



### **33: GEORGE FOREMAN KNOCKS OUT GOLLUM WITH A RIGHT HOOK! (Luke 9:18-27)**

Is there anything in your life that takes total precedence over everything else?

Wanna hear me get nerdy for a minute?

Recently, I watched the whole “Lord of the Rings” series again, meaning the original three movies, with my oldest daughter Charlotte. She was especially struck, or maybe even disturbed, by the character “Gollum”. Originally named Sméagol, Gollum was a Stoor, one of the three early Hobbit-types in the Third Age. Gollum was the fourth bearer of the ring of power, and literally killed his cousin and was banished by his people over desiring to possess it. By possessing the One Ring, his life extended centuries beyond his nature, and he became deformed and twisted in body and mind by the corruption of the Ring.

Gandalf the Great described Gollum to Frodo Baggins as follows;

*"He will never be rid of his need for it. He hates and loves the Ring, as he hates and loves himself. Sméagol's life is a sad story. Yes, Sméagol he was once called. Before the Ring found him. Before it drove him mad."*<sup>1</sup>

Is there anything in your life that takes total precedence over everything else?

When I was age fourteen through eighteen, a leafy green substance that is now legal in Ohio took precedence over many things in my life. I wrote songs about it. I spent most of my money on it. I ended up only having friends who used it and lost many friends who didn't use it. It led me to greater addictions and harder drugs that took my mind for a spin that could've ended in insanity. To quote Gollum, it was certainly "My Precious"! It had me in a grip that quite literally transformed me into a different person- lazy, dishonest, apathetic, lustful, and rebellious to the point of being destructive. Praise God that I was freed from the addiction!

Is there anything in your life that takes total precedence over everything else?

During the entirety of my time as a follower of Christ, I have struggled to allow Jesus to fully take precedence over everything. We all do. I have gone through seasons of workaholic, married, monogamous, non-porn-addicted sex dependency (yes- one can be addicted in an unhealthy way to biblical married sex!), spiritual discipline addiction (yes, there is such a thing also!), obsession with exercise, obsession with my spouse, obsession with ministry, and obsession with my kids. ***Even good things that God gives us can compete for the thrones of our lives!***

Is there anything in your life that takes total precedence over everything else?

Jesus wants precedence over your life. Who is He? He asked His disciples who people thought He was while He was on earth...

**18** *While Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"* **19** *They answered, "John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, that one of the ancient prophets has come back."* **20** *"But you," he asked them, "who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "God's Messiah." (Luke 9:18-20)*

Jesus asked his disciples about popular perceptions of who He is. The crowd believed that Jesus was a prophet of some kind or the reappearance of John the Baptist. In contrast, Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Gollum>

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Peter, the impetuous, bold leader and close disciple of Jesus, understood, to some extent, that Jesus was to take total precedence over everything else. He saw Jesus as God's Promised Ruler, though this category was short of a full confession of deity. More time with Jesus and more reflection on the significance of his resurrection would produce that deeper understanding of Jesus and His messianic function.<sup>3</sup>

Is there anything in your life that takes total precedence over everything else? How's that working for you? Is what you're smoking, doing, drinking, watching, snorting, loving, obsessing over, and fixating yourself on *really* fulfilling you? Or are there moments when you're real, real empty? I know what that emptiness is like...

To be a disciple of Jesus is to understand this unique role of Jesus that Peter understood. There was no one else like him in the plan of God. He was and is the only foundation that can be laid to build the house of God. "For no one can lay any foundation other than what has been laid down. That foundation is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 3:11).<sup>4</sup>

Jesus was not merely a prophet. That reduces the Christian faith to one ethic among many, something it never claims to be. Peter's confession was crucial because in it he was claiming that Jesus uniquely bore the hope of God's promise.<sup>5</sup>

But we need to understand that Jesus was and is the Messiah! He was and is the promised One of God! He was and is the sacrificial lamb that takes away our sin! He was and is the great hope of the world! He was and is the righteous One, the holy One, the forgiving One, the merciful One, the beautiful One!

Again- is there anything in your life that takes total precedence over everything else? Let Jesus the Messiah take precedence!

Jesus continued to speak to His disciples:

*21 But (Jesus) strictly warned and instructed them to tell this to no one, 22 saying, "It is necessary that the Son of Man suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day." (Luke 9:21-22)*

Peter's confession may have led to misunderstanding about what was ahead for Jesus, so Jesus immediately moved to correct that possibility. The disciples anticipated a direct route to glory. They believed power and privilege were the destiny of those associated

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with him. But they had much to learn about the road the Messiah traveled. He predicted the suffering of the Son of Man in rejection, death, and resurrection. These things “must” happen; Luke used the Greek word “dei” to indicate that God’s design was involved in the call to suffer. This is the first Son of Man saying in Luke that referred to suffering.<sup>6</sup>

I recently watched the movie “Big George Foreman”, about the famous boxer George Foreman’s life. One big thing that George struggled with in his early days was not sticking things out and following through. He would try things for a short time, then quit when something didn’t go well. Finally, under the mentoring of a coach “Doc Broadus” who believed in him, he took up boxing, and in his very first sparring match, he got beaten. In the locker room, he told Doc that he wanted to quit because he lost. Doc told him that he had to keep at it and not give up. He had to keep learning. He had to keep growing. He had to take the punches. He had to get knocked down. He had to grow in strength.

The story of George is amazing actually, because George had tremendous amounts of success and fame as a championship heavyweight boxer, but he also struggled with cheating on his wife, and basically being obsessed with being number one. So when he was finally defeated by Muhammad Ali (after a forty win streak!), he sunk into total despondency, and struggled to get back on top. Eventually, this led him to give his life fully over to Jesus, and become a preacher for years! Then after raising a family of his own, being a pastor, and building a youth center, his money dried up because of a dishonest accountant who had a drinking problem and made poor investments. He then entered back into training, lost about 50 lbs., and in line with a prophetic dream his wife had, became the oldest man to win a heavyweight title at the age of 45, rebuilding that youth center! On top of that, he became famous for slinging a pretty popular grill back in the 1990’s also!

And George certainly knew what it was like to have success on his own terms. Then, he experienced what it was like to trust God for everything over the top of being successful, and yet God still brought him great success, which he utilized for the Kingdom of God.

Does success take total precedence over everything else in your life? Does something have to be easy to be able to keep doing it? In anything we do, we know that the principle is that hard work and uphill struggling will bring results. And yet spiritually, do we know this? Are we willing to only allow “success” to come about in our lives if it fully brings God glory, and forsake all other versions of “success”?

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Do you follow Jesus through suffering and rejection? Are you willing to suffer and be rejected? Jesus was in fact rejected for you. Jesus did in fact suffer for you. He did that so that your sins would be forgiven. He came from heaven to earth, perfectly obeyed God, and showed the way. From His perfectly obedient life on earth, He did, in fact suffer many things, and was rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes. He was killed. From the earth to the cross, our debt to pay. From the cross to the grave, then He was raised on the third day. From the grave to the sky, He ascended to heaven. We lift His Name on high! 🎵

Are we looking to get something out of Jesus, or do we know that He requires all of us? And part of following Jesus is to keep at it and not give up. It's to keep learning. It's to keep growing. It's taking the punches. It's getting knocked down. It's growing in His strength! It's walking through the fire! And then, maybe then, we can consider it a great joy, whenever we experience various trials, because we know that the testing of our faith will produce endurance. And then we can let endurance have its full effect, so that we may be mature and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:2-4) Then, when our faith is fully tested, and endurance has fully taken root and had its full effect in us, we can be mature and complete in Christ. This doesn't mean we'll be perfect or sinless. It means that we'll be complete, lacking nothing, because we'll only desire the things of God. We'll only desire the things that bring God glory!

If we want to be rooted in the fourth soil, and not the second or third (Matt. 13:1-23), we must come to realize that Jesus doesn't owe us anything, but "all to Jesus, we surrender, all to Him we freely give!" It's never too late to start surrendering all to Jesus, and it's never time to stop surrendering all to Jesus!

Old Testament teachings talk about the imagery of the suffering servant (Isa. 52:13 - 53:12) and the idea of the suffering of the righteous in the Psalter (Pss. 16; 22; 31; 69; 118). Both these themes teach that suffering precedes glory.<sup>7</sup> It's an age old reality. Jump into the ring, take the punches. Trust Jesus. Keep growing in Him. Keep letting Him coach you!

And ultimately, trusting in Jesus means taking up a cross! Jesus said some hard words in Luke 9:23-27!

**23** Then he said to them all, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. **24** For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it. **25** For what does it benefit someone if he gains the whole world, and yet loses or forfeits himself? **26** For whoever

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*is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and that of the Father and the holy angels. 27 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”*  
(Luke 9:23-27)

Is there anything in your life that takes total precedence over everything else? Jesus wants to be the one to have total precedence over anything else in your life!

But wait Jesus, You want us to deny ourselves? Lose our lives? What does it mean to deny ourselves and lose our lives so that You will have Your way in us?

Well for one thing, on a contextual level, Cross-bearing is a powerful ancient image. Rejection stood at the center of that image, as well as accountability to the state. The cross-bearer had committed a severe crime and needed elimination. Criminals bore their own crosses as they journeyed to their death. Thus for a Christian to bear a cross was to be prepared to face rejection and death, even as one remained accountable to God for the path one walked. It meant that one had died to the world, separated from its values and lifestyle (Gal. 6:14).<sup>8</sup>

To bear a cross meant to be marked for life. It meant to carry a heavy burden. It meant to stick out like a sore thumb. And it's better to be a sore thumb for Jesus than to be a healthy pinky finger for the devil!

But let's dig into the words of Jesus here, verse by verse.

Luke 9:23 has an interesting sequence of tenses. All three verbs are imperatives, but the call to “deny [one]self” and “take up [one's] cross” are in Greek aorist tenses<sup>9</sup>, while the call to “follow [Jesus]” is in the present. This means that discipleship involves the fundamental commitment of self-denial and bearing one's cross, while the call to follow Jesus is constant, growing out of the base commitments. Discipleship therefore requires a basic shift of orientation as we align ourselves with God's will through a humble renunciation of our own agenda. To deny ourselves in the context of cross-bearing means that the world will come against us or even “kill” us for walking outside its paths, but we are ready to do so, because God has called us to walk a different way.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Aorist is an ideal tense to describe an action that happens at a particular point in time. This is why some grammar books describe it as “punctiliar.” Aorist verbs describe the entire action as a single event. This does not mean that aorist tense always describes actions which are over in an instant.

(<https://ezraproject.com/greek-tenses-explained/>)

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So when we initially meet Jesus, or when He officially meets us (depending on your theology!), we respond by denying ourselves and taking up a cross. From there, we continue to follow Jesus. Following Jesus also includes a continual denying of ourselves and taking up a cross!

An ancient medieval knight would take an oath;

*“Be without fear in the face of your enemies.  
Be brave and upright that God may love thee.  
Speak the truth always, even if it leads to your death.  
Safeguard the helpless and do no wrong – that is your oath.”<sup>11</sup>*

A knight would then go forth and proceed to live out that oath. They would strive to be fearless, brave and upright. They would strive to be truthful and boldly honest, even if it led to death. They would protect the weak and helpless, and seek to do right always.

When one pledges their life to Jesus as an apprentice and a disciple, they take the oath to *deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Him*. We’ve cheapened Christianity in the West to the point where we think it’s fine for people to read their bibles once and a while, pray a little, join a small group, attend a Sunday Church, tithe and volunteer for the Church. Those are all good things, and are certainly a product of being a disciple of Jesus. But Jesus wasn’t asking people to do those things first. The Pharisees did things like that. Jesus was asking for us to *deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him!*

Is there anything in your life that takes total precedence over everything else? Jesus wants to be the one to have total precedence over anything else in your life! He can be far more trusted with that than anything!

And what’s your cross? I guarantee it connects with your story. What was your childhood like? What are the things that interest you and drive you? What breaks your heart? What are your talents? What are your abilities? I guarantee that God has passions for you to pursue, and people to serve, love, and build up who need Jesus that you’re meant to move towards!

The road of service is not a road to self-fulfillment as proclaimed by the world. It involves a type of self-denial where the spiritual and basic needs of others are rigorously pursued. In a world where individual rights have almost inviolate status, such selflessness cuts against the grain. Bearing one’s cross means denying one’s own

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<sup>11</sup> <https://chrisenss.com/a-knights-oath>

agenda, seeking to serve God and follow him, so that one also serves others as a believer gives testimony to God's compassion for all of us. That is never popular in a world that exalts one's right to self-actualization.<sup>12</sup>

Again, remember the account of George Foreman's life. He did the whole "self-actualization" thing in his early years, and hit a lot of walls. Then he gave his life over to Jesus, and the wide-grinned, loving, generous man we now know came to life! Self-actualization is actually an abandonment of who the true self is in Christ! Our goal is not to "live our best lives"! It's to allow Christ to fully have His life in us!

When we look at Luke 9:24, it summarizes everything nicely. If you try to save your life by preserving yourself from the opposition of the world and/or by accommodating yourself to the world, what results is loss of real life. On the other hand, if you are willing to lose your life for the sake of the things of God, then what you save is real life. In the ancient world, choosing for Jesus meant certain opposition from people in the world. That opposition might express itself in the type of scorn Jesus saw, the type of ridicule the early church faced, beatings such as Paul experienced, or even death such as Stephen faced. The Christian faith was new and, in its Jewish context, was a threat to well-established traditions. If someone desired popularity and acceptance, he or she did not accept Christ. But the cost of popular acclaim was great, since the choice meant forfeiting the opportunity of salvation. Only those willing to line up with God and face popular rejection would respond to the gospel and enter into life. Thus, from the beginning, the choice of Jesus had built into it a sense of going a different way.<sup>13</sup>

Go ahead, try and save your greed, your selfishness, your religiosity, your addiction, your self-proclaimed destiny, and all the other things that you think you deserve! Watch what happens. If you have any sort of conscience things will begin to gnaw at you, and a sense of emptiness will start to seep in.

But lose all those things for Jesus and you will be saved! Deny those things, pick up the cross that Jesus has for you, and follow Him! What have you got to lose? What is your greed, selfishness, religiosity, addiction, self-proclaimed destiny, and all the other things you think you deserve really doing for you anyways? Aren't they getting old? Aren't there many moments where you desire real change but then you just keep repeating the same patterns and mistakes, again and again? Don't you want a power to effect real change in you? I got news for you. You can't do it on your own. Jesus will enliven you with a power, a resolve, a boldness, a conviction, a passion, a flourishing, a love, a

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grace, a forgiveness, a fire, and a peace that you've never known! Put all your trust in Him!

Jesus' rhetorical question in Luke 9:25 drives the point home. "To gain the whole world" means that all the provision, power, and property the world can provide is available to us — like our idiom "to have the world by the tail." To Jesus, it makes no sense to live this way, for it makes one a loser in real life. What is described here as a proverb was earlier a temptation for Jesus. In Luke 4:5-8, he faced a choice between walking on the path God called him to take or accepting the kingdoms of the world by bowing before Satan. Jesus knew, of course, that the choice was not a real one, for Satan could not give him what God could. Thus, Jesus calls on disciples here to follow the example he has already established. To gain the world at the expense of one's soul is a bad investment and a losing proposition.<sup>14</sup>

Listen. You could have all the money in the world, have the best house in the world, have the best car in the world, have the hippest, most expensive threads, eat the best food, do the strongest drugs, have the best sex, own the most property, run the most successful company, and be famous, and you can be totally, utterly empty and feel that life is pointless.

Nothing in this world is worth gaining that is worth more than eternity! Jesus was our ransom to turn our lives heaven ward y'all. We are meant to love God and love people with every fiber of our beings. We are meant to give up all the other traps for this treasure of love.

But we are wired to think the total opposite! I've thought for most of my life, even while following Jesus, and even now, in my natural being, that somehow, if I just get a little more money, if I just pay off my mortgage and car loans, if I just get our attic redone and finally keep the squirrels out of there, if my wife finally gets paid full time along with me getting paid full time, if our kids finally move out, if we finally finish scraping wallpaper off of every room in our house and repainting, etc. etc. etc.- that somehow I'll have more fulfillment. And let me tell you now that even though that thinking in my natural being is natural, it's simply all a lie. There is nothing that satisfies the entire being like Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

What will such sacrifice of the world to gain our soul really gain? It's a **lot** more serious than our culture makes it out to be! Jesus uses a negative picture to answer the question. Those ashamed or afraid to confess the Son of Man (i.e., Jesus) will face his rejection when he returns with all of heaven's glory. They will get what they have

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chosen: separation from him. Jesus portrays himself as the judge at the end of time, a theme Luke develops elsewhere (Acts 10:40 - 43; 17:30 - 31). Our Lord will not accept any who have asked him not to be a part of their life. But the picture is a tragic one, for when he reappears, his position and privilege will be obvious to all. To be excluded will be a public affair; facing eternity without God and knowing it is the most tragic of all positions in life. On the other hand, by implication, those who ally themselves to Jesus will experience the kingdom of God.<sup>15</sup>

It's true that to be ashamed of Jesus and His words is to be ashamed of the very things of God. Casting Jesus aside will end in ruin. Casting aside the teaching of Jesus is casting aside the very words that bring life, breath, love, and vigor to our beings! Why would we reject the giver of life? Why would we reject the very words of life?

Jesus concludes his remarks with a note that some present with him will not taste death until they experience the kingdom of God. This remark appears to have two points of reference. (1) Some of the Twelve will journey with Jesus to the mountain and experience the Transfiguration (9:28 - 36), where they will receive a glimpse or preview of Jesus' coming glory. They will "see" the kingdom of God to come. (2) The reference may well anticipate the type of blessing that descends on the church at Pentecost, since there the power of the risen Jesus manifests itself in the distribution of the Spirit (Acts 2:14 - 39). With the Spirit the promise of the messianic blessing commences, and God begins to express his presence and rule from within his people (Luke 3:15 - 17; 24:49; Acts 1:5 - 8). Thus, Jesus notes that with the hard road of discipleship comes association with the rich blessing of being a part of God's kingdom.<sup>16</sup>

And I'm telling you that some of you reading today are going to taste the Kingdom of God in this life! You're going to experience the power of the Holy Spirit rushing through your being and transforming you! You're going to experience the transformative forgiveness of the gospel and have your soul and spirit set free! You're going to realize that the things of eternity in Christ's hands are a trillion times more valuable than anything you've ever experienced on this earth! You're about to taste heaven! Put yo' bib on, grab your knife and fork, and open up yo' mouth wide!

Discipleship means being a learner, a follower. It means that our attention is turned to how we can follow Jesus, not how we can make him follow us.<sup>17</sup>

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Some of us want Jesus to follow us more than we want to follow Him! We want Him to validate our choices and behaviors that go totally against what He's asking us to do, instead of submitting our choices and behaviors to Him and allow the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to prune all the things that are not of Him completely and totally out of us!

Jesus saved us for discipleship. His goal was to make a people eager to be his people!

*11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. 14 He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works. (Titus 2:11-14)*

Only Jesus can redeem you, rescue you, transform you, and send the Holy Spirit to live inside of you so that the Spirit within you denies godlessness and worldly lusts, and also make you **eager** to do good works! The Holy Spirit wants to come and live inside of you and absolutely, completely transform you in more ways than you could imagine!

It's real simple though it also costs everything- start by doing this- give Jesus precedence over the whole lot. Give Him all of it. Let Him have complete, total leadership and control over all of you!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Is there anything in your life that takes total precedence over everything else? What is it? Is it making you happy? Sad? Frustrated?
2. What would it look like to allow Jesus to take total precedence over your life? Would it make your life better? Why?
3. Take some time to pray and give Jesus the things that you're holding on tightly to.