



CAPITOL COMMISSION

The King and His Followers (Luke 9:18-27)

JANUARY 28, 2014

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This account marks a turning point in Luke's gospel as Jesus begins to expand the apostles' understanding of his ministry, and reveals in detail the purpose of his incarnation. In this encounter Jesus presses the disciples to address a lingering question that has been presented repeatedly in this narrative. After asking who the crowds believed him to be, he now turns the spotlight directly on the twelve and asks, what about you, "Who do you say I am?" Peter, the spokesman for the twelve, steps up and responds to Jesus' inquiry. His response comes after much time observing Jesus in various situations. He had witnessed the divine power at work through his miracles, he had heard him teach, been chosen to be an apostle, sent out to preach the good news of the kingdom, and empowered to heal the sick in the various towns and villages in Galilee. Not only that, as one of the twelve, he had just witnessed Jesus feed a great multitude through a miraculous demonstration of his creative power. As Peter considers the weight of this evidence, he responds by faith and answers this inquiry. Jesus is the Christ of God, the long awaited king of Israel.

In this response, Peter offers the first portion of Jesus' identity; however, a complete understanding of God's plan concerning the Messiah requires some additional insight from the Lord. The more volatile aspect of Jesus' messianic identity concerns the path that he must walk; this makes it necessary for his identity to remain a secret, at least for the time being. The term Christ is used by Peter as a title and connects Jesus explicitly with ancient Jewish messianic hopes. These expectations are seen in the birth narratives because the Christ is the one who would fulfill such a prophecy as Isaiah 9:6-7. In this passage the son who was born would sit on the throne of David, the government would be upon his shoulders and its increase and peace would know no end. His names include, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. In Peter's confession he is stating that Jesus is the Christ, he is the king God had promised upon which all the hopes of Israel hung. Everything that the prophets foretold concerning the coming king would find their fulfillment in Jesus.

With this connection made public for the other apostles to discern this truth, Jesus reveals the most scandalous aspect of his ministry. While he was the promised king of Israel, the path that Jesus journeyed would be different from that which any person who possessed authority had ever walked. It was the way of the cross. It was not a life of accumulating power, exerting authority, and ruling by the sheer force of his divine right; rather it would require sacrifice, suffering, and death. When Peter declares that Jesus is God's promised king, the disciples are warned sternly to keep this revelation a secret because he is to be a king like none the world had ever witnessed, he was the king of Kings who came to suffer and die. For those who seek to follow King Jesus, his life leaves them a pattern that demands their imitation. He calls all who would pursue him to a life of daily self-denial and death, to a life that seeks to lose all for the sake of his name.

Luke 9:18-27 - (18) Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" (19) And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." (20) Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

(21) And he strictly charged 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 on the third day be raised."

(23) And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (24) For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. (25) For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? (26) 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. (27) But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

THE PROMISED KING

The Christ of God – In this declaration Peter is provided divine insight which changes everything for the disciples understanding of Jesus. No sooner had they grasped this key component concerning the identity of the master before it had vanished. As with seeking to hold water in one's hand, so too is the challenge of holding tightly to an understanding of Jesus that is solely informed from a worldly perspective. Peter was correct in his answer. Jesus was the Christ; he was the king that God had promised through his prophets. The word Peter used literally means "anointed one." In Israel, when kings were placed into this divine office they were traditionally anointed with oil as part of the coronation ceremony. Over time the word *Christos* had come to mean the Anointed One, the Messiah, the King that would put an end to all other kings, the one who was going to put everything right. As a little boy Peter, like other Jewish children, would have been told that the Messiah would usher in an era when evil and injustice would be defeated by the establishment of his throne. For a Jew to arrive at this place in one's understanding about Jesus would have filled his heart with much hope for the future. Imagine the encouragement to be intimately connected with this future king, and the zeal to expend all one's energy in helping to bring about the establishment of this promised king's kingdom.

Pennsylvania

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A KING LIKE NO OTHER

He strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one – Peter was correct in his understanding of Jesus’ identity as the Christ, but this information if it made its way to the populace would cause significant damage to the ministry and to Jesus fulfilling his purpose. Why was this knowledge so dangerous? The Gospel of John gives some insight into the challenges facing Jesus’ ministry even without this information being made public. In John 6:15 immediately following the feeding of the five thousand the text says that Jesus withdrew into the mountains by himself because he perceived the people were about to make him king by force. Also, when being interrogated by Pilate before his death, Jesus makes this statement in John 18:36, “My kingdom is not of this world, if it were . . . , my servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews.” Jesus understood the willingness of the people to throw off the oppressive rule of their leaders and the ease with which he could ignite the flames of revolution. However he was resolute, he both commands and charges the twelve that no one apart from this inner circle was permitted to possess this knowledge.

The Son of Man must suffer many things – This statement would have sent shockwaves through Jesus’ closest and most trusted companions. The term “Son of Man” refers to more than Jesus’ human nature. This was a title that is tied to prophecy from Daniel which references “one like the son of man” (Daniel 7:13-14). This passage spoke of a divine messianic figure that would come with the angels to set everything right. By saying “the Son of Man must suffer,” Jesus was connecting suffering with the Messiah, and this had never been done by anyone in Israel’s history before this moment. While there are many prophecies in the Old Testament that speak about a mysterious Servant of the Lord who would suffer (for example such passages include Isaiah 43, 49, and 53), nobody before Jesus had ever associated these texts with the hope of the Messiah. The idea that the Messiah would suffer was a concept that was difficult for the 1st century audience to comprehend. The Messiah was supposed to defeat evil and injustice and set this fallen world back in order. The question they could not escape, “How could evil be defeated by suffering and death?” This seemed like a ridiculous idea both to those in Jesus’ day, and truth be told, to many in contemporary times as well.

Must suffer many things . . . , and be rejected . . . , and be killed, and . . . be raised – When Jesus used the word “must” it indicated that he was planning to die by his own voluntary choice. This was not merely a predictive activity about what will happen in the future. In the use of the word “must” Jesus is saying, “Yes, you were right in confessing that I am the Messiah, the King; however,

I came not to live but to die. I am not here to take power but to lose it. I am not here to exert my authority over you, not here to rule but to serve. This is the way I will defeat evil and gain victory over death.” Jesus does not say that the Son of Man would suffer; he said the Son of Man must suffer. The word “must” modifies and controls the whole sentence and means that everything in the list is necessary. Jesus must suffer, must be rejected, must be killed, and must be resurrected. What Jesus said was not just “I have come to die” but “I have to die.” It is absolutely necessary that Jesus die. The world could not be renewed, or for that matter neither could an individual’s life be restored apart from the death of Jesus.

THE KING’S FOLLOWERS

If anyone would come after me – Jesus says, “I am a King, but not like any king you had ever imagined. I am a king who must die.” Yet he does not stop there. Jesus is saying, “Since I am a King on a cross, if you want to follow me you must also go to a cross.” What does it mean to take up your cross? What does it mean to lose one’s self for Jesus’ sake? Jesus wants us to understand that our self-worth is not built by gaining the things of this world, it can never be found in what we achieve or the things we acquire. However, in our individualistic culture the message promoted to the masses declares you’re nothing apart from your career, your money, your standing and status. From this perspective one’s worth is based solely on performance and achievement. Jesus says this will never work. When these things are removed our lives crumble before our eyes because our confidence was based on the things that were temporary. It’s also not a matter of saying, “I’ve been a failure, I’ve been immoral, so now I’ll be good, I’ll go to church and become a moral person. Then I will know I am a good person because I am spiritual.” If we seek our agenda as the end, then Jesus is just the means; and we are using him. But if Jesus is the King, you cannot make him a means to your end. You cannot come to a king negotiating. You lay your sword at his feet and say, “Command me.” But never forget that Jesus is not just a king, he is a king on a cross. If he were only a king on a throne, you would submit because you had to. But he is a king who went to the cross for you, and so, you submit to him out of love and trust. This means you do not come to him negotiating, but saying, “Lord, whatever you ask I will do, wherever you send I will go.” Taking up your cross means for you to die to your self-determination, die to controlling your own life, and die to using Jesus for your own personal agenda.

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