus highlighted the benefits of following Him. To make His point, He set up a paradox between ***whoever wants to save their life*** and ***whoever loses their life***. Those who insist on hanging on to their own lives will eventually lose what they hold dearest. By trying to maintain control, they actually lose control of who and what they are. In contrast, the one who surrenders his or her life—by denying self, taking up a cross, and following Jesus—will live. As a good steward, this individual will have gained a much greater treasure than what they released.

Jesus' question in verse 25 indicates that the battle for our lives is really a battle for our eternal souls. Even if an individual ***gain the whole world***, the victory would be temporary and hollow because it ends when this life ends. One who pursues only what this world has to offer forfeits himself for eternity.

VERSE 26

Those who take up their cross testify to the glory and grace of the Savior. But those who shirk from true discipleship also shirk from Him. Jesus said they would be **ashamed** of Him and His words. The Greek wording Luke used here isn't about being embarrassed, it refers to disowning or completely rejecting someone. Those who are ashamed of Christ were never really His disciples in the first place. Since they had rejected Him, He would reject them in eternity. They will have no place in His kingdom.

VERSE 27

The word **truly** demonstrates that Jesus was drawing special attention to what He was about to say. He pointed out that some of those present would not **taste death** without seeing the kingdom of God. Obviously, each of these disciples suffered physical death. In fact, some—if not many—had already died as martyrs by the time Luke wrote his Gospel. Thus, some have wondered how Jesus could say that they would see the kingdom beforehand.

A few explanations are possible. Some believe Jesus was referring to the events on the Mount of Transfiguration, which Luke described immediately after these verses. It is also possible that Jesus was emphasizing again that the kingdom was present wherever He was present.

Another possible meaning relates to what the disciples would witness in the days to come. Not long after this conversation, most of them would see Jesus crucified and raised from the dead. A few weeks later, they would watch Him return to the Father. Then, they would experience the power of Pentecost and the birth of the church. In reality, the rest of their lives would be dedicated to seeing God's kingdom move across the known world. We will see His kingdom as well if we are faithful disciples of Christ.

Where have you seen the kingdom of God at work around you? How has that encouraged you to embrace Jesus when you could have denied Him?

APPLY THE TEXT

- All people must realize who Jesus is.
- Not all will accept Jesus as the promised Messiah.
- Believers are called upon to unashamedly follow Christ with all their being.

What are some practical things you and your Bible study group can do to help people have an accurate view of Jesus' identity? Why is that important?

Do you know someone who needs to recognize the dangers of rejecting Jesus? How can you use these passages to help that person understand those dangers?

How would you rate your denying of yourself, taking up your cross, and following Jesus daily? What actions can you take to grow in these three areas?

PRAYER NEEDS

A Silence Broken



By James Wiles

Sometimes dysfunction in a family can lead to silence between family members. Unfortunately, such a silence can last for years or even decades. But a silence spanning four centuries is unique to human history. That is how long it had been since the nation of Judah—God’s chosen people—had heard from Him. Not since the time of the prophet Malachi had Judah

heard the voice of God. But that was about to change.

Zechariah and Elizabeth seemingly made the perfect couple, seeing that they were both from priestly families. Indeed, the Scriptures tell they were looking forward to the coming Messiah and were living obediently in accord with the divine revelation.

Yet all was not perfect with their ideal family. For years they longed for a child but had not had one. The social stigma of barrenness often left couples bitter. Yet Zechariah and Elizabeth remained faithful, trusting God to fulfill His will for their lives and somehow, some way, sometime provide that missing piece to their otherwise perfect lives. They continued their normal routine, month in and month out, year after year, and still were without a child. But that too was about to change.

As a priest from the division of Abijah, the eighth of the

twenty-four divisions of the Levitical priesthood (1 Chron. 24:7-18), Zechariah served in the temple two weeks a year. His duties varied depending on three things: the number of priests on hand, the activities scheduled for the week, and the casting of lots. The priests cast lots to discern whom God had chosen to perform the duties of highest honor. One such duty was the offering of incense. Because the number of priests was so large, this duty was assigned only once in a priest's lifetime. Thus it was the summit of his priestly ministry.

That the pinnacle of Zechariah's priestly ministry occurred at the exact time of God's renewed communication with His people is no coincidence. While first-century Jewish culture often associated the barrenness of a woman with sin, Luke 1:6 clearly indicates this was not the case for Zechariah and Elizabeth. Just as Sarah (Gen. 11:30), Rebekah (25:21), and Rachel (29:31) before her, Elizabeth's barrenness was by God's design and was ultimately to be for God's glory. Her son was destined to be the forerunner of the Messiah, thus the timing of his birth had to be in harmony with the timing of the Messiah's advent. Elizabeth's barrenness and the Lord's 400-year silence were both

about to be broken simultaneously in one event—God's announcing the coming of the forerunner of the Messiah.

Zechariah stood at the golden altar, which was next to the veil in the temple's holy place, as close to the holy of holies and the ark of the covenant as any man could get, except the high priest, who could enter once a year (Heb. 9:6-7). Zechariah placed on the golden altar the specially prepared incense (Ex. 30:34-38), and he offered prayers of intercession. Luke did not report the content of Zechariah's prayers; we can assume Zechariah was praying for the redemption of Israel, the fulfillment of God's promise to send the Messiah.

The appearance of the angel Gabriel shattered Zechariah's thoughts. And as so often happens when God touches our lives to answer our prayers, Zechariah stepped back in disbelief. How could it be that in this holy place an intruder had entered? Could it possibly be that after 400 years of silence God would speak and answer Zechariah's prayers—Israel's prayers? Gabriel's message answered the question with a resounding "Yes!" The Messiah was soon to appear, and Zechariah's son would prepare His way. God's plan for their son was far

more than Zechariah and Elizabeth had ever dreamed. Since the message was wonderful—too wonderful for Zechariah to believe—he asked for some assurance. His lack of faith was answered with his becoming mute. This was not a time to speak, but a time to believe. Unable to speak, Zechariah could only communicate by making signs (Luke 1:22). When at last he stepped outside the temple door, the people who had gathered around for prayer knew something unusual had occurred.

At the end of the week, Zechariah returned home, and not long after, Elizabeth was pregnant. In due course, Elizabeth gave birth to a son, and in obedience to the angel's message, named him John. When confronted with the unusual choice for his son's name, Zechariah responded in obedience and his voice was restored. Thus ended the barrenness of Elizabeth, the silence of God with His people, and Zechariah's silence as well.

Elizabeth and Zechariah's son, John, grew strong in body and spirit. From him Judah once again heard, "Thus says the Lord."

We can learn lessons from the experiences of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

- Just because we start out life full of potential does not mean we will have a smooth ride.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were considered the perfect couple until they wound up later in life with no children.

- When things don't turn out the way we planned, we should continue to trust in the Lord. Even though their prayers for a child went unanswered, Zechariah and Elizabeth continued in their service to God.
- Without our realizing it, God may be at work to provide for us a life beyond our dreams. Elizabeth and Zechariah never imagined their child would be the forerunner of the Messiah, but God's plan was exactly that.
- God has the power to bring His plans to fruition, but we have to open our lives for Him to use us. Some might say Zechariah just happened to be at the right place at the right time to receive God's blessing. But I prefer to believe God blesses those who are faithfully serving Him.

This article first appeared in the Winter 2007-08 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. James Wiles is a freelance writer living in Fort Worth, Texas.

COMING **NEXT QUARTER**

LUKE 10-24

- Session 1* **Neighbors?** • Luke 10:25-37
- Session 2* **Celebrate?** • Luke 15:20-32
- Session 3* **Worthy?** • Luke 18:9-17
- Session 4* **Worshiped** • Luke 19:29-40
- Session 5* **Resurrected** • Luke 24:1-12
- Session 6* **Sinners?** • Luke 19:1-10
- Session 7* **Cornerstone** • Luke 20:9-19
- Session 8* **Remembered** • Luke 22:7-20
- Session 9* **Willing** • Luke 22:41-53
- Session 10* **Denied** • Luke 22:54-62
- Session 11* **Sacrificed** • Luke 23:33-46
- Session 12* **Revealed** • Luke 24:18-31
- Session 13* **Commissions** • Luke 24:36-49

LUKE