

All of Me

LUKE 9:18-27

As Our Savior Jesus Gave All He Had. If We Want To Be Considered One Of His, We Must Give All We Have As Well.

I. DECIDING WHO JESUS IS (VS 18-20)

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All of Me

Luke 9:18-25

I had a difficult time deciding what I wanted to title this sermon. I wanted to title the sermon, "All in," because at critical points in a poker game, one of the players is willing to risk all he has at the table to force the issue. If she wins, she is the big winner. On the other hand, if she loses, she is out of the game. It seems to represent what authentic faith looks like with Jesus. Do we believe that when we hold Jesus, we hold a hand that no one in the universe can beat? In other words, are we willing to go all in with our lives? It seems to me, that Jesus is constantly asking the disciples this question, "Are you willing to go all in with Me?" We have seen the disciples give up everything to follow Jesus. They gave up their businesses and left their families and friends behind. So in other words, if we are going to be authentic followers of Jesus, it means that we bet everything on Him being the Messiah and the only way to heaven. That was a good title and I had a good joke to go with it.

On the one hand, for some strange reason, I have been humming this song over and over again. It's one of those tunes you can't get out of your head. The song is titled "All of me." Louis Armstrong sings it with that great raspy jazz voice. There's a phrase in the song that says, "I gave you the best ... Why not take all the rest ... Why not take all of me?" It's easy to see how Jesus could sing that line to us. It occurred to me that should be our prayer back to God. Every morning, before our feet hit the floor, we should offer ourselves up to God with the prayer, "All of me Lord, please take all of me."

This morning's passage is going to force us into making a decision. If you are an unbeliever, I would like you to seriously consider what I am preaching this morning. I would love for you to decide to follow Jesus. If you have made a commitment to Christ but are not evidencing any fruits of faith in Christ, I would encourage you to decide to start taking your faith seriously and dedicate yourself to holy living. If you have been a believer for a long time, I would like for you to examine how seriously Jesus expects you to live out your faith and ask yourself if you need to rededicate your life to Jesus. Wherever you find yourself this morning, please see that Jesus expects us to make a good decision.

Two young lieutenants were testing for a promotion. They both had the same qualifications and time in grade for the promotion. In order to determine which lieutenant would be promoted to captain, the commander gave them a test. Both applicants got 9 out of 10 questions correct. The commander called one of the lieutenants in and said, "Thanks for your taking time to take the test for promotion but we've decided to give the promotion to the other lieutenant."

"We both got 9 questions right on the test. Why didn't I get selected?"

The commander said, "I based my decision on the question you both missed," to which the lieutenant said, "How could one incorrect answer be better than the other?"

The commander said, "On question #5 the other lieutenant answered, "I don't know." Your answer for #5 was, "Neither do I."

It was easy to see how the commander made his decision which lieutenant to promote. In this life, there is only one question that matters. We must decide Who Jesus is. No one will go to heaven because they are good and no one will go to hell for being bad. One gets to heaven by receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior. One gets to hell by rejecting Jesus is the Lord and Savior. It will be a simple decision for Jesus. Jesus decided that He wanted to love us by suffering and dying on the cross. Now we must decide if we want to love Jesus by receiving Him as Lord and Savior.

This morning's text is meant to force us into deciding Who we think Jesus is? The main idea is relatively straightforward. AS OUR SAVIOR JESUS GAVE ALL HE HAD. IF WE WANT TO BE CONSIDERED ONE OF HIS, WE MUST GIVE ALL WE HAVE AS WELL. There is no doubt about the Bible's message. Jesus loved us so much that He came to suffer and die so that we could be forgiven of our sins and cleansed from all our unrighteousness. It is His desire to save us and bring us into a right relationship with God. The Bible says that God does not want anyone to go to hell but the decision lies with each one of us.

The first step is described in verses 18-20 as deciding Who Jesus is. JESUS INVITES EACH PERSON TO EXAMINE HIS CLAIMS AND THEN DECIDE WHO HE IS. I want to invite all of us: whether we think we are believers, or if we know that we are not yet believers to decide this morning Who Jesus is.

DECIDING WHO JESUS IS (VS 18-20)

In verse 18 we see Jesus creating a reflective environment for the disciples. If you remember from last time, Jesus had taken the disciples aside to process their recent missionary journey. But they were interrupted by a crowd of more than 5,000. Jesus taught them and miraculously fed them. Now it was finally time for Jesus and the disciples to spend time alone. Jesus was praying and the disciples were with Him. Jesus raises His head, looks at the disciples and says, "Who do the crowds say I am?"

Jesus is now in the process of wrapping up the Galilean ministry. Shortly, He will be headed for Jerusalem to fulfill His mission. It's important to make sure His disciples are ready for this final assault on Jerusalem.

There are a couple of things here for us. First of all, we need to place ourselves in a quiet space for Jesus to speak to us, instruct us, and minister to us. We have to quiet ourselves and that is difficult because we live in a world that moves very quickly, there are many distractions, many things vying for our attention, and we are not very comfortable being quiet before God. But if we want to be considered true followers of Jesus, we must come to this place regularly.

Next, we must be ready before we do things for God. For example, if we are going to participate on the worship team, if we are going to lead a small group, teach Sunday school, or other ministries, we must be prepared to do these things. Let's see how Jesus makes sure the disciples are ready for this mission to Jerusalem. He starts out by asking them Who the crowds think He is.

In verses 19 we see some of the popular views. Jesus had been going around healing the sick, performing miracles, casting out demons, calling people to repentance and faith, and announcing the arrival of God's Kingdom.

Because of Jesus' call to repentance and His attacks on all false expressions of religion, some felt that He was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Because of the miracles He performed, some thought He was the prophet Elijah returned to earth. And because of the prophetic nature of His message, some felt He was one of the Old Testament prophets brought back to life. Jesus talked a lot about the end times and judgment.

There are these types of sentiments floating around today. Almost everyone thinks Jesus was a great moral teacher. They look at some of His teachings that warn us not to judge others. Jesus instructed to be a good neighbor and to love even our enemies. They place Jesus in the same category as great moral teachers who were killed for their teachings like Martin Luther King Jr., Socrates, Abraham Lincoln, or Steven Biko who was killed for his stand against apartheid in South Africa. People perceive Jesus to be a peaceful, thoughtful, pacifist like Ghandi.

Some view Jesus as a great spiritual leader like Budah, or the Dalai Lama. They picture Jesus going from place to place preaching love and joy and peace.

Today, even many evangelicals are fooled. Many evangelicals in a recent survey said that there are many ways to God and Jesus is only one of those ways. Please here clearly what C. S. Lewis says in his book Mere Christianity:

"...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."

Let me make it perfectly clear what we believe the Bible to teach. Jesus is not simply a great prophet in the line of many nor is He simply a great moral teacher. Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh and He claimed to be the one and only unique way to be reconciled with God. Listen to the words of Jesus Himself:

"... I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"
(John 14:6 / NRSV).

Jesus clearly stated that He was God and He was the only God. There is no other. Contrary to what our culture teaches, all religions are not correct nor are the equal. The world has a lot to say about Who they think Jesus is and most of what they think is based on wishful thinking.

JESUS DECIDES TO GO ALL IN (VS 21-22)

But in verse 20, Jesus gives us a personal invitation to decide for ourselves. C. S. Lewis made it clear that if we take the teachings and words of Jesus seriously, He is either a liar, a lunatic, or Who He says He is, the Lord and Creator of the Universe. Jesus turns the discussion to the disciples. He says, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" Peter did not hesitate and he seems to be speaking the sentiments of the Twelve. He says, "The Christ of God." This is simple but powerful. I know I've said this before, but it is important to repeat here. Christ is not Jesus' last name. He is not the son of Joseph and Mary Christ. Christ is His title. It is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Messiah. Messiah and Christ mean the Anointed One, the Chosen One. Jesus was the One Who was promised by God through the prophets and the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus is that specially designated One Who will deliver Israel from her sins. Jesus is the rightful King of Israel and in fact the whole world. Jesus is the King of the Kingdom of God that they had been preaching. In Judaism, the priests, prophets, and kings had been set apart and anointed for service. Jesus is the High priest of all priests. Jesus is the greatest of all prophets. Jesus is the greatest King. Indeed Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He has made it clear there is no other way to salvation. If you do not believe this, you are not a Christian according to the Bible. If you are not a Christian then you are not saved and headed for an eternity in hell. The disciples made their confession. The Bible says:

"9... if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved" (Romans 10:9-10 / NRSV).

I'm begging you to think seriously about this question this morning because your eternal destiny rests on the answer. Who do you say Jesus is? I hope this morning you will come to the right decision and say that Jesus is your God and Savior. JESUS INVITES EACH PERSON TO EXAMINE HIS CLAIMS AND THEN DECIDE WHO HE IS.

If you do decide to acknowledge Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you won't be disappointed. In verses 21-22 Jesus decides to go all in. In other words JESUS DECIDED TO GIVE ALL HE HAD FOR A RELATIONSHIP WITH US. I really want us to consider what Jesus did so that we could be in a right relationship with Him. In warning the disciples not to tell anyone that message in those terms was for the safety of the people. If the people got the wrong idea and thought Jesus was there to overthrow the Romans, they may start a revolt and many would die. While Jesus was a young boy, there was a revolution started by a zealot named Judah. In the end, Rome crushed them and crucified about 200 of the Jewish rebels along the roadside. Jesus did not come to crush Rome. He will do that at His second coming. Jesus will crush all worldly kings and kingdoms that stand up against Him. But during His time on earth, He came to crush the power of sin, Satan, and death. You see the problem we have is that sin separates us from God. Jesus had to take care of that problem first.

One of the ways He had to do that was by suffering a great deal. During His ministry, He watched people refuse to accept His message. Since He created us with the ability to decide, He did not interfere with that freedom of choice. Therefore, when people refused to be healed or set free, He was sad, but honored their choice.

He suffered rejection. Jesus was the fulfillment of all of Israel's hopes. He was the fulfillment of the Hebrew prophecies. He was their long awaited Messiah. And yet, because of their pride, the leaders of Judaism at the time rejected Him. He came to save them and the very ones who should have recognized Him, rejected Him.

And Jesus had to suffer death, but not just any death. Keep this in mind. The death Jesus had to die had to reflect what you and I deserve. We deserve to be tortured and humiliated for eternity. Jesus had to experience all of that on behalf of each one of us. Jesus was publicly rejected by His own leaders and handed over to the Romans. The Romans publicly humiliated Him and publicly and mercilessly tortured Him. The Romans then made Him carry His cross through town and crucified Him in the middle of two convicted thieves. Every time someone spit in His face, He received that for our punishment. Every time the whip and hook tore His flesh, it was what we deserved. Every time He was punched in the face, it was for you

and me. Every hammer of the nails, every drop of blood, every shooting pain was what we deserve. You deserve every bit of that humiliation and torture. I deserve every bit of that humiliation and torture. We deserve to spend eternity in hell forever separated from God, The One Who loves us.

Jesus was no victim. Jesus was no martyr. Jesus willingly chose His destiny because of His love for us. That's what you call love.

Jesus had to make sure His disciples were ready because this is not the destiny they thought Jesus was in for. They were expecting Jesus to march to Jerusalem and assume His Kingship. But Jesus wanted them to understand this part of His mission. The prophet Isaiah said this about Jesus' mission about 700 years earlier:

"13See, my servant will prosper; he will be highly exalted. 14Many were amazed when they saw him—beaten and bloodied, so disfigured one would scarcely know he was a person. ...

3He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised, and we did not care.

4Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God for his own sins! 5But he was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. He was whipped, and we were healed! 6All of us have strayed away like sheep. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the guilt and sins of us all.

7He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. 8From prison and trial they led him away to his death. But who among the people realized that he was dying for their sins—that he was suffering their punishment? 9He had done no wrong, and he never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal; ...

10... it was the LORD'S good plan to crush him and fill him with grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have a multitude of children, many heirs. ...11When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of what he has experienced, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins. 12 ... He bore the sins of many and interceded for sinners" (Isaiah 52:12-53:12 / NLT).

But there will be one more part of Jesus' ministry. In order to claim victory over sin, Satan, and death, He will have to conquer them; and conquer them He will. On the third day after His death, the disciples will witness His resurrection from the dead. Jesus' resurrection will prove that He is who He says He is. There was no one in history that rose from the dead. Jesus' mission was to fix the sin problem; the problem that separated us from Him. He died so that we could be in a saving relationship with Him. But the disciples had to decide if Jesus was indeed Who He claimed to be. Then they would have to be prepared to accept that it was for their sins that He was dying. There is no doubt as to Jesus' mission. JESUS DECIDED TO GIVE ALL HE HAD FOR A RELATIONSHIP WITH US.

In poker terms, Jesus went all in for us, even though in no way did we deserve it. There is only one question left to ask. Verses 23-27 force the question, "Will we go all in for Jesus?" I hear people all the time claim to be Christian but nothing in their life evidences that fact. IN ORDER TO BE IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, WE MUST GIVE IT ALL FOR JESUS.

Listen to what many evangelical Christians believe as polled by the Barna Group. They think they are legitimate Christians and yet hold these beliefs:

59% believe it is morally acceptable to live together sexually before marriage.

57% believe it is acceptable to have sexual fantasies about someone.

44% believe it is acceptable to have sex outside of marriage.

33% believe it is acceptable to look at pornography.

32% believe abortion is okay.

If I read the Gospels correctly, there is no way these views are in any way consistent with the teachings of Jesus and the rest of the Bible. And yet people who attend church each week and participate in programs of the church, and may in fact be teaching others have a very defective view of what it means to follow Jesus.

WILL WE GO ALL IN FOR JESUS? (VS 23-27)

In verse 23, Jesus says that following Him means that we give up our rights. Look who Jesus is addressing here. He is addressing anyone that would want to be His follower. That means that if anyone wants to consider themselves a Christian they must deny themselves, pick up their cross, and follow Jesus' way of life. There is no doubt here that our self-interests must be put to death. Think about what this means to deny ourselves. If I deny one of you, it means that I am saying that I don't know you, I don't care about you, and I'm not interested in you. If I am going to deny myself it is as if I am saying to my self, my desires, and all my self-interests, "I don't know you, nor do I care about you, nor do you matter to me in the least. It seems to me that most of us are too selfish and self-absorbed to say that to ourselves. And yet learning to think of others' interests ahead of our own is how the Apostle Paul tells us to act out our love.

Next, Jesus commands that we take up our cross daily. I often hear people say, "This or that is my cross to bear." I would simply like to quote Bruce Larson's explanation in his commentary on Luke:

"The agenda He has for us seems clear here. We are to pick up our cross and follow Him. The cross He has for us should not be confused with the thorns of life, our common human inheritance. The cross is chosen willingly. We tend to say of those who are ill, bereaved, or suffering financial difficulties that the 'have their cross to bear.' But those unfortunate happenings are not crosses. Those are the thorns we have not chosen. ...

But bearing your cross is quite a different matter. Your cross is not like Jesus' cross. His cross was literal one and He died on it to forgive our sins. ... Our cross is that difficult thing we choose to do because we are His people. We receive grace to be brave and uncomplaining through our thorns but the glory comes as we pick up our cross for His sake. We choose a hard place, a difficult relationship, a thankless job. We serve on a committee, or get involved with a neighbor. We do the things we don't have to do because we feel it is God's agenda for us.

What does the cross look like? It looks like Calcutta for Mother Teresa. It looked like Lambarene for Albert Schweitzer. It looked like Africa for David Livingstone and the leper colony at Molokai for Father Damien."

Following Jesus means that we give up our rights in order to serve God and humanity. If you are a husband or wife, it means humbling yourself so that your spouse can be all that God intends for him or her to be. It means to swallow your pride and make relationships right. It means learning submission. It means learning humility. Picking up your cross is always a willing act, never a forced act. Are we willing to let go of our selfish, self-absorbed, and self-centered way of living?

In order to drive the point home, Jesus goes on to say in verses 24-25 that following Him means giving up life. The world tells us to take care of number one. We are taught daily to take care of ourselves first and to think of ourselves first. But Jesus says that if we want to follow Him, we must learn to lose our lives. It is opposite world in the Kingdom of God. When we lay down our lives to follow Jesus, He gives them back to us with interest. If we try and hold on to our lives in order to please ourselves, God will take everything away from us in the end. Look at verse 25. When Jesus asks this question, He expects one answer and only one. He says, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" The answer is as resounding and an emphatic "No good whatsoever!"

It gets even harder. Jesus says that if we are ashamed of Him now, when it is time for Him to decide who goes to heaven and who goes to hell, He will allow those who have been ashamed to witness about Him and live for Him to go to hell. I have heard people say, "I just live my life for Jesus. People can see that." I can say that in my life, I have used this excuse for not clearly stating my love and dedication to Jesus. I want to be much more intentional about sharing the Gospel. Jesus says it right here that if we are

ashamed of Him then He will be ashamed of us. I need some real work in this area. How about you?

William Barclay summarizes what it means to go all in for Jesus like this:

“They are called to spend life, not hoard it. The whole gamut of the world’s standards must be changed. The questions are not, ‘How much can I get?’ but, ‘How much can I give?’ Not, ‘What is the safe thing to do?’ But, ‘What is the right thing to do?’ Not, ‘What is the minimum permissible in the way of work?’ but, ‘What is the maximum possible?’ Christians must realize that life is given, not to keep for themselves but to spend for others; not to nurture its flame but to burn it out for Christ and for others.”

In verse 27 Jesus reminds us that in the end, living for Him will result in gaining everything that matters. We know that Jesus is coming back to judge the living and the dead. Jesus is coming to judge you and me. He promises those who faithfully follow Him eternal life with Him in heaven. To me, there is nothing anyone could give me in this life that would compare to that. And there is no amount of suffering for Jesus that could cause me to give that type of reward up. Jesus says to the disciples that some would see the Kingdom of God manifested to them. Let give you some options in what Jesus could mean. In one sense, they saw the power of God’s Kingdom when Jesus healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, cast out demons, and raised the dead. They saw the power of God’s Kingdom when Jesus performed miracles such as calming the storm, walking on water, and turning water into wine. They saw Jesus forgive sins and give dignity to people who had lost all dignity. They will witness Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven. They will receive the power of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and the birth of the Christian church. Jesus will also manifest God’s Kingdom when He returns at the Second Coming.

I think Jesus can legitimately be referring to all of these. But right after He says this, He will take Peter, James, and John up a mountain and they will witness Jesus transformed into a glorious shining being. We will study that experience next week. All of us have seen God’s Kingdom on the move when we were saved. In order that none of us leave here this morning with a defective view of what it means to be a Christian, let me just emphasize this point. **IN ORDER TO BE IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, WE MUST GIVE IT ALL FOR JESUS.** Is that your view of Christianity? You see, Christianity and church is not just some nice social commitment we have or some social club that we enjoy belonging to. Christianity is a relationship in which all parties give all they have to the other. **AS OUR SAVIOR JESUS GAVE ALL HE HAD. IF WE WANT TO BE CONSIDERED ONE OF HIS, WE MUST GIVE ALL WE HAVE AS WELL.**

I love this story that Dr. Donald Hubbard, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in New York City tells of a very difficult week at a youth camp some years ago.

The teenagers from his church were at that time very cool and hardened toward the gospel. On the final night, they had a campfire where the idea was to toss a stick into the fire, symbolic of one's life and commitment to Christ. The evangelist spoke and the offer was made, and no one responded. There was a girl with a disability there who had been shunned by the group all week because she was so hard to talk to – not that the kids were mean to her, they simply ignored her. Finally, she stood and faced the group, looking at each one, and said, "I don't know why God made me this way, but He can have all of me."

Who here this morning wants to go all in for Jesus? If you are a believer and are convicted this morning that you have not given Jesus all of you but you want to make that commitment this morning, please stand up. I want to pray for you. By the way I'm already standing in this very category and want to pray for myself as well as all who choose to make a better attempt at giving it all for Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for all of us standing at this time. We know that You gave everything You had so that we could be in this right relationship with You. We know that You love us. Lord, forgive us for not loving You with the passionate love You expect from us. But this morning Lord we commit ourselves to You in love. We do want to love You with all our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls. Holy Spirit have Your way with us so that we can accomplish this. For we ask this in the powerful and loving Name of Jesus, Amen.

For those of you here this morning that have not yet received Jesus but want to give your life back to Him in love for what He has already done for you, please stand with me and make this prayer yours by saying amen at the end.

Prayer: Lord I realize that You loved me so much that You gave Your life in the most horrible way so that You and I could be in a right relationship. I believe You are Who You said You are, God, The Creator and Sustainer of the universe. I believe that You died for my sins and that You rose from the dead. Right here and right now I want to give my life to You. I want to be Your child. Please forgive all my sins and save my soul. Amen.