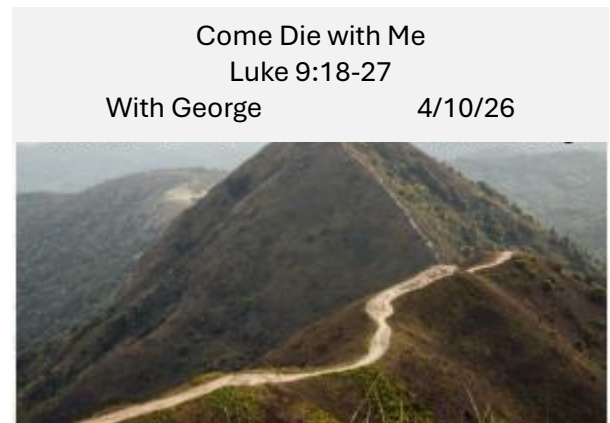


By the 1970's the photography company Kodak made good money from its cameras, but the real profit was in film sales and development. It's market value of \$31 billion. It was one of the most valuable corporations in the United States. In 1975, their engineer invented the first digital camera, but being short sighted, they were worried it would destroy their film sales. 40 years later, Kodak filed for bankruptcy. Digital photography had taken off. They were focused on the profit margins and not the future state of their services. The fall from a \$31 billion company to bankruptcy shows the financial peril of short-sightedness in the world of business.

In our passage today, we learn of the peril of spiritual short-sightedness. Jesus explains his future and what the future is for his disciples. The crowds had short-sighted notions of who the Messiah would be, and all that the Messiah would save them from. However, he would suffer, be rejected, killed and raised, revealing the glorious mission he was on. Their vision needed expanding; they could not afford to be short-sighted.

Jesus asked, "Who do the crowds say I am?" (v18) "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life." The people were speculating and their speculations revealed their short sightedness. All this talk can give the appearance of a follower of Jesus, but sadly many are merely professional discussers. Our conversations can be about the preacher, and not the One the preaching was proclaiming. It's time to stop defensive sermon critique and start the Saviour-worship. Only one question really matters, "Who do you say I am." Stop merely giving intellectual assent, dressing up to do some karaoke on a Sunday morning! We're here because of Jesus! Set yourself on delighting in Jesus! Take up the cross of Christ; die to yourself and your notions of Christian life; repent of your unbelief and give yourself in worshipful service of your Lord and Saviour. Take your empty hand that can do nothing to earn your salvation, and by grace lay hold of Christ as your Saviour. As you do, remember, a hand that lays hold of Christ, is a hand that grace has opened. May you know Jesus. When Jesus asks his disciples that question, and Peter answers, "God's Messiah," we're all thinking A* student! Simply saying 'God's Messiah' is not enough. We must understand what kind of Messiah Jesus is. They knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but they did not yet understand that he must suffer, die, and rise again. Jesus's identity could not be rightly proclaimed apart from his redeeming work, and the disciples didn't get that yet. Despite giving the right answer, they too were short-sighted as to what the Messiah would have to do.

In my first year of university, I was not a Christian. But, having been raised in a Christian home, I could chat the chat, talk about Habakkuk or penal substitution and say that Jesus is God's Messiah. But the big difference was, I knew about Jesus, but they knew Jesus! I could recite the verses, but they were worshipping the Saviour about whom the verses spoke. They were being challenged by their sin and repenting. I could have answered when asked the question about the Messiah, but they would have answered, "You are my Saviour and my joy and my treasure. Understanding who Jesus is, is far more than knowing his title. Jesus took time to help them understand a little of the future, "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." (v22) For Jesus to truly be God's Messiah, and not man's messiah, he had to rise again to life." This was a voluntary act of Jesus's own free will. The Son willingly went to the cross, according to the eternal purpose and counsel of the triune God. God's glorious grace was revealed to creation at the cross. This was planned before the foundation of the world. The purpose of creation is to proclaim the glories of God. The purpose of mankind is to glorify God and enjoy him. The reason for the cross is to reveal God's glorious grace and make atonement for sin. May our sight be expanded from short-sighted and self-focused sight to sight that beholds the glories of God! Seeing God's Messiah correctly is crucial, because we can't walk as his disciples if



we are missing him. Christ's suffering accomplished redemption, while the disciple's suffering accomplishes conformity to Christ.

Jesus says his disciples must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him. The Christian walk is not a walk of white picket fences and homemade ice cream. Should God bless us with such gifts then let us enjoy them to the glory of God. But let us not pretend we live in a time of peace, where all is calm and well. There is a war going on for our very souls in age of spiritual conflict. We are aligning ourselves firmly with one side; the winning side yes, but the battle still rages, despite the war being won. Imitate Jesus, and willingly subject ourselves to worldly shame or whatever comes from following God's will. One of the hardest areas for self-denial is that of reputation and relationships. It will cost in the relational arena. The cross is not foolishness, though it may look like that too many of our friends and family. The Cross is the power of God for salvation that turns out to be the glory of Christ, and of those who follow him. It means to put to death self-centred purposes and renounce the self-glorifying world.

The daily pattern of discipleship and denial is a lifelong pursuit. This is not suffering hunting. We don't need to turn over stones to find a bit of suffering and we do not earn salvation through suffering. We are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus. Our conformity to Christ is to make us look more like his Son. He will accomplish his good purposes in us through it. The key to all of this is that we believe in the resurrection! Therefore, we must talk of resurrection, of new life. Following Jesus is about the new life, free from sin and shame and following him in joy. "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it." (v24) If we follow Jesus into death of self, we rise to life in him. Following Jesus is not a hobby, but total and complete allegiance to him in every corner of the heart. Nor is it self-destruction. We deny the sinful self because Christ is infinitely more valuable. We put sin to death so that, by the Spirit, we may live more fully unto God. Paul writes in Romans 8:13, "By the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body." "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?" (v25) The possession of the whole world, its honours, accolades and riches will not satisfy us. They may distract us for some time, but when their distraction fades. When I was a young lad, I used to play rugby averagely, cricket poorly and football terribly. I won the taking part award for football, because I went to training. I won the allrounder award for cricket, because I once hit a four and took a catch. And I was captain of my school rugby team. I was proud of my football and cricket awards and had them displayed on my desk. I was proud to be captain of Highfield's School 1st XV. And that is all good, that is genuinely Ok. We enjoy God's good gifts. But the trophies are now in the loft and the captaincy is irrelevant. If I looked to them to satisfy me, I would be empty. Jonny Wilkinson woke up the morning after winning the 2003 Rugby World Cup, feeling a profound sense of emptiness, rather than joy. "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?" When the game is over, it all goes back in the box. Death will come and separate us from everything we have achieved, bought, or done on this world, other than our faith in Jesus. Naked we come naked we go. Are we too spiritually short-sighted? Are we losing our souls today? The world as we know it will come to an end. Jesus says, "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes into his kingdom and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." The Lord will never be ashamed of those who love and trust him and have faith in him. The end will come. Don't spend your life trying to kid yourselves or kid others. You can't kid God.

"Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see God's kingdom." Jesus took a few of his disciples to see his glory in the transfiguration. They perceived a present spiritual reality. The disciples who remained partially blind soon saw the reign of God in Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension and in their continuing mission in the world. We would have sight to see the Kingdom of God; the present spiritual reality that is real in Christ. The question is whether, having received Christ by faith, you are willing to follow him wherever he leads. Your confidence rests not in the perfection of your cross-bearing, but in his perfection. Hebrews 7:25 says, "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." Your salvation rests in him who ever lives to intercede for you.