

Home Church Study Guide—March 14, 2010
Messiah Defined (Luke 9:1-43)

Chapter 9 is so full of teaching concerning authentic discipleship. The first 27 verses serve as the first plot climax in Luke's gospel. Up to this point, the ministry of Jesus has been to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God. The story then takes a dramatic shift. Now begins the difficult task of informing His disciples what it truly meant to be Messiah, and it was so different than what they expected.

The apostles return from their first evangelistic journey full of excitement for what they had done. Jesus intended to withdraw to a private place and discuss their experiences but the crowds found them. We see Jesus' heart once again as He welcomes them and continues proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. He simply could not get tired of the exciting nature of living in God's kingdom! The disciples were disturbed because of the hour and lack of food, so they boldly asked Jesus to send the crowds home so they could eat. They must have been absolutely shocked when Jesus said, "You feed them." Of course, they measured Jesus' request by their limited provisions. The task, they explained, was impossible. Did they not remember? This was not the first time God's people were hungry in the wilderness. God would provide. And so Jesus fed the thousands with what seemed to be so little. Little becomes much in the hands of Messiah, so much that what was left over was enough to feed a large group. Also note that in Luke's gospel, there is this miracle language used to intentionally form a close connection to what will be the continuing practice of the church—the Lord's supper. The introduction of sitting at a table where God provides our needs begins in Luke/Acts in the wilderness. Jesus looked to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and the multitude was filled to overflowing.

Directed by His Father, Jesus asks, "Who do people think that I am?" We should not be surprised that Jesus is not considered by the people to be Messiah. That was such a sacred thought that it would not be spoken without complete assurance of its truth. But there was no hesitation on the part of Peter. He knew. Jesus was indeed Messiah. This is the point where the plot changes direction—dramatically. Now Jesus is preparing Himself and His followers for the trip to Jerusalem. Jesus tells them what it means to be Messiah, and what the nature of following Him will be. As He submits Himself to the will of the Father, which will lead not to His enthronement but His crucifixion, so we must die if we are to live. Jesus was indeed exalted, but only after His death. Only when we die can we find our true purpose in life. "Denying self" is the one most important aspect of authentic discipleship. Jesus willingly submitted His life to God, intentionally walked toward the cross, and laid down His life—to show us the way to LIFE! God is a loving God who wants what is best for us. So much so that He sent His only Son to show us that life. Jesus is MESSIAH. But He comes, as the anointed one of God to show us that life as we know it in this world is terribly misdirected. We must deny our self interest, give up on focusing on our own well being, and follow Jesus, carrying the visible sign of sacrifice on our shoulders and thus expanding the kingdom of God! When we risk our lives in the adventure of following Jesus, we will indeed find what we so desperately seek—life as it was intended to be!

It is very important that we take this journey with the disciples of Jesus. We must hear Jesus' voice about the nature of His "Messiahship." It is one of betrayal and violence. The disciples simply were not capable of understanding. The text suggests a prohibiting presence in their lives. They were still subject to Satan's confusing ideas. They had such strong preconceived ideas about Messiah and kingdom that they could not see Jesus for who He really was. It seems that we, too, want to continue what is called a "triumphalistic" reading of the text. We want the story of Jesus to be about one who came to bring us comfort and happiness and security in this world and then, when this world is over, we want the same things in the next life. But such is not the nature of life in the kingdom. While there will be ultimate triumph, this life is not about us having what we want while awaiting an even "better deal" after death. How clearly do we see the walk of authentic discipleship?

"So What" for Home Church discussion:

1. Where and how have you experienced the loving care of God during your life journey? What have you learned from such experiences?
2. We acknowledge Jesus as Messiah. Are we willing to walk out his way of life—carrying a cross? How (specifically) can we give ourselves in the coming week? Discuss this and commit to praying for one another in this.