

UNASHAMED

Luke 9:18-27

Several decades ago, many people in our nation identified with Christianity and the church was literally in the mainstream of the community and enjoyed an almost “protected” status in the culture. As the influence of the church began to wane, we may remember the time when there was an emphasis on the “silent majority” status of the church and its impact on the culture. What is implied by the name “silent majority?” Was this an admission that the church was no longer in the mainstream and it became necessary to work in the background and behind the scenes to impact the culture since other philosophies and world views were coming to the forefront? It seems that the church has now become the “silent minority” and its status can be described as being “threatened” rather than being “protected.”

How does the thinking, attitudes and actions of a group change when the group moves from a majority, protected status to a minority, threatened status? Does the group become passive or active? Does the group assert itself and openly act to influence the world in which it finds itself or does it retreat into the shadows and eventually just fade away into the annals of history? What would make the difference in which direction such a minority group would take?

A couple of major influences on the direction such a group might take would be “intensity of the commitment of the leadership of the group” and “a realization of the members that the principles and truths around which they were united were absolute and unchanging.”

How might we describe a small group of thirteen men traveling around the rural communities of Galilee and occasionally going into Judea and Jerusalem? They were definitely a minority group. Whether they would have been considered protected or threatened depended on several factors. As long as they stayed in the remote areas and did not create a disturbance in the main part of the power centers of the region, then they were reasonably safe. When they disturbed the status quo, then the threat level increased.

At this particular time in the ministry of Jesus, the sense of “threat” may have been heightened because they had just received word that John the Baptist had been murdered. Matthew reported that Jesus (and presumably the disciples) went to a more remote area near Bethsaida. The crowds found Him and this was the area where the multitude was fed. After that, the crowd was sent away and the disciple took a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee. Jesus spent some time in prayer and then went to join His disciples by walking across the water and after Jesus (and Peter) got into the boat and Jesus calmed the winds, those on board confessed that Jesus was the Son of God.

When they got to the shore, the crowd was already there and they wanted more food. Jesus did not provide any more food but told them that He was the bread of life that came down from Heaven. If they would eat that “Bread” then they would live forever. Of course, the crowd did not see that the miracle of feeding the multitude was a living parable that pointed to the spiritual truth of Who Jesus is. The response of the crowd was “will He give us His flesh to eat?” They were “offended” and many left. This prompted Jesus to ask His disciples, “Will you leave, also?”

After all this whirlwind of activity and change, Jesus finally found some additional time to spend in prayer because He knew that these events signaled a new phase in His ministry in which the challenges and dangers to Him and His disciples would intensify.

Confess Him – 9:18-20

¹⁸ And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying,

“Who do the people say that I am?”¹⁹ They answered and said, “John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again.”²⁰ And He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.” Luke 9:18–20 (NASB95)

Based on the background events, why did Jesus ask these two questions? The answers to the two questions would show the sharp contrast between the beliefs of these close followers of Jesus and the rest of the people. They needed to realize that they were, indeed, a minority group that was out of step with the mainstream thinking of the nation in which they lived.

Why would that matter?

In any social, cultural, or organizational setting (or even in our physical bodies) what is the typical response of the host entity when it recognizes a growing influence of the presence of elements that are radically different in the “body” or the organization? In the situation of our physical bodies, we refer to what happens as an “immunity response” that tries to either neutralize or eliminate the “foreign” element. The word “foreign” applies to what is so different as to be rejected or repelled or to be incapable of becoming assimilated. On the other hand, if the “radical element” is not having a growing influence, then the body or the culture will “tolerate” what is happening.

People had witnessed the life and work of Jesus and they tried to explain what they were witnessing with any explanation they could come up with rather than believe and admit the obvious truth to which the evidence pointed that He is the “I AM.” Is that not what the secular humanists are doing today? All the evidence of the discernable “physical world” with all the complexity and with the fact that there is “life” is consistently denied to be the outcome of there being a “Creator.” Instead, ideas are put forth that “random chance happenings” (which normally result in disorder and chaos) somehow put things together in an orderly manner so that it just looks like it was “created.” The origin of life is basically ignored but then elaborate imaginative ideas are proposed to explain how that “life” in a single cell somehow evolved into more complex forms of life. When questioned as to where life originated, they will suggest something such as space aliens brought it to earth.

The things that people were saying about Jesus such as He was John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets was totally implausible unless the people believed in reincarnation which was not part of their beliefs. However, they were reaching out to try to grab hold of something that could explain the obviously supernatural things that were associated with what Jesus was doing.

The answer to the second question was the disciples’ confession of Christ as the Son of God and was made through their spokesman, Simon. This was not the first time this question had been answered by various people. The question and the affirmative answer had been raised and stated several times over the past three and a half years. Even before Jesus began His earthly ministry, some thirty years prior to that time, Mary surely understood that Jesus was the Messiah. This was revealed to her even before she conceived Jesus. Elizabeth had made a confession that the unborn baby that Mary was carrying was her “Lord.” Joseph was told that Jesus would save the people from their sins which was the ministry of the Messiah. Later on, John the Baptist made a declaration when he was baptizing people in the Jordan River and Jesus came to that place, he said “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” Following his baptism of Jesus and seeing the Holy Spirit descending upon Him, John declared Jesus to be the Son of God. Immediately, following that and having heard John declare a second time “Behold the Lamb of God,” Andrew told his brother Simon, “We have found the Messiah.” The sister of Mary was the mother of James and John and she had to have been told by Mary about Mary’s special son. We would likely conclude that James and John had at least heard that Jesus was the

Messiah. I would guess that many others had wondered or speculated that “perhaps” Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus had even openly stated the fact to the Samaritan woman at the well that He was the I AM. She invited the people in her village to come and meet this man and raised the question “Could this be the Messiah?”

Based on the background events, why did Jesus ask these questions at this time? In our 20-20 hindsight, we know that His ministry was going to start coming out of the shadows of the hinterland (Galilee) and move into the mainstream of Judea and Jerusalem. This change of direction and a growing direct impact would trigger an “immunity response” from the culture that would threaten what they were doing and literally threaten their lives. The question was, “were they ready for such a change?”

What does it take to be ready to take on such a mission? We can think of a variety of considerations such as “what do we really believe” and “how committed are we?” It was important to pin down the truth of “Who do you believe Jesus is” before the next phase was revealed to the disciples. The result of making such a formal “confession” is what we might say about driving down a stake to firmly mark the spot and for that to serve as a reminder of that to which we have committed. It reminds me of what Samuel did when he set up a stone as a remembrance of the Lord’s help in Israel’s defeat of the Philistines.

Simon’s words were on behalf of the entire group. Do you think that all of the twelve men believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God? What about Judas Iscariot? That is a difficult question, however, it can be argued that Judas did believe it and believe it so much that he was willing to enable the religious authorities to arrest Jesus. Some believe that Judas thought that the arrest of Jesus would result in an awesome display of power and the immediate overthrow of the Romans and a restoration of the sovereignty of Israel. The lesson for us is that we can truly believe the truth about Who Jesus is and still fail to follow His precepts and principles because of erroneous preconceived ideas about what God is doing. We can easily misinterpret events in the world as sure signs that some event is the beginning of Armageddon and the rapture of the church is imminent.

So, what was this change of direction that would require absolute certainty of what they believed and total and full commitment?

Revelation of His Suffering – 9:21-22

²¹ But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, 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 be raised up on the third day.” Luke 9:21–22 (NASB95)

This small group had just heard confirmation of one of the greatest truths that finite man had ever heard and they were told to “tell no one.” The nation in general, and certainly the religious leaders in particular, was not yet ready for this message that Jesus was the Messiah. The concept the people had regarding the Messiah was that He was to be a political leader and this misconception would have resulted in total chaos.

The disciples needed to understand that this political fulfillment was not what was going to happen. The truth of the matter was something that they could not have imagined and it involved Jesus suffering, being rejected and being killed (followed by resurrection). In Matthew’s account, Peter reacted to this statement by privately telling Jesus that this was not going to happen and that resulting in Jesus rebuking Peter by telling him that he was thinking like the world thinks. Based on what we read about what actually happened, it is more than likely that most of them thought that Jesus was speaking figuratively rather than about actual events that would happen. Jesus was not just talking about His teachings being overtly dismissed

by the Jewish leaders and then His influence dying out and disappearing for a brief time only to be revived and then flourishing. Following the rebuke of Peter, Jesus then spoke to the rest of the disciples.

Follow Him Unashamedly – 9:23-27

²³ And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. ²⁴ “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. ²⁵ “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷ “But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:23–27 (NASB95)

When Jesus spoke of His suffering, rejection, and death it was in reference to an event that would happen to Him physically. What may have been new to the thinking of the disciples was that the way of suffering, rejection and death applied to those who are disciples of the Messiah. Jesus’ experience was a literal event in which physical death would happen while what was described for the disciples was more of a “way of living” in which there would be an ongoing denial of self by putting self to death (the work of a cross) as they follow the path that Jesus would show them.

They had difficulty understanding His comments regarding His own death and it would take some additional time to grasp that they (the disciples of Christ) would also experience suffering and forfeiture of their “self-life” while they gained more and more of the resurrected life of Christ in themselves. It is as John the Baptist said to his followers, “He must increase and I must decrease.”

Sometimes we get the idea that denying self is to not have anything material. This is simply “denying things to self” rather than denying self. That kind of self-denial can be very self-serving and self-seeking. It is similar to the Pharisee who prayed, “I fast twice during the week, I give to the poor, I, I, I.” What Jesus meant was that we are to say “No” to self-love, to self-seeking, and to self-assertion. Jesus may have been thinking about the motive of Simon Peter in saying “Not so, Lord.” Was Simon just trying to be a hero or just wanted to have his own way in what Jesus was going to do? The alternative is to put self to death. This is a choice we make. Just as Jesus made the choice to go to the Cross, we must voluntarily take up our instrument of “death to self” and follow the example of Jesus. The choice of taking up our cross is a decision we make; however, we cannot crucify ourselves. That is, you cannot put yourself on a cross; someone has to do that to you.

That which may seem like “losing” by the world’s evaluation is the way to eternal life. The benefits may not be seen in this life except by faith. But our faithfulness is what pleases God and, in the Judgment, will be rewarded.