

STANDARD B: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “IN CHRIST”?

Lesson 4: What Does It Mean for Jesus to Reign as Lord of Our Lives?

Introduction

One day as Jesus was teaching, a strange thing happened. (See Luke 18:18-25.) A man of social importance and success came to Jesus. He asked, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” People could almost feel the excitement and hope in his voice. He thought that as soon as Jesus instructed him, then he would go and do what Jesus said. Jesus told him to keep all of the commandments. The man responded, “I have kept all the commandments since I was a boy.”

Then Jesus told the man he still lacked one thing. Jesus told him to place the thing he cherished most, his innermost self, in God’s service. “Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and then you will have treasure in heaven,” Jesus said. “Then come and follow me.”

The man’s wealth represented the thing he valued most. To be Jesus’ disciple the man would have to let Jesus and His Kingdom become the most important value in his life. This is what Jesus requires of all His disciples.

What did the man do? He wanted so much to have eternal life. Surely he must have quickly obeyed Jesus. But, no, he did not. When the man heard Jesus’ instructions, he became very sad and went away. He rejected Jesus’ instruction. Why? Because he loved money far more than he wanted eternal life. This “important” man went away, just like many people do today who at first think they want to follow Jesus and then go away from Him.

Many people in the New Testament were just like this “important” man. They thought that they wanted to be Jesus’ disciples. They loved to see Him do miracles. They were amazed by the big crowds and by watching Jesus deal with His enemies. But when Jesus told them what discipleship really meant, many people turned back. They did not want discipleship to be so much of a burden to them. They wanted to follow Jesus as long as their old lives did not have to change very much. But for Jesus to be Lord of our lives requires change and hard work on our part.

A. For Jesus to be Lord of our Lives, We Must Lose Our Lives to Jesus.

Jesus talked about what would happen when a person chooses to be Jesus’ disciples. Being a disciple would require much sacrifice and commitment. Jesus told His disciples that they, too, would have to be crucified if they expected to be His disciples. He really made some of His followers angry. He told them if any of them wanted to be His

disciples they would have to deny themselves. They would have to take up their cross daily and follow Jesus.

Jesus also told His followers if they wanted to save their lives they should not follow Him. He seemed to say some strange things (Luke 9:24). He said if people tried to save their own lives, they would actually lose them. But if people would lose their lives for Jesus, they would actually find them.

Jesus knew before long some of His disciples would be ashamed of Him. Some people would certainly be ashamed of Jesus when they saw Him helplessly hanging on the Cross. To their disappointment, Jesus wouldn't even try to save himself. But Jesus said that anyone who was ashamed of Him would not be His friend. In fact, Jesus said that He would be ashamed of that person.

To lose one's life for Jesus means entering fully into the life He gives. It means completely giving up, or crucifying, the "old life," which was really a way of death. Trying to have life apart from Jesus is, in fact, eternal death. But, for those who are set free from the old slavery to the kingdom of evil, the result is sanctification and eternal life (Romans 6:21-23).

What are some of the ways that Christians show they have lost their lives for Christ and have been changed by Him? First, things that are valued most change. Next, Christians show their love for God by a change in their habits. The old habits that were evil and destructive change because Jesus lives in us and we now belong to Him. We want Him to control our habits. Jesus also expects us to speak about Him to our friends and family members. We will allow Jesus to rule over our attitudes and secret thoughts. People will now see because of the way we live that we belong to Christ. We want Him to change us so our thoughts, words, and actions reflect His character.

Question: If we are ashamed of Jesus, how will Jesus react to us?

Question: What does it mean to lose our life to Jesus?

B. For Jesus to Be Lord of Our Lives, We Must Be Sanctified by Jesus.

Sanctify means to set apart someone or something for a holy purpose. It means to separate from the old sinful self and actions and to give oneself completely to God. The only acceptable way for disciples to follow Jesus is to give themselves completely to Him. Jesus must rule as Lord alone. Then Christ sanctifies the believer. Christ sanctifies the person who completely surrenders to His lordship.

Sanctify also means "to make holy." Jesus Christ sanctifies or makes holy the people who completely give themselves to God. This is the only correct way to be Jesus' disciples. And that is why Jesus said that people who lose their lives for Him will surely find them (Luke 9:24-25).

The Bible calls this way of radical obedience to Christ “sanctification.” It is a big word that simply means “belonging to God.” The disciples who allow the Lord to reign completely in their lives are sanctified completely. Through the sanctified person’s whole being, Jesus reveals that He is the the unquestioned Lord of all things.

Question: What does *sanctify* mean?

Question: What does it mean for Jesus to sanctify believers?

1. Sanctification includes being crucified with Jesus.

Jesus told His disciples to take up their crosses and follow Him. Being crucified with Jesus is strange language (Luke 14:27; Galatians 2:20). Jesus’ disciples were not literally crucified with Him. Today, Christians are not actually placed on crosses and crucified. So what did Jesus mean?

Jesus meant that they would have to live just as completely in faith and obedience before God as He did. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He trusted the word of His Father. He completely renounced all the kingdoms the devil represented. Jesus totally trusted and obeyed His Heavenly Father. His trust and obedience finally took Him to the Cross.

Sooner or later, anyone who sets out to be Jesus’ disciple will realize the old kingdom of sin and darkness will have to die. All that the old kingdoms represent must be crucified. Jesus clearly tells His followers that the old kingdom has to be crucified if they follow Him.

The place where the old kingdom of sin rests is in one’s heart. The *heart* means the center of our will. It means the center of our control over our past, present, and future. It includes our thinking, our deepest desires, and our emotions. At the center of our hearts and self-centeredness is the kingdom of darkness. There, the old kingdom of sin must be destroyed. Christ must reign in our hearts as Lord. Only then can people say they have been truly crucified with Christ.

Question: What does it mean to be crucified with Jesus?

Question: What is the meaning of *heart*?

2. Sanctification includes living obediently.

Jesus lived in obedience to His Heavenly Father. Likewise, His disciples must live in obedience to Him. Those who love Christ will want to obey Him more than they want to do anything else. Obedience to Christ is the way we show our worship for God. The apostle Paul spoke to the Christians in Rome about living obediently. He urged them to offer themselves as living sacrifices to God. They were to present themselves as holy and pleasing to Him. Their complete obedience to God would be their most important act of worship (Romans 12:1).

3. Sanctification includes living in a new reality.

Sinners live according to an old reality that lets rebellion against God have the final say in what they do. They give themselves to an evil mind. Destructive habits, words, and actions rule them. Their lives show hatred for all that God really wants His world and people to be. They are truly children of darkness, and they do the works of darkness.

Sinners are dead in their sins. They do not have the life of God in them. Jesus is their only hope for ending their evil desires. He is the Redeemer who can remove the sin of darkness and bring the light of forgiveness. He can forgive sins. Jesus can remove the hatred and bring peace.

After God saves us, then we no longer follow our evil desires. We want to live a new life, with a new reality. God's reality is a realm of forgiveness, peace, and righteousness. The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of light and grace. The Kingdom of God and the kingdom of sin cannot exist together. People who try to live in both kingdoms will fail completely.

The Kingdom of God requires total allegiance. Anyone who wants to be Jesus' disciple must understand anything that stands against God will have to die. It will have to disappear and be replaced by the reign of Jesus Christ in every part of one's life.

Question: What is the difference between the "old reality" and the "new reality"?

Question: What does "total allegiance" to God mean?

4. Sanctification means living in resurrection power.

Only after the old kingdom has been destroyed in our inner being can we know the full meaning of Jesus' resurrection. Resurrection power destroys the power of the kingdom of darkness. Anyone who holds on to some part of the old kingdom of evil can never know the full power of Christ's resurrection.

The apostle Paul said that we must first be crucified with Christ before we can be raised with Christ in the power of His resurrection. Paul said, Christians have been "buried with him [Jesus] through baptism into death" (Romans 6:14). Christ was raised from the dead by the Father to live a new resurrected life. In the same way Jesus' disciples must now be resurrected by God's power and now walk in the newness of Christ's life.

To live in the newness of Christ's life is what the apostle Paul describes as living in the power of His Resurrection (Romans 6:5-10; 8:1-17). No person can conquer the old kingdom of evil. This only happens when the Spirit of God freely and without challenge controls our lives. The Spirit of the resurrected Christ lives in us and wants to rule us completely. All of this happens through the grace of God that He has expressed in Jesus.

Those who live in the power of the Holy Spirit will let the Holy Spirit shape their minds and lives completely. Disciples of Jesus will now bring glory to the Kingdom of God.

It is very important to remember this is impossible through human strength. No human being can live for the glory of God unless God makes that possible. No human being can live in the newness of resurrected life unless the Spirit of the living Christ reigns in them. Jesus taught His disciples they must rely on the Holy Spirit if they are to live and witness for Him. (See Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:6-11; 2:1-4.)

Question: What does living in the power of the Resurrection mean?

Conclusion

When Jesus told His followers that they must take up their crosses if they intend to follow Him, He was on the way to His own crucifixion. He did not argue with His Father about going to Jerusalem. He did not sit around and waste time. He did not try find a way to stop His death. He felt an urgency to fulfill His Father's will.

The same is true of Jesus' call for our complete sanctification today. Persons who understand what it means to follow Jesus will not argue with Him. Because they want to be exactly what Jesus wants, they will not waste any time. Jesus said, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it" (Luke 9:24).

Activity: Think carefully about this lesson. Consider these questions: Have you lost your life for Jesus' sake? Have you surrendered your life completely to God? Have you allowed God to sanctify you completely?

Activity: Talk with another person about what it means for Jesus to be Lord of our lives.

Activity: Is there anything in your old kingdom of sin that must be crucified to be able to live as Jesus wants? Ask God to take away your evil desires and to sanctify you, so that you can live for Jesus Christ as His disciple.