

Come Follow Me
Elo Viz production
Week 11
Matt 9-10, Mark 5, Luke 9

Today I hope to address a topic that I believe most people would avoid like the plague. It is very controversial, and many might be very sensitive to it. So, I hope to present the topic with grace and kindness. Here we go...

Why do people leave the church? According to the all knowing wikipedia there are several reasons which include: dis-believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that the Book of Mormon is not a historical document. Also, some left because of conflict with other members and with church leaders, it also mentions that some leave because of "rules of conduct" professed by the LDS church. I'm sure those would cover a large majority though there may be a few others with varying reasons. These could also be reasons for others not wanting to receive baptism and joining the church in the first place. In any case; It's irrelevant whether we agree with them or not. The fact remains that they left because of something that they believed.

You and I choose to remain faithful in the church because of what we believe. And we can claim that our beliefs are the correct ones, but this statement does not make it true for others.

This was the same issue the saints were dealing with while the Son of God stood before their face in physical form. It was also the same problem the Pharisees faced. Last week in Luke seven we read about two of John the Baptist's disciples questioning Jesus. And I have to say it feels weird even saying that. These men were disciples of John the Baptist...do you see the problem there?

“20 When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?

21 And in that same hour he **cured** many of *their* infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many *that were* blind he gave **sight**.

22 Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the **poor** the gospel is preached.

23 And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be **offended** in me.” (Luke 7:20-23)

John the baptist knew that this was Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the World. But even he was a little discouraged when Jesus did not do what John wanted Him to do. They believed in that day that when the Messiah came, that He would be a great military leader that would free them from the captivity they were living in under the rule of Rome. And there sat John in a cold

prison cell not being delivered as he hoped. A prison in which he later died, being beheaded by order of Herod.

What is interesting to me is that even though John knew that Jesus was who they believed Him to be, there were some that still chose to ignore Him and remain disciples of John. Even Judas, though we all judge him and confess that we would never betray the Son of God, condemning him to an awful destruction because we think we would never do that. He knew Jesus and still turned his back on him. Simon Peter did as well, denying Him three times.

It is no wonder Jesus asks His disciples:

“Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?”

14 And they said, Some *say that thou art* John the Baptist: some, [Elias](#); and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

15 He saith unto them, But whom say [ye](#) that I am?

16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the [Christ](#), the [Son](#) of the [living God](#).” (Matt 16:13-16 and Luke 9:18-20)

This same question is asked today, If you walk down the street in New York and ask random people “who do you think Jesus Christ is?” You will get similar answers; some say He was a great teacher, some say He was a prophet like unto Moses. But what anyone else thinks doesn't matter. Who do you say he is? This is the difference in testimony and conversion.

Did you notice in the beginning when we talked about those that left the church, none of them had to do with the Savior. None of those people would have ever left if they had a personal witness of, and a relationship with Jesus Christ. His question to the Apostles of “Whom say ye that I am?” is the most important question that we can ask ourselves. If we are truly converted to the Savior then we can endure any bad ward or stake leader. If we have a personal relationship with Jesus then we can get through any trouble, trial or sin. We can experience joy when times are hard, during poverty, sickness or even death. He is the way, the truth and life. (John 16:6) “Take my Yoke upon you” He said, “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:29-30)

Jesus praised Peter for his answer: “Blessed art thou, Simon [Bar-jona](#): for flesh and blood hath not [revealed](#) *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt 16:17)

And there is the key to true conversion; a personal, spiritual, eternal connection with the Heavens, with your creator, the source of all truth. When God tells you who Jesus is you can be sure He is telling the truth. That is when your faith turns to knowledge.

So how do we get that witness? How do we find out for certain that Jesus is the Christ. We can spend a lifetime listing all the intricate details and various ways how to come unto Him, but the Master gives it to us all wrapped in one perfect sentence:

“And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his **cross** daily, and **follow** me.” (Luke 9:23)

There are two parts to this statement. First our duty is to deny ourselves. This is outlined by King Mosiah:

“For the **natural man** is an **enemy** to God, and has been from the **fall** of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he **yields** to the enticings of the **Holy Spirit**, and **putteth** off the **natural** man and becometh a **saint** through the atonement of Christ the Lord,” (Mosiah 3:19)

David O McKay said “The purpose of the gospel is ... to make bad men good and good men better, and to change human nature.”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media/image/meme-mckay-change-human-nature-0dab8ab?lang=eng>

We all have our vices, our addictions and distractions. This is all part of our mortal journey. To use our agency to choose to change who we are and who we want to become. The adversary's plan is to numb, distract, and tire us, so we don't have the time, means or ability to change. But change can be exciting. To be able to see things as never before. To be able to do and be a part of things as never before. All things that God has in store to show you. Even that shown to the prophets of the entire world from creation to the end. I tell my 15 year old son all the time that Pride is not a good look on anyone. It's the worst wardrobe you could wear, and people will only look at you with disgust if you put on the cloak of pride, the only one that will think you look good in it is you. This principle of letting go of the natural man is to permanently dispose of the cloak of pride and to never take it up again.

The second part to this I recently learned about. Have you ever heard someone use the term “I guess it's just my cross to bear ”. Referring to a trial or situation they are dealing with. I don't believe that this is what Jesus meant when he asked us to “Take up our crosses and follow Him”. Please notice that Luke adds one word that the other gospel writers don't. He recorded Jesus saying:

“take up his **cross** daily,” (Luke 9:23)

In considering the meaning of His saying, remember where the cross leads...It leads to death. It led Christ to the top of Calvary to be crucified by His own people that hated Him. For us to take up our cross and follow him is to be slain on that hill right next to Him. The only reason any of us would ever do that is if we knew for certainty who He was and what He did for us. No casual testimony, no disciple of John the Baptist or any other man would lead you to die on a cross next to Jesus. Only a solid conviction of Him and His gospel would do that. And some people have: Simon Peter did not see himself as worthy to die the same way the Savior did so he asked that when they crucified him that they did it upside down. In fact all of the apostles died in gruesome manners in the name of and service to Jesus Christ. Joseph was shot to death in a jail. Many of the early saints willingly gave their life for the Lord and died in brutal ways.

Not too long ago Elder M. Russell Ballard said:

“He isn’t asking us to die a martyr’s death; He’s asking us to live a disciple’s life. This is a great time to live, brothers and sisters, and it is up to us to carry on the rich tradition of devoted commitment that has been the hallmark of previous generations of Latter-day Saints. This is not a time for the spiritually faint of heart. We cannot afford to be superficially righteous. Our testimonies must run deep, with spiritual roots firmly embedded in the rock of revelation. And we must continue to move the work forward as a covenanted, consecrated people, with faith in every footstep, “till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2008/10/the-truth-of-god-shall-go-forth?lang=eng>

This willingness to take up our cross and follow Him will not happen overnight. It takes time, patience and perseverance. John Pontius describes the process this way:

“This is where the enabling and changing majesty of the atonement is manifest: when we take whatever truth we understand and whatever light we perceive, and reorder our lives to that level of obedience, sacrificing whatever is required in that small circle of light; then the Lord changes us in that instant that our hearts turn to Him in diamond-hard desire, It doesn't happen after year of trying to prove our intent; it happens in the moment we choose to forever obey.

Then, as the light increases, a higher and higher level of desire and obedience is required to pass the angels that guard this gate. On the lowest level, we may be told to not steal a candy bar. When we choose to forever obey that law, we are changed so that the desire to steal leaves us. On the next level, we are taught to not covet the candy bar. We succeed and are changed that we no longer covet. A further level may be to give one of our candy bars away. We obey, and are changed. The next could be to give our only candy bar away. We obey are again changed even more profoundly, so that God leads us to meet our needs in other ways. When we obey, we are again changed so that our needs are met by miracles.

The greatest level may be to realize, after long experience and unfailing miracles, that anything we sacrifice to God's will we did not actually need, and that if God has asked us to give away all of our food and our water, He will change us so that we no longer need them.

This is the pathway to every glorious blessing, to incrementally climb the ladder of obedience to blessedness that exceeds the ability of man to conceive while standing below the bottom rung.

At every level, the lesson is to sacrifice the needs of the flesh in some way. Every level is greater, every sacrifice more exalting and every change moves us nearer and nearer to when this telectual world no longer demands that we play by its rules. Then we become truly changed, born again, remade into new creatures in Christ, and changed by spiritual fire and fulfillment of temple promises in the greatest sense so that mortality is no longer our master.

Then we are truly ready to abide the day of His coming. “
(Journey to eh Veil II- John pontius, page 182-183)

And I would add at that point we would truly be willing to take up our cross, and follow Jesus wherever he leads us, even if that is to the top of Golgotha.

I believe that this all starts by clinging to the light that is Christ Jesus. Not the church, not another person in the church, not to anything else except Jesus. He is the unmovable rock of Salvation. The sure way. The only way.

In His sacred name I testify, even Jesus Christ, Amen.