

Surely There Are Some Standing Here

Christ's assurance in Luke 9:27, and parallel Synoptic passages, that "some standing here would not taste death..." has been a puzzling statement in the minds of the past two centuries' readers. A simple survey of commentators' expoundings on such will demonstrate the diversity of opinion regarding this statement. First, we will look at the verse in context and review the obvious difficulties. Next, we will look at the history of traditional attempts to resolve this statement. Finally, we will investigate a curiously neglected point of view which could give fresh insight into what our Lord was commending to his hearers.

Context

Luke

[Luke 9:22](#) εἰπὼν ὅτι δεῖ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου πολλὰ παθεῖν καὶ ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι ἀπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ ἀρχιερέων καὶ γραμματέων καὶ ἀποκτανθῆναι καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἐγερθῆναι .

[23](#) Ἔλεγεν δὲ πρὸς πάντας· εἰ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔρχεσθαι ἀρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καθ' ἡμέραν καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι .

[24](#) ὃς γὰρ ἂν θέλῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ σῶσαι ἀπολέσει αὐτήν· ὃς δ' ἂν ἀπολέσῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ οὗτος σώσει αὐτήν .

[25](#) τί γὰρ ὠφελείται ἄνθρωπος κερδήσας τὸν κόσμον ὅλον ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἀπολέσας ἢ ζημιωθείς;

[26](#) ὃς γὰρ ἂν ἐπαισχυνθῆ με καὶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς λόγους , τοῦτον ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπαισχυνθήσεται , ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐν τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τῶν ἁγίων ἀγγέλων .

[Luke9:27](#) λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ἀληθῶς , εἰσὶν τινες τῶν αὐτοῦ ἐστηκότων οἱ οὐ μὴ γεύσονται θανάτου ἕως ἂν ἴδωσιν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ .

[28](#) Ἐγένετο δὲ μετὰ τοὺς λόγους τούτους ὥσει ἡμέραι ὀκτὼ παραλαβὼν Πέτρον καὶ Ἰωάννην καὶ Ἰάκωβον ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος προσεύξασθαι .

Mark

[Mark 8:34](#) Καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν ὄχλον σὺν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· εἰ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔλθειν , ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι .

[35](#) ὃς γὰρ ἐὰν θέλῃ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν σῶσαι ἀπολέσει αὐτήν· ὃς δ' ἂν ἀπολέσῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν [ἐμοῦ καὶ] τοῦ εὐαγγελίου σώσει αὐτήν .

[36](#) τί γὰρ ὠφελεί ἄνθρωπον κερδήσαι τὸν κόσμον ὅλον καὶ ζημιωθῆναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ;

[37](#) τί γὰρ δοῖ ἄνθρωπος ἀντάλλαγμα τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ;

[38](#) ὃς γὰρ ἐὰν ἐπαισχυνθῆ με καὶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς λόγους ἐν τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ τῇ μοιχαλίδι καὶ ἁμαρτωλῷ καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπαισχυνθήσεται αὐτὸν ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀγγέλων τῶν ἁγίων

[Mark 9:1](#) Καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι εἰσὶν τινες ὧδε τῶν ἐστηκότων οἵτινες οὐ μὴ

γεύσονται θανάτου ἕως ἂν ἴδωσιν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐληλυθυῖαν ἐν δυνάμει .

2 Καὶ μετὰ ἡμέρας ἕξ παραλαμβάνει ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸ Πέτρον καὶ τὸν Ἰάκωβον καὶ Ἰωάννην καὶ ἀναφέρει αὐτοὺς εἰς ὄρος ὑψηλὸν κατ' ἰδίαν μόνους καὶ μετεμορφώθη ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν,

Matthew

Matt 16:24 Τότε [ὁ] Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ· εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔλθειν , ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθείτω μοι .

25 ὃς γὰρ ἐὰν θέλῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ σῶσαι ἀπολέσει αὐτήν· ὃς δ' ἂν ἀπολέσῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ εὐρήσει αὐτήν·

26 τί γὰρ ὠφεληθήσεται ἄνθρωπος ἐὰν τὸν κόσμον ὅλον κερδήσῃ τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ζημιωθῆ; ἢ τί δώσει ἄνθρωπος ἀντάλλαγμα τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ;

27 μέλλει γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἔρχεσθαι ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ , καὶ τότε ἀποδώσει ἑκάστῳ κατὰ τὴν πράξιν αὐτοῦ .

Matt 16:28 ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι εἰσὶν τινες τῶν ὧδε ἐστῶτων οἵτινες οὐ μὴ γεύσονται θανάτου ἕως ἂν ἴδωσιν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ

1 Καὶ μεθ' ἡμέρας ἕξ παραλαμβάνει ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸν Πέτρον καὶ Ἰάκωβον καὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναφέρει αὐτοὺς εἰς ὄρος ὑψηλὸν κατ' ἰδίαν .

Note the interesting variations between the Synoptics. If Mark was written before the others (“see the Kingdom of God present in power.”) and was used as a reference by Luke, then Luke deletes “present with power” and rests with “see the Kingdom of God.” Matthew stresses the object of “seeing” as not merely the Kingdom of God, but that they shall see “the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom.” If the connection between this statement and our Lord’s immediately preceding description of His coming judgment was not inherently obvious in Luke, Matthew leaves us no room for separation.

Historical Survey of Understanding

“Not Taste Death”

Possibilities for “Not Taste Death” seem to be fairly limited. From an historical review of opinion, this can only mean physical death of those present, listening to Jesus. One is hard pressed to find any other consideration.

Could “εἰσὶν τινες τῶν αὐτοῦ ἐστηκότων οἱ οὐ μὴ γεύσονται θανάτου” (“some of these standing here will not taste death”) be merely an emphatic statement: “You can bet your life this will happen”? It seems to be an emphatic statement, for sure, but there is no ready evidence in first century literature to prove that an idiomatic phrasing such as this might warrant a figurative interpretation.

Could some of these still be alive? Some cite Jesus’ statement to Caiaphas in Mark 14:61, ... Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed *One*?” 62 And Jesus said, “I am; and **you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand**

of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” Is Caiaphas cursed to walk this earth until He sees the second coming of our Lord? Some think so, but to our Lord’s audience in Luke 9, he would not be the inherently obvious referent.

“See The Kingdom of God”

So many diverse opinions exist as to what “Seeing the Kingdom of God” might mean. A popular hypothesis points to the immediately following account of Christ’s transfiguration before Peter, James, and John-- who were hearers standing before Him at our problem passage. But what did they witness? They definitely witnessed Christ in His glory-- to some extent. But did they witness Christ coming in the glory of His Father with His angels to repay each man according to his deeds (from Matthew)? It would be a hard sell to force this as Christ’s intent for speaking our passage. What would be the point to declare to the people: Surely there are 3 standing here to whom I will give a glimpse of My glory before they die (i.e. in 8 days). There would not seem to be much purpose in such a statement, and this interpreted wording is far from the wording Christ uses in any of the Synoptics.

Could the Kingdom of God referent be merely a Spiritual state of an individual or the Church? [Luke 17:21](#) says, “...neither will they say, ‘Look, here!’ or, ‘Look, there!’ for behold, the Kingdom of God is within you.”

The Kingdom of God was present with power at Pentecost, at Christ’s resurrection, indeed, even at the time Christ walked the earth, and even now. But could any of these be the referent in light of the harder Matthean account? Matthew 16:27 “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds. [28](#) “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

A Curiously Neglected Reading

Immediately preceding our problem passage, our Lord commends His followers to the sacrifice which they will need to share with their Teacher in order to follow Him as a disciple.

[Luke 9:22](#) ...“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.” [23](#) And He was saying to *them* all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. [24](#) “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. [25](#) “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? [26](#) “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels. [27](#) “But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”

Our Lord begins by explicitly describing the sufferings of which He would soon partake: rejection and death. He then declares to those who would be His followers that they too must follow His example and die daily if they wish to be His disciples. Those who would save their life would die, and those who would die, for Christ's sake, would live. If we then review our problem passage in this context, we hear: surely there are some standing here who will not die until they see the Kingdom of God. Why wouldn't proper exegesis mandate us to view this theme of death commonly throughout the context of our passage? We must, at least, consider such. Christ is clear to His hearers that He is not mandating physical crucifixion for all who would be His followers. This is assured to them by His addition of the qualifier καθ' ἡμέραν. We must take up our cross καθ' ἡμέραν. Indeed, we hear our Lord again express in, [Luke 14:27](#) "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." This theme of *dieing to oneself* in Luke 9:22-25-- why is it so foreign to understand this theme continuing through verse 27? Indeed, there is nothing which indicates otherwise. The idea of denying oneself and being identified with Christ is expounded upon in 26, and then we have our passage in verse 27. Would it not be poor exegesis attributing to the term 'death' anything other than what the Speaker ascribes immediately before? Why then do so many historical interpretations insist on switching meaning to physical death at verse 27?

There is an additional element also pointing us back to the previous mention of death: the emphatic οὐ μὴ. "But I say to you truly, there are some standing here who **indeed will not** taste death..." This most clear, emphatic negation construct appears 27 times in the NT. It is true that this emphatic negation construct does not require stressing the negation of a previous statement, but many times it does. An example is found in Matthew 15.

[1](#) Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, [2](#) "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." [3](#) And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? [4](#) "For God said,

'Honor your father (τίμα τὸν πατέρα)

and mother,' and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.'

[5](#) "But you say, 'Whoever says to *his* father or mother, "Whatever I have that would help you has been given *to God*," [6](#) he is

not to honor his father (οὐ μὴ τιμήσει τὸν πατέρα)

or his mother.' And *by this* you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

Here, the negation does not seem to stress the **quality** of dishonoring one's father and mother; but instead, the emphasis seems to clearly highlight the negation of the previous statement. If we apply this same function to our passage, we hear: You must pick up your cross and die daily to follow Me. Surely some standing here will **not** die till they see the Kingdom of God.

If this is the case, then what might our Lord be saying? Surely some standing before Him will *not die to themselves and be His disciple*, to judgment? ..short of seeing the Kingdom present with power? Surely some *will* follow Him and not *taste death, eternal*: all the way to seeing His return and beyond? Our Lord is notorious for making statements similar to these. Is it so foreign to place our passage among other similar statements?

[John 4:14](#) “...but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”

[John 11:25](#) Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, ...”

[John 2:19](#) Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

[Luke 9:27](#) “But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”

In light of our Lord’s immediately preceding call to pick up one’s cross and taste death in this life, to find life eternal, there seems a very natural progression if we retain this same meaning of death to the next verse. Would we sincerely challenge Christ’s declaration of an eternally quenched thirst, as not being fulfilled because His hearer was *physically* thirsty later that evening?

But what is the clear message from our Lord in these verses? We must not be as Epictetus might suggest, “lie[ing], indeed, but are ready with the arguments which prove that one ought not to lie.” We must follow the clear and obvious teaching of our Lord: to follow His example of suffering many things, being rejected, and being crucified daily. How so? How often do we really feel rejected? How often do we pick up our cross and crucify our desires? How often do we stop seeking our own life, for the sake of Christ, and for the same purpose Christ chose to suffer for us? Not often enough. More often we feel so blessed with peace and so accepted-- which our Lord does truly offers us-- that we can not fathom this type of suffering in our lives.

Why aren’t we rejected? Why was Christ rejected and crucified? Because He cared for those who would crucify Him. He went out of His way to leave His comfort zone and seek out those who needed Him and His crucifixion. It has been said that the reason the Church does not care about the lost, is because the people of the Church do not have any lost in their lives for whom they care about. Is this the example Christ gives to us? Can we pro-actively leave our comfort zones and seek to spend our time in places where we will develop caring relationships with the lost? Our Lord’s words take on new meaning when we consider His motivation which brought Him to His suffering-- to save a lost and dieing world. “If any man would be My disciple, let him deny himself, pick up his cross and follow Me.”