

Sermon: Who's for Jesus?

Text: Luke 9:46-56

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Introduction: How do you know if you are for Jesus? We should all know spiritual greatness is not something you earn; it is a gift from God. "Some people get so caught up in their own holiness that they look at the Trinity for a possible vacancy." - John MacArthur quoted in *Quotes & Ideas Starters*, p. 80

Recently, Peter, James and John had been involved in special experiences with Jesus (at the house of Jairus, [8:51](#); and the Transfiguration, [9:28](#)). The others were still stinging from their latest failure in ministry. It is no wonder there was tension and these disciples were trying to secure their place in the coming kingdom they kept hearing about. You can almost hear the disciples like toddlers saying to each other: "you're not the boss of me" or "I'm the boss;" "no, I am - no, I am!"

I believe we learn to follow Jesus over a lifetime. In the interest of full disclosure, though, I think it is necessary for those making such a commitment to know what is expected - what God really wants from us. You must know none of this is humanly possible. Only with God's help can we become a disciple of his. Who's for Jesus? Let's look at what Jesus has to say. It is:

I. Those Who Can Welcome Children ([vv. 46-48](#))

Luke 9:46-48 (NIV) ⁴⁶An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. ⁴⁷Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. ⁴⁸Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest."

Our world is sometimes viewed in terms of winners and losers, important and unimportant, famous and "not so much." Years ago a man by the name of Cassius Clay said: "I am the greatest!" He made a career saying so. Have you seen him lately?

A. Understand Jesus' plan

What is it about a little child that Jesus wants his disciples and us to understand?

Jesus uses the image of a “young child” to inform us what he values in disciples. In Jesus’ time, children were brought into the world to enlarge the workforce. Everything was for the benefit of the family. They had no rights or real significance outside of what they might contribute to their father. Children had no ability to improve their lot. Jesus’ plan was to find those who were willing to commit everything to God for his glory.

In ancient royal families “a girl born into a royal family did not become a princess through her own efforts. There was no cause for pride in what she was gifted to be. Rather, a wise princess would be humble. She, like every other little baby, was born weak, defenseless and vulnerable. It was only the gift of her birth into the royal family that established the greatness of her position. As she grew in her royal role, she realized that her greatness as a future queen would come only as she gave herself to serve her subjects. All of her accomplishments could only come about because of the privilege of being born into her position.”

Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary, Matthew*, pp. 626-627

Ministry is not about my prestige or yours, but God’s. Who gets to do what - is not important, only that God receives the credit. If you understand this, then you will:

B. Understand God

Bruce Metzger calls [verse 48](#) “step parallelism.” Welcome a child, you welcome Jesus. Receive Jesus, and you receive God.

Once we quit making all of *our* decisions based on *our* perceived importance, God’s importance will be made visible. People will see God in us. It is only when we can be the least that God will call us the greatest. The best service we can offer is when there can be nothing gained personally from it - no hidden agenda.

“Once there was a very old man who used to meditate early every morning under a large tree on the bank of the Ganges River in India. One morning, having finished his meditation, the old man opened his eyes and saw a scorpion floating helplessly in the strong current of the river. As the scorpion was pulled close to the tree, it got caught in the long tree roots that branched out far into the river. The scorpion struggled frantically to free itself but got more and more entangled in the complex network of tree roots.

When the old man saw this, he immediately stretched himself onto the extended roots and reached out to rescue the drowning scorpion. But as soon as he touched it, the animal jerked and stung him wildly. Instinctively, the man withdrew his hand, but then, after having regained his balance, he once again stretched himself out along the roots to save the agonized scorpion. But each time the old man came within reach, the scorpion stung him so badly with its poisonous tail that his hands became swollen and bloody and his face distorted with pain.

At that moment, a passerby saw the old man stretched out on the roots struggling with the scorpion and shouted: “Hey, stupid old man. What’s wrong with you? Only a fool risks his life for the sake of an ugly, useless creature. Don’t you know that you may kill yourself to save that ungrateful animal?”

Slowly the old man turned his head, and looking calmly in the stranger’s eyes, he said: “Friend, because it is the nature of the scorpion to sting, why should I give up my own nature to save?” - *Seeds of Hope* A Henri Nouwen Reader, pp. 180-181

Two thousand years of church history has not changed the heart of man. It is only when one receives Jesus (Holy Spirit) that it becomes OK for others to receive credit and for compassion to be extended to the thankless. All ministry is important if done for Jesus, just as all ministers/servants are important if they don’t mind being unimportant.

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II. Those Who Can Welcome Help (vv. 49-50)

Luke 9:49-50 (NIV) ⁴⁹“Master,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.” ⁵⁰“Do not stop him,” Jesus said, “for whoever is not against you is for you.”

A. There are others who follow Christ.

We need all the help we can get. How do we view other followers of Christ? God is not like the Marines who insist they want only a “few good men.” God wants everyone, who follows him, involved in ministry.

A person does not need credentials to be called. An office title does not make you anything. Only properly motivated performance defines a person. A shepherd is not one until he cares for, and is even willing to lay down his life for his sheep (**John 10:11**).

It is easy sometimes to think that no one else is as dedicated in their following of Jesus, but that is a prideful attitude. Some of our own movement have become very dogmatic over the use or nonuse of instruments in worship. Others have declared that “Christian Church” is not a proper title for a community that follows Christ.

Jesus is saying here that if they are doing ministry *in my name*, opposing Satan *in my name*, then even if their name is denominational:

B. They are not the problem.

I grew up in a church where it was us against them: Protestants against the Catholics, immersionists against those who baptize infants, Pentecostals and those like us who weren't controlled by Satan. All this is silly, and I don't mean humorous, I mean the kind of stuff God weeps over and so should we.

These other people are not the problem because they also are “for” us, i.e., our purpose and mission, and not “against” us.

I personally have no problem working with people outside the “Christian Church” context if we have common agendas, and they also claim Jesus as their Savior and Lord. They do not need to agree with me on every point of doctrine.

Again the problem is not them, it is our pride and desperate sinful need for personal glory. The Twelve do not hold an exclusive franchise designed for relieving human suffering. They are not the only ones who can tell of Jesus.

Philippians 1:15-18 (NIV) ¹⁵It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,

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III. Those Who Can Welcome Adversity (v. 51)

Luke 9:51 (NIV) ⁵¹As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

This verse literally starts a new section in Luke's gospel that deals with Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem. It is during this time we will find out "Who's for Jesus?" It is a time of unique teaching and special preparation because:

A. Jesus was going to leave .

Jesus' leaving involved his dying and returning to the Father. Jesus needs to know that his disciples are trained and able to continue the work he had started. As he approaches Jerusalem there is this internal rivalry. There is a crisis in leadership: the disciples still don't understand the mission statement and corporate goals.

B. Jesus was going to die.

Jesus knew this very well, but his disciples just could not get their heads around this idea. Being with the Messiah was supposed to be wonderful. Everything was supposed to be like their dreams - no human need or suffering.

We have the advantage over the disciples in that we can look back on what they could not yet see. But I wonder if Isaac Watts' words are any easier to live today:

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

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IV. Those Who Can Welcome Instruction (vv. 52-56)

Luke 9:52-56 (NIV) ⁵²And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; ⁵³but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. ⁵⁴When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" ⁵⁵But Jesus turned and rebuked them, ⁵⁶and they went to another village.

Part of being a good disciple is that we are teachable and willing to learn from lessons taught. Here are three!

A. Rejection is a part of life.

When you try to do the right thing Satan is going to strap on his boots and come for you. If you are going to be an “advance person” for Jesus and try to get others prepared for his coming, do not be shocked when people reject not only your ideas, but you.

John 15:18-19 (NIV) ¹⁸“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

The stated reason in our text for Jesus’ not being welcomed in Samaria was *because he was heading for Jerusalem*. The Samaritans (Luke speaks negatively of them only here) hated the Jews and all Jerusalem stood for. They had their own ideas about how and where to worship, so they rejected Jesus. Even so the Samaritans would be included in the initial missionary work of the church.

Another lesson to be learned is:

B. Judgment is God’s area.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, not to destroy them. Our mission ought to follow his example. Even God is willing to wait until harvest to separate wheat from weeds, sheep from goats, and those who are good from those who are evil. He delays judgment for good reason.

II Peter 3:9 (NIV) ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

It appears that from the beginning of the chapter (**9:1-6**) the disciples had forgotten their instructions. Instead of shaking dust from their feet and moving on, they wanted to call down fire on the unresponsive villagers. Not a lot of grace in that! I suppose it is like how an invitation to accept Jesus and his Word turns ugly with threat of hell and all its fury in some settings today.

“To be a servant of the gospel is not to highlight judgment or long for execution, but to seek to save lives as long as God allows.” - Bock, *Luke*, p. 286

the last lesson we need to continually learn is:

C. We simply need to obey.

We are commanded to share the message. Sometimes like the disciples of old we will be rebuked or corrected. When that happens we also need to move on to the next village and get back to our mission. Our job is to tell of Jesus and spread the word of his coming into the world and his soon return. God will judge who is included and excluded.

Conclusion: To truly follow Jesus as a genuine disciple, we must understand personal worth comes directly from the Creator. We also need to learn the Church is larger than one small group. We need to be advised that whenever we determine to follow Christ Jesus we will experience much of what he endured. Finally, we must remember our vocation is not to judge others, but to allow all to hear the gospel. “For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest.”

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem later in Luke, he does not call down fire this time either, but weeps. He knows what the coming rejection is going to cost him, but he does not weep for himself, but for those who are still blind and deaf to his word.

After the Last Supper right before Jesus is betrayed, denied, tried and convicted and goes to the cross - Luke records a scene with the Twelve for us:

Luke 22:24 (NIV) ²⁴... a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

There are still lessons to be learned - for all of us.

As we come to a time of decision about who is Lord the question is still:

Who’s for Jesus?