



Luke 9:26–27

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.’

Reflection

Discipleship has just become very real

for Jesus' disciples. Their dreams of an all-conquering Messiah reclaiming the throne in Jerusalem and driving the Romans out of the Holy Land are lying in tatters. Their dreams of the 'good life' riding Jesus' coat tails to victory have just taken on a very new dimension. The throne Jesus will sit down upon in Jerusalem will be the cross that he is nailed to. And according to Jesus, their way will also be the way of the cross. Listen to these sobering words from Jesus over the past couple of days, culminating in Luke 9:26–27, our passage for today.

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; oth-

ers 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.' 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.' 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.'

It's worth repeating Jesus' words from yesterday to frame up our text today. Jesus said to his disciples and us,

'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.'

Now I don't know about you but daily

cross-bearing doesn't sound like a great deal of fun – taking up a heavy, splintered wooden cross beam, people pointing and jeering and hiding their face from you as you labour your way towards your death. But paradoxically, as we saw yesterday, Jesus bore this burden, bore our burden, 'for the joy set before him' (Heb 12:2). And Paul speaks of cross-bearing as 'light and momentary troubles' achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all (2 Cor 4:17). In other words, while the Christian life can be hard, gruelling even, and certainly very counter-cultural, it is worth it; and importantly, it is worth it even now. There's deep and lasting joy, purpose, meaning, reward and glory in daily picking up our cross and following Jesus. When Jesus says he has come to give us life and life to the full (John 10:10) this is what he

means. Our 'best life now' is a life lived in service of him, in service of his kingdom, taking up his mission, daily bearing our cross, just as he bore his.

But what practically is cross-bearing and how does it lead in to our passage today? Sometimes when people talk of carrying their cross they speak of some unfortunate circumstance in life using the phrase 'we all have our cross to bear.' But this isn't what Jesus means at all. Carrying our cross is self-denial, the daily sacrifice of placing God and others before ourselves. It's living a kingdom-orientated life over a self-orientated life. Here are some examples. Cross bearing involves prayer and bible study, in place of pastimes that we might otherwise prefer doing. Cross bearing involves right-living in our world: feed-

ing the hungry, welcoming the stranger, loving the unlovely, caring for the sick, and supporting persecuted Christians. Cross bearing involves standing up for what is right and sharing the gospel with those who may react against it with hostility. None of these actions are easy. They involve denying one's self, and cost us time, money and convenience. But they are good and right and deeply rewarding in-and-off-themselves, let alone the way they echo into eternity. At times these our actions may seem pointless, because the gifts are abused or we're abused in the act of giving them. But ultimately there is nothing more valuable that we can spend our time doing on this earth. That's daily cross-bearing. Jesus continues,

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?

Then in today's passage,

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.'

In the ancient world, honour-shame cultures prevailed. Our society today is shaped around the Christian values of 'right and

wrong' and 'truth and falsehood' and 'life and death'. But far more important in ancient culture, at the top of their value hierarchy, was honour and shame. The chief end in life was to obtain honour and avoid shame. If you needed to lie to achieve that end, so be it. If someone needed to die to achieve that end, so be it. And the cross was the ultimate symbol of shame, nothing could be more shameful than dying on a cross. In the same way, a cross-bearing lifestyle in the ancient world and today is one that brings shame on the bearer. To be a Christian never has or never will be the way of the world, it is the way of the cross. Two divergent paths. Shame in this world and honour in the next. Or honour in this world and shame in the next. Two divergent paths. Two different kingdoms. The kingdom of God or the kingdom of

self. Followers of Jesus cannot have it both ways and how they live determines where their allegiance lies. So Jesus concludes,

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.

You are either for me or against me, and the measure you use will be used against you. If you are for me then I will be for you on the last day. If you take up your cross and follow me then my death on the cross was for you. A tree is known by its fruit; so too the Christian.

Then this enigmatic phrase to end,

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

What does this mean? It means that many of the twelve will live to see Jesus' resurrection from the dead which marks the beginning of the new era of the kingdom of God. Jesus preached, 'Repent for the kingdom of God is near' but it was his death and resurrection – the defeat of Satan, sin and death – that marked the beginning of the kingdom that will have no end.

Think & Pray

One hundred and eighty years after the death of the great Charlemagne (who

would come to be known as the ‘Father of Europe’), in about the year 1000, officials of the Emperor Otto opened the great king’s tomb. In addition to incredible treasures they saw an amazing sight – the skeletal remains of King Charlemagne seated on a throne, his crown still on his skull, a copy of the Gospels lying in his lap with his bony finger resting on the text, ‘For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?’

Meditate and pray over these words from Jesus this morning,

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

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and in the glory of the Father and
of the holy angels.