

INTRODUCTION

1. Please take God's Word and turn with me to Luke chapter 9.
2. This week we have addressed True Belief, the Lordship of Christ, Biblical Confession and Repentance.
3. Tonight we are concluding with "What It Means to Follow Christ."
4. To do that I want us to look at Luke 9:23-24.
5. Luke 9:23-24 (NASB) says, "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."
6. The message of salvation is to *follow* Jesus.
7. What do those two words mean? They are calling the sinner to surrender to the authority of Jesus Christ.
8. Inherent in those two words is terminology that speaks of self-denial, crucifixion, and daily death.
9. Paul Washer says, "In the gospel of Jesus, sincere and costly discipleship always accompanies genuine conversion. The gospel of Jesus teaches men that a mere profession of faith alone is no sound evidence of salvation."
10. But it is a profession that includes "self-denial, crucifixion and

daily death.”

11. To add to this, Luke 13:25-27 (NASB) says, “Jesus says to the multitudes that were with Him, “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.”
10. Some, however, responded eagerly to Christ while neglecting to count the cost. They received no encouragement from him:
11. Luke 9:57-62 says, “As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Permit me first to go and bury my father." But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." And another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”
12. Are these difficult demands?
13. No – they’re Impossible!
14. Yet those are Jesus' very words---unqualified, unadorned, untempered by any explanation or soothing rationalization.
15. Our Lord was sounding a note that is missing from much that passes for evangelism today. His "follow Me" was a call to surrender to his lordship.
16. This was the core of the early church’s confession of faith.

17. This was the primary nucleus of truth affirmed by every true Christian (1 Cor.12:3).
18. Paul said in 2 Cor.4:5, "...we...preach...Christ Jesus the Lord.
19. The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas in Acts 16:30, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (v.31).
20. Paul said in Romans 10:9-10, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (NASB)
21. The lordship of Christ is clearly at the heart of true saving faith and that is what is meant by the words "follow Me."
22. In this passage we see the *invitation, the cost, and the message* Jesus gave to the multitudes.
23. Let's look at them one at a time.

I. The Invitation to Follow Christ (v.23a-b)

A. The Context

1. The chapter begins with Jesus calling His “twelve disciples” together and giving them “power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases” (v.1)
2. Matthew 10:1 is bit more specific saying, “He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.”
3. Following this Luke says in verse 2 that “He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.”
4. Again, in the words of Matthew 10; when He first called them they were “disciples” (v.1), but when He sent them out they were now “apostles” (v.2).
5. Luke continues in verse 6 saying “they departed and went through the towns, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.”
6. Verses 7-9 records Herod’s response Jesus saying that he was “perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again” (vv.7-8). And Herod wanted to see Him (v.9).
7. At this point in the narrative, the apostles returned and told Jesus “all that they had done” (v.10). He then “took them and went aside privately into a deserted place...but the multitudes...followed Him.”

(v.11).

8. From verses 11-17 Luke records the events of the feeding of the 5000.
9. Following this event Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do the crowds say that I am? So they answered and said, ‘John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered and said, ‘The Christ of God.’ And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, ‘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 the third day’” (vv.18-22).

That is the context leading up to our passage under consideration: Jesus gives authority to the twelve, sends them out, heals and feeds the 5000, questions His identity to the disciples among the crowds and to them.

And now the narrative turns back to the *crowd*.

B. The Crowd (v.23a)

“Then He said to them *all*.”

“Them” is in italics which indicates it does not appear in the original text but was added by translators so that it reads, “Then He said to all.”

While Matthew 16:24 says he was speaking to “His disciples,” Mark 8:34 says, “And when He had called the people to Him, with His disciples, He said to them.”

This is why the translators add “them” in Luke 9:23. The audience is both the disciples and the people who were with Him.

Understanding who Jesus is speaking to in verses 23-24 is very important because there are some who interpret this passage as a call to Christians to go to the next level in their discipleship.

Just a brief look at the text indicates the opposite because of the use of the phrases, “come after Me, deny himself, take up his cross daily, follow Me” (v.23). In verse 24 it is talking about saving your life or losing it. Verse 25 continues with speaking of the one who “gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost.”

It is clear that this is a message to the crowd of the “initial surrender of the new birth” (MacArthur) and to the disciples to examine themselves in light of these words. To the disciples this is a reiteration to “the call to the life of daily obedience to Christ” (MacArthur).

C. The Call (v.23b)

“If anyone desires to come after Me.”

1. “Anyone” again refers to both the “people” and the “disciples”
2. “Come after Me” is the initial surrender of the new birth
 - a) Jesus uses those words in Matthew 11:28 to call unbelievers to salvation.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy

laden, and I will give you rest.”

- b) We know this is a reference to salvation because He defines it in John 6:35:

“And Jesus said to them, ‘ I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”

- c) John 6:37 continues with the same phrase:

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”

- d) He said in verse 44: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draw him; and I will raise Him up at the last day.”

- e) The book of Revelation also uses this term “come” as a call to salvation in Rev.22:17:

“And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”

So the call is to “come after Me.” Notice *the cost* that is involved in coming to Christ:

II. The Cost of Following Christ (v.23c)

“Let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

John MacArthur writes, “To come to Jesus Christ is to receive

and to keep on receiving forever. But Jesus, through His direct instruction during His earthly ministry and through His apostles in the rest of the New Testament, repeatedly makes clear that there must be a cross before the crown, suffering before glory, sacrifice before reward. The heart of Christian discipleship is giving before gaining, losing before winning” (Matthew 16-23, p.46).

A. It Begins with Denying Yourself (v.23c)

“A person who is not willing to deny himself cannot claim to be a disciple of Jesus Christ” (MacArthur).

“Deny” is from *aparneomai*, which means “to completely disown, to utterly separate oneself from someone.”

It is the word Jesus used to describe Peter’s denial of Him while He was being questioned by the high priest (Mat.26:34). Each time he was confronted about his relationship to Jesus, Peter more vehemently denied knowing Him (vv.70, 72, 74). He disowned his master before the world.

That is exactly the kind of denial a believer is to make in regard to himself. He is to utterly disown himself, to refuse to acknowledge the self of the old man. Jesus’ words here could be paraphrased, ‘Let him refuse any association or companionship with himself.’

Self-denial not only characterizes a person when he comes in saving faith to Christ but also as he lives as a faithful disciple of Christ.

The self of which Jesus is speaking is the natural, sinful, rebellious, unredeemed self that is at the center of every fallen person and that can even reclaim temporary control

over a Christian.

It is the flesh body, the “old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit” (Eph.4:22 - NASB).

1. To deny that self is to confess with Paul, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, my flesh” (Rom.7:18).
2. To deny that self is to have the sincere, genuine conviction that one has nothing in his humanness to commend himself before God, nothing worthwhile to offer Him at all
 - a) The believer is made acceptable before God when he trusts in Jesus Christ, and he stands before the Lord in perfect righteousness, clothed in “the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph.4:24)
 - b) But as Paul also declared, even after salvation a believer has no more goodness in himself, “that is, in [his] flesh,” than he had before salvation
3. To deny that self is to “make no provision for the flesh” (Rom.13:14, “provision,” means “forethought, planning ahead”)

“The sins we commit develop from wrong ideas and lustful desires that we have allowed to linger in our minds (cf. Jas.1:14-15). The longer we permit them to stay, the more provision we make for the flesh to bring them to fruition” (John MacArthur, Romans 9-16, p.269).

B. Take Up Your Cross (v.23c)

This idea has a profound meaning which must be understood.

1. What it does not mean

Taking up one's cross is not some mystical level of selfless 'deeper spiritual life' that only the religious elite can hope to achieve.

Nor is it the common trials and hardships that all persons experience sometime in life.

A cross is not having an unsaved husband, nagging wife, or domineering mother-in-law.

Nor is it having a physical handicap or suffering from an incurable disease.

2. What it does mean

To take up one's cross is simply to be willing to pay any price for Christ's sake.

It is the willingness to endure shame, embarrassment, reproach, rejection, persecution, and even martyrdom for His sake.

“To the people of Jesus' day the cross was a very concrete and vivid reality. It was the instrument of execution reserved for Rome's worst enemies. It was a symbol of the torture and death that awaited those who dared raise a hand against Roman authority” (John MacArthur, Matthew 16-23, p.49).

“Not many years before Jesus and the disciples came to Caesarea Philippi, 100 men had been crucified in the area. A century earlier, Alexander Janneus had crucified 800 Jewish rebels at Jerusalem, and after the revolt that followed the death of Herod the Great, 2,000 Jews were crucified by the Roman proconsul Varus. Crucifixions on a smaller scale were a common sight, and it has been estimated that perhaps some 30,000 occurred under Roman authority during the lifetime of Christ” (MacArthur, p.49).

- a) To take up your cross is to be willing to start on a death march
- b) It is to be willing, in His service, to suffer the indignities, the pain, and even the death of a condemned criminal

“Obviously the extent of suffering and persecution varies from believer to believer, from time to time, and from place to place. Not all the apostles were martyred, but all of them were willing to be martyred. Not every disciple is called on to be martyred, but every disciple is commanded to be willing to be martyred” (MacArthur, p.49).

- (1) Peter said in 1 Peter 4:12-14 - “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of

glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.”

“To come to Jesus is to come to the end of self and sin and to become so desirous of Christ and His righteousness that one will make any sacrifice for Him” (MacArthur, p.49).

- (2) Jesus had earlier said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household’ (Mat.10:34-36).
- (3) He had also said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!” (Mat.10:24-25).

Christ was no in effect saying to His disciples that if He, their Lord, would have to ‘suffer many things...and be killed’ (Mat.16:21), how could they expect to escape the same treatment?

The cross represents suffering that is ours because of our relationship to Christ.

Christ does not call disciples to Himself to make their lives easy and prosperous, but to make them holy and productive.

Willingness to take up his cross is the mark of the true disciple.

C. Follow Me (v.23c)

1. This is loyal obedience
2. After a person denies himself and takes up his cross, Jesus said, he is prepared to “follow Me.”
3. True discipleship is submission to the lordship of Christ that becomes a pattern of life
 - a) John said, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 Jn.2:6).
 - b) Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

To continue in His Word is to be His true disciple (Jn.8:31).

- c) Paul calls salvation the “obedience of faith” (Rom.1:5; 16:26)
- d) Peter describes God’s sovereign saving work in a life as “the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood” (1 Pet.1:2 - NASB).

4. Obedience is an integral feature in salvation and is as characteristic of a believer as is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and the sacrificial saving work of the Son

Jesus said, "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor" (John 12:26).

III. The Message for Following Christ (v.24)

"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."

"The Lord is saying that whoever lives only to save his earthly, physical life, his ease and comfort and acceptance by the world, will lose his opportunity for eternal life. But whoever is willing to give up his earthly, worldly life and to suffer and die, if necessary, for Christ's sake, will find eternal life. Every person has a choice. He can "go for it" now and lose it forever; or he can forsake it now and gain it forever" (John MacArthur, Matthew 16-23, p.51).

- A. This Message is Repeated in Luke 17:33

"Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it."

- B. True Disciples Do Not Count Their Lives Dear to Themselves

1. Paul - Acts 20:20-24
2. Heb.11:35 says, "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection."

3. To the church at Smyrna, Jesus said, “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev.2:9-10).

CONCLUSION

1. To be a follower of Christ you have to be willing to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.
2. The true disciple is willing to pay whatever price faithfulness to the Lord requires.
3. The price may mean suffering martyrdom as Paul did or enduring physical exhaustion and illness in Christ's service as Epaphroditus did.
4. Whatever the particulars of a believer's cross-bearing may be, it requires the willingness to abandon safety, security, personal resources, health, friends, job, and even life.
5. I want to end by telling you a story that John MacArthur gives in one of his commentaries about a plantation slave “in the old South who was always happy and singing. No matter what happened to him, his joy was always abounding. One day his master asked him, "What have you got that makes you so happy?"

The slave replied, "I love the Lord Jesus Christ. He has forgiven my sin and put a song in my heart."

"Well, how do I get what you have?" his master asked.

"You go and put on your best Sunday suit and you come down here and work in the mud with us and you can have it," came the reply.

"I would never do that," the owner retorted indignantly as he rode off in a huff.

Some weeks later, the master asked the same question and was given the same answer. A few weeks later, he came a third time and said, "Now be straight with me. What do I have to do to have what you have?"

"Just what I've told you the other times," came the answer.

In desperation, the owner said, "All right, I'll do it."

"Now you don't have to do it," the slave said. "You only had to be willing."

It is not that a disciple has to be a martyr, but that he is willing to be a martyr if faithfulness to Christ demands it" (Matthew 16-23, p.51).

6. "It costs to follow Jesus but it costs more not to."
7. Let's pray.

