

## Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

### **The Starting Principle of Discipleship**

Scripture: Luke 9:23

Code: 42-119

We return to our wonderful study of Luke's gospel. Open your Bible, if you will, to Luke chapter 9. This is how we inform our worship so that we can worship in spirit and in truth. We inform it with the truth of God's Word. Any and every passage is from God and is rich and instructive. But the one we look at this morning is particularly so.

I want to read verses 23 through 26, and then you'll have in mind and we'll begin to talk about it. Luke 9:23. "And He was saying to *them* all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory, and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels.'"

It's brief, not many verses, not even very many words, but this is at the heart of the teaching of Jesus. This is pure gold, biblical gold. Maybe better, this is a diamond of truth, clear and brilliant. The subject is following Jesus, verse 23, "If anyone wishes to come after Me." This is a text about how to come after Jesus, how to follow Jesus, how to become a Christian, how to be saved, how to be redeemed and born again. That's what it's about. It is critical teaching.

And one thing strikes you at the very outset, and that is coming after Jesus involves self-denial. That's clearly the first thing that's said. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself." The gospel is a call for self denial. It is not a call for self fulfillment.

And that puts the true gospel in opposition to the contemporary evangelical gospel which is a gospel of self fulfillment, self help. Jesus is viewed as a utilitarian genie. You rub the lamp, He jumps out and says, "You have whatever you want." And you give Him your list, and He delivers. There are those within the framework of evangelicalism in the Charismatic segment who tell you Jesus wants you well, and if you're not well it's because you haven't claimed your healing. Jesus wants you prosperous and rich, and if you're not it's because you haven't claimed it. Jesus wants you free from debt and if you send the televangelists enough money, you'll by virtue of your faith free yourself from debt, or the demon of debt, as it's often referred to, because Jesus doesn't want you having any troubles or any problems. Your salvation is a guarantee of health, wealth, and prosperity, and happiness.

The psychological, man-centered evangelicals tell you that Jesus gives you peace, and Jesus gives you joy, and Jesus makes you a better salesman, and Jesus helps you hit more home runs. Jesus really wants to make you feel better about yourself, and wants to elevate your self image, and wants to put an end to your negative thinking.

It's interesting how this trend has come into the church. I kind of watched it through the years, been around long enough to have seen it arrived. It really arrived, I think, most pointedly through the ministry of Robert Schuller. A number of years ago he wrote a book called *Self Esteem: The New Reformation*. I reviewed that book. It was published in a national magazine, the review that I did. Because I thought it was a turning point, it was an attempt at a new reformation. It was an attempt to replace the gospel - the biblical gospel - with a new gospel. And it worked.

In that book, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*, Robert Schuller writes, "It is precisely at this point that classical theology has erred in its insistence that theology be God-centered and not man-centered." So this is an iconoclastic beginning. The first thing we have to do is put an end to classical theology. We have to put an end to God-centered theology and replace it with man-centered theology. That's pretty blatant, but that was exactly what was going on.

He writes further, "This master plan of God is designed around the deepest needs of human beings." And what are those needs? "Self dignity, self respect, self worth, self-esteem. The pearl of great price is genuine self respect and self-esteem."

He further writes, "If we follow God's plan as faithfully as we can, we will feel good about ourselves." That's the gospel of evangelicalism. It's the feel-good gospel. Feel good about yourself. Then he goes on to say, "God needs you and me to help create a society of self-esteeming people." Pardon me if I don't join. I can't think of a group I'd less like to associate with.

So, in this effort at a new reformation, the first thing you have to do is wipe out classic, God-centered, historic theology, then replace it with a man-centered, psychological, self-esteem theology, and make everything in the Bible and the gospel work toward making people feel better about themselves to fulfill their dreams, and fulfill their visions. Further he says, "God's ultimate objective is to turn you and me into self-confident persons." And then - this is enough - one more quote, "Once a person believes he's an unworthy sinner, it is doubtful if he can really honestly accept the saving grace God offers in Christ."

So, in the new gospel, if you want to be saved, you cannot believe yourself to be an unworthy sinner. How twisted is that? How contrary to the truth is that? But it is that man-centered, self-esteem gospel that was picked up by the number one disciple of Robert Schuller, Bill Hybels, and translated into the seeker-friendly movement which has hijacked evangelicalism. It's a kind of quasi-Christian

narcissism, self-love which is characteristic of false teachers, according to 2 Timothy 3, where it says, “Dangerous seasons will come, for men will be lovers of self.”

And Christianity has become a “get what you want,” rather than a “give” movement. The divine intention for the gospel has been prostituted. The glory of God has been replaced by the satisfaction of man. Abandoning your life to the honor of Christ has been replaced by Christ honoring you. It’s all twisted and the real gospel is no longer in vogue.

There was a saint of many centuries ago who got it right. This is a prayer that he wrote. “Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly, let me learn by paradox that the way down is the way up, that to be low is to be high, that the broken heart is the healed heart, that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit, that the repenting soul is the victorious soul, that to have nothing is to possess everything, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive. Let me find Thy light in my darkness, Thy joy in my sorrow, Thy grace in my sin, Thy riches in my poverty, Thy glory in my valley, Thy life in my death.”

Thy life in my death? That’s the true gospel. It’s not about exalting me, it’s about slaying me. Jesus said, “If you’re going to follow Me, you deny yourself, you take up your cross every day and you follow Me.” It’s the death of self. You win by losing. You live by dying. And that is the core, the heart message of the gospel. That is the center of discipleship.

This is not an obscure passage. This is not something that’s sort of different than the normal teaching of Jesus. This is principles which He teaches repeatedly throughout His ministry over, and over, and over again, in all different contexts.

Let me show you that. Go back to the 10th chapter of Matthew, for a moment. Matthew 10:34. Jesus has been, in the prior verses, talking about confessing Him, of course confessing Him as Lord and Savior. Verse 32, “Everyone who confesses Me before men, I’ll confess before My Father who is in heaven.” So He’s talking about confessing Christ as Lord. And then in verse 34 He says this. “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I didn’t come to bring peace, but a sword. I came to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s enemies will be the members of his household.”

First thing, come to Christ, it may make your family worse, not better. It may send a rift into your family the likes of which you have never heretofore experienced. But that’s the way it is, because if you give your life to Jesus Christ, there will be an impassable gulf between you and the people in your family who don’t. Verse 37 says so “he who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” If you’re not willing to pay the price of a permanent rift in your family unless those people come to Christ, if you’re not willing to pay the price of greater trauma in your family, greater conflict in your family, greater suffering in your

family, then you're not even worthy to be My disciple.

Verse 38, He says, "He who doesn't take his cross - " the cross was associated with one thing, one thing alone. A cross was an instrument of death. It was an instrument of execution. Jesus goes even beyond this. If you're not willing to have conflict in your family, you're not worthy to be My disciple. If you're not willing to have conflict with the world to the degree that it could cost you your life, then you're not worthy of Me.

Verse 39. "He who has found his life shall lose it, he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it." It's about losing your life. It's not a man-centered theology, it's a Christ-centered theology that says, "I give everything to Christ no matter what it costs me." Now that's Matthew 10.

Mark 10 is another illustration of this teaching of Jesus. This is absolutely at the heart of Jesus' teaching, that's why these few verses are going to take us some time to work through because this must be understood. Mark 10:21. Jesus here is speaking to this rich young ruler who wants eternal life. He asks in verse 17 about eternal life. And Jesus, you remember, talks to him, and if you put the whole account together, Jesus confronts his sin. He won't admit it and he won't give up his self-righteousness, which is the worst sin. And then Jesus talks about his money and he's not about to give up his money. He wants Jesus, yes. He wants eternal life, but Jesus throws in his face you're going to have to give up your self-righteousness, that is you're going to have to recognize yourself as an unworthy, wretched sinner, and you're going to have to be willing to give up all your earthly possessions if I ask.

And you remember the story. He wouldn't do it. Verse 21. "Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, 'One thing you lack: go sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; come, follow Me.' " Jesus said, "The price is be willing to give up everything. I might not ask it, but I might. The price is be willing."

"At these words his face fell, he went away grieved. He was one who owned much property." I'd rather have my money. I'd rather have my property than Jesus. Then you're not worthy to be His disciple. If you're not willing to be separated in your family, if you're not willing to be separated from the world, if you're not willing to be separated from the material things that you possess, then Jesus isn't that valuable to you. It's an all or nothing proposition.

Now follow along into Luke chapter 9 again, and go to the end of the chapter, verse 57. This is so critical for us to understand and so practical, as I'll point out. They were going along the road, Jesus with some of the people who followed Him, some of the disciples, who would-be disciples. And somebody said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." Really? "Jesus said to him, - " We're not going to the Ritz Carlton, I hope that doesn't affect you negatively. " - The foxes have holes, the birds of the air *have* nests, the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." If you follow Me, you will lose

everything. That's the price. Just know that. Jesus didn't say, "Oh great, follow Me. You will be happy. You will be healthy, wealthy, prosperous, successful." He said, "Just know this. I don't have any place to lay My head. It's going to cost you everything."

"He said to another, 'Follow Me.' He said, 'Oh, I need to go bury my father.' " And the implication is his father wasn't even dead. What does he mean "go bury his father," go to the funeral? No, hang around till he gets the inheritance. He just heard Jesus say he wasn't going to have anything if he followed Jesus. Jesus had nothing to give him, so he wanted to hang around home until he could pack a fortune in his bag and then come after Jesus. He too disappeared.

But Jesus sets the standard as total self-denial. If you turn to the 14th chapter of Luke, just introducing these times and places where Jesus discussed this, you find that the message is always the same. There's a great multitude in 14:25 and they're coming along with Jesus, and He turns and He speaks to them. "If anyone comes to Me - " You all want to follow Me, you want to be My followers. "If you come to Me and you don't hate your own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and even your own life, you can't be My disciple." It's not about you. It's not about your self esteem. It's about your sin, and your desperation, and you seeing Christ as so priceless, and so valuable as your Savior from sin and death and hell, that you would willingly give up everything. If it cost you your family, if it cost you your marriage and - in verse 27 - you carry your own cross. And if you don't carry your own cross - that is, be willing to die and give your life and come after Me - then you can't be My disciple. It can't be any clearer than that.

In the 17th chapter of Luke, Jesus speaking again on another occasion, says this, verse 33, "Whoever seeks to keep his life shall lose it, whoever loses *his life* shall preserve it." It's the same principle. You try to hold onto you, your plans, your agenda, your success, your self esteem, you lose. You lose.

In the 12th chapter of John's gospel, so you know that John didn't leave this core teaching from Jesus out, John 12:24. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." "If you're going to be fruitful in following Me," Jesus says, "It's going to cost you your life. You're going to have to die." "He who loves his life - " verse 25, " - loses it, he who hates his life in this world shall keep it till life eternal. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me." And the path that He was going was a path to persecution and death.

So you want to come after Jesus, do you? So you want to follow Jesus, do you? It will just cost you absolutely everything. Oh, the Lord might not take your life. He might not take all your money. He might not take your family or your spouse. He might not take your job, but you need to be willing if that's what He wants. You need to be desperate enough to embrace Christ no matter what the price.

Now let's go back to Matthew 16 for a moment, because we can't understand the full picture of the Luke passage without comparing Matthew 16 because they're parallel, but Matthew has included more information. Now the scene is, it's exam time with the disciples, as you remember from our last message. It's exam time. There's only one question on the exam. The one question on the exam is Matthew 16:15. "He said to them, 'Who do you say that I am?'" After a couple years of training, and disclosure, and revelation, and miracles, and signs, and wonders that Jesus had done, all of His teaching, it was time to give them the final exam in the school of discipleship. And so there's only one question on the exam, "Who do you say that I am?" They get it right. "Simon Peter answers - " on behalf of all of them, " ' - Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' " And Jesus responds, "That's right. Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonas Barjona, because flesh and blood didn't reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven." You have accepted the revelation of God. You have seen what God has been revealing through Me. You understand that's the right answer. This is the high point of all discipleship training. They have come to the right conclusion about Jesus Christ. That's absolutely necessary for salvation. He is God's Christ, God's Messiah, God's Son, God's Savior, all that the Old Testament promised, and all that Jesus claimed is in fact, true. This is the great confession, the supreme confession.

You remember that the gospels were written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that believing you might have life in His name. Well, they believed and they have life in His name, and this is their great moment of confession. They got it right.

In response to that affirmation comes, "You got the message from God. You saw what God was saying through Me, and you got it right. That's wonderful. And I have something else to say to you, Peter." Verse 18, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I'll build My church." There's a little bit of a contrast here. "You are Peter - " you're a small rock, " - but upon this rock bed - " different word - "I'll build My church." A little contrast. What is the rock bed? The confession of who He is, the reality of who He is.

"I'm going to build My church," He says, "and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." This is wonderful. You've come to the right answer and I'm telling you this. I'm going to build the church and the gates of Hades - what's that? Hades is where dead people are, the gate is how you get dead, and that's by dying. So the "gates of Hades" is simply death. Satan has the power of death. Hebrews 2 says he wields the power of death in the world. That's his greatest power. But even Satan's power of death is not going to stop the Lord from building His church.

This is a triumphant note. You've got the right answer to the question. You passed the exam, A+. And I'm telling you guys it's on that great and glorious reality that I will build My church, and Satan's great power of death will not prevail against it. Furthermore, I'm not only going to build My church, but I'll give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. You're going to be able to open the door to the Kingdom and let people in.

How? Because they're going to proclaim the gospel. How do you get into the Kingdom of Heaven? What's the key that unlocks the door? It's the gospel, isn't it? So you're going to be My gospel preachers, and whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Binding and loosing was an old rabbinical concept. The rabbi would say to a person who didn't repent, "You're bound in sin." He would say to a person who did repent, "You're loosed from sin because God forgives those who repent." And so Jesus says to the apostles, "You're going to do the same. You're going to unlock the Kingdom with the gospel and you're going to tell sinners who repent they're loosed from their sin, and sinners who don't repent, they're bound in their sin. You're going to be My representatives. You're going to be My authoritative agents in the world, and you're going to bring people into the Kingdom."

You can just feel the welling enthusiasm. This is it, guys. This is what we've been bouncing around for the last couple of years hoping would happen. He's the Messiah. He's going to build the church. Nothing's going to stop it. We are going to have the authority to open and close the Kingdom, not the established religion of Judaism, not the scribes and the chief priests and the elders. It's going to be us. We're going to build the premier ones, the preeminent ones in the Kingdom. This is what we've been waiting for. And then in a shocking, shocking statement, verse 20, "He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ."

That doesn't make sense because they're just swept up in the thrill of the moment, of the authority, of the invincibility of the church, at the identity of Jesus, and now He says, "Don't tell anybody." It's not the time. And verse 21, "From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day."

What a downer. Jesus says, "Don't tell anybody because the plan is not for Me to take over My Kingdom now. The plan is not for Me to enter into My glory now. The plan is for Me to be killed by the Jewish establishment." I mean, this is just absolutely shattering. After they have been literally exalted by the realities that He is the Messiah, that He will build the church, that even the power of death won't prevail against it, that they're delegated this authority, they could taste the Kingdom. They could feel the glory coming. You could say they could feel the heat of the Shekinah. Health and wealth and prosperity was right around the corner. And surely Jesus would destroy the apostate leaders of Judaism, and they would be the new leaders of Israel, and surely He would destroy the Roman oppressors, and occupiers, and pagans, and surely He would heal all diseases, and He would provide food as He did when He fed the multitudes. This was the great glorious moment they had all been waiting for, for so long. And then Jesus says, "Don't say anything. I have to die first."

Verse 22. "Peter took Him aside." Peter says, "Lord, we need to have a private talk. Come over here." "And he began to rebuke Him." Talk about a type A personality. Man, he rebukes the Son of God, the

self-confessed Son of God. The Son of the living God just came out of his mouth and he says, "Come over here. I need to straighten You out."

And he says, "God, forbid *it*, Lord. This shall never happen to You." That's not going to happen. You're not going to die. That isn't the plan. "And Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan.'" I don't think he even liked being called Simon, let alone Satan. Then He says this, "You are a stumbling block to Me." And here's why. "You are not setting your mind on God's interest but man's." You have a man-centered idea.

You know, that could almost be the motto for contemporary evangelicalism. You are not setting your mind on God's interest but man's. It's all about you, isn't it? And it's all about what you want, and it's all about the power and the glory, and it's all about the crown, and it's all about the reward and the authority. You don't get it. The way up is down. You're not going to get a crown without a cross.

And then in verse 24, Jesus introduces the principle, "said to His disciples - " the apostles and the rest of the crowd, as Mark 8:34 indicates the crowd was listening, too. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross." Luke adds, "Daily and follow Me." And with that, we transition back to Luke 9. Let's transition back to Luke 9 and pick it up there. Matthew filled in so much for us that was helpful.

This is a shocking experience for the apostles, having come to this glorious confession, and now being told not to say anything, and then being told Jesus is going to die. And not only is Jesus going to die, but He's saying to them all - back to Luke 9:23, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me." And with that statement, Jesus opens up the paradox of discipleship. The paradox of discipleship. We're going to be looking at that not only, of course, this morning, but next Sunday, as well.

Now this section, I'll just kind of break it down into four categories: The principle, the paradox, the Parousia and the preview; which we'll look at as we go. But for this morning and just a few moments left, I want you to look at the principle in verse 23. The principle.

It isn't hard to figure the principle out. It's simply this. If you want to follow Christ, you want to be a Christian, do you? Here's the message. Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him.

Do you hear that in the contemporary gospel? Do you ever hear that? Do you ever hear that in a message given by a television preacher or an evangelist? Do you ever hear anybody say that? Do you ever hear anybody stand up in a crowd and say, "If you want to become a Christian, slay yourself, deny yourself all the things that yourself longs for and wants and hopes for, be willing to die and slavishly submit in obedience to Jesus Christ"? That doesn't sell. That's not smart marketing. It just happens to be the truth.



So what do you want to do? Get someone artificially converted? That's the popular way. Give people the illusion they're saved when they're not so that some day when they face Christ they're going to say, "Lord, Lord," and He's going to say, "Depart from Me, I never knew you." The gospel has to be the gospel. You want to follow Me then? The principle is, it's the end of you if you want to follow Me. It's the end of you. You don't exist anymore. Paul said it this way. "For to me to live is - " what? " - Christ and to die is - " I've learned how to be abased and how to abound. I've learned how to have things and not have things. It doesn't matter. If I live I live to the Lord. If I die I die unto the Lord. What's the difference? I'm the Lord's." That's the attitude.

Men want glory. They want health. They want wealth. They want happiness. They want all their felt needs met, all their human little itches scratched. They want a painless life. They want the crown without the cross. They want the gain without the pain. That's how people think. That's not God's interest. The author of our salvation, according to Hebrews 2:10, was made perfect through suffering, and so are we as well taken through the crucible of suffering. And where we suffer, first of all, is in the death of all hopes, all ambitions, all desires, all longings, all needs that are human. That's the point.

So you want to be a Christian, it's not easy. You'd think it was easy. Today, if you want to be a Christian, pray these little words. Pray this little prayer, and you'll be a Christian. It's not easy to be a Christian. Let me show you some things.

Matthew 7:13. This is, again, the teaching of our Lord. Matthew 7:13, Sermon on the Mount, familiar words, verse 13, "Enter by the narrow gate." First of all, become a Christian, you're going through a narrow gate. The idea of narrow here means "constricted." I mean, it's one of those things that you have to kind of go through. It's very, very tight. You can't carry anything through it. You come through with nothing. "There is a wide gate, but it leads to destruction."

There's a wide religious gate, and people are going on with all their baggage, and all their self needs, and all their self esteem, and all their desire for fulfillment and self satisfaction, and all of that. They're going on there, but it doesn't go to heaven, it says "heaven" but ends up in hell. And many go that way.

But there is also, verse 14, this very small, narrow gate and it leads to eternal life, but notice this, "Few are those who find it." And the idea is it's hard to find. And I agree that it's hard to find. It's especially hard to find today. You can go to church, after church, after church, after church, after church and never find it. It's a very narrow gate.

If you turn to the 13th chapter of Luke you'll see some more elements of this same teaching. Luke 13:23. This is very, very important. Someone said to Jesus as He was passing from one city and village to another on His way down to Jerusalem, "someone said to Him, 'Lord, are there *just* a few

who are being saved?” That was the implication of Jesus’ teaching, that this is a narrow gate, that this is hard to find. And so the question comes, “It seems like You’re saying there are just a few who are being saved.” And He said to them, “Agonize, *agnizomai*, strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”

It’s hard to find and it’s hard to get through. Why? Why is it so hard to find and why is it so hard to get through Answer, because it’s so hard to deny yourself. So hard. That’s the reigning reality in human fallenness, that man is the master of his own soul, the captain of his own faith, that man is the monarch of his own world, that man is king and to say he has to slay himself, deny himself, that’s too much to swallow. You preach a gospel that doesn’t include that and people will flock around to get out of hell into heaven. You start preaching the true gospel that calls for total and absolute self-denial, the recognition that you have nothing of which you are worthy, nothing of which you can be commended, nothing in you that needs to be salvaged. But rather you’re willing to slay everything you are, all your hopes, dreams, ambitions for the sake of the pearl, for the sake of Christ and you’re coming on God’s terms. That’s not easy. It’s hard, first of all, to find that truth and it’s even harder once you’ve heard it to submit to it because man worships himself. He’s his own god.

What we need to be telling people is not “come to Christ and you’ll feel better about yourself,” is not “Jesus wants to meet whatever your needs are.” Jesus doesn’t want to meet your needs, your worldly, earthly, human needs. He wants you to be willing to say, “I will abandon all the things I think I need for the sake of Christ.”

So, a little further along in the 14th chapter of Luke’s gospel, go down to verse 28. “Which of you - ” Jesus says “ - who wants to build a tower doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all those who observe it begin to ridicule him saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ”

Now if you’re going to come to Christ, you’re going to have to count the cost. You’re going to have to count the cost before you make a pretense that you’re going to come to Christ, a pretense that you’re going to follow Jesus. Have you counted the cost? Do you understand there’s a price to pay? We know what the price is. The price has just been given in verses 26 and 27, which I read earlier, hating your father and mother if necessary, hating your own life, carrying your cross, coming after Me. That’s the price, that there’s nothing in the world, the human realm, that you hold dear enough to forfeit Christ. “What king - ” verse 31 “ - if he’s going to go out and fight a battle with another king doesn’t sit down and take counsel whether he’s strong enough with ten thousand men to counter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace.” You either make peace with the enemy if you can’t conquer him, or you make sure you’ve got the troops that it’s going to take to win the battle. In other words, Jesus is saying, “Don’t come to Me unless you’ve assessed the price.” And the price is self denial, self crucifixion and self submission.

In verse 33 He gives the point. Don't think it's anything less than this. "No one of you can be My disciple who doesn't give up all his own possessions." Jesus said, "You have to be willing to give up everything. You're not going to get saved by dumping all your earthly goods, but you have to be willing to give up everything. That's how devoted you are to the cause of Christ. You will deny yourself all of your worldly longings. You will deny your own right to live and give your life, if need be, for the cause of Jesus Christ, and you will submit to His will, following Him whatever He asks, whether He says you must lose these things, or you can keep them, that's up to Him."

And then Jesus told those two parables in Matthew 13:44-46. He said there was a man who found a treasure hidden in a field and he saw the value of the treasure and he sold everything for the treasure. Then he said there was a pearl of great price, that the man found the pearl of great price, he sold everything to get the pearl. It's the selling everything that is the essence of salvation. It's I give up everything, I deny myself, I offer my life both in terms of death, if need be, and in terms of obedience in life. This is the message of the gospel. So when you go to preach the gospel, that's what you have to say.

Now, you say, "But people aren't going to buy that." Well wait a minute, people aren't going to buy that, of course not, unless the Spirit of God is working in their hearts, right? Unless the Spirit of God is doing the work of conviction, and the Spirit of God is awakening the dead heart, and the Spirit of God is generating faith, and then that's the only true message that connected with the work of the Spirit will produce true salvation. Don't reinvent the gospel to suit you. That's what's being done today.

If anyone, anybody wishes to come after Me, open invitation, any of you wish to come, anybody here want to come? Well, you have to believe in Jesus. You have to confess Him as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and Lord and Savior. Then you have to be willing to have a rift in your family, a rift in your marriage, a rift with the world that could cost you your life, and a rift with your own personal ambitions, and submit your whole life to following Him and doing whatever He asks. It's not the one who says, "Lord, Lord," Jesus said, "It's the one who does the will of My Father. And this is the will of My Father, that you submit to the Son."

This is the gospel. It's a gospel of self denial. It's a gospel of self sacrifice and self submission. Deny yourself, take up your cross every day, put your life on the line for the cause of Christ, and follow in the sense that you do whatever He asks.

If you give anything less than that as the terms of the gospel, then somebody could be deceived, right? You say, "But what if they don't respond?" That's not the issue. That's within the power of God to determine. What you're responsible for is the purity of the gospel.

Well, next time we're going to go into these elements of the principle in verse 23: Self denial, taking up the cross, and following Him. I wish I could give this all in one message, but I can't, and I can't shortcut the material because it's too critical and it's too germane to the essence of the gospel. But I think you can tell by now how critical important this is, how replete it is in the teaching of Jesus, and as we get into these elements next time and move from the principle to the paradox, you're going to see clearly what is your responsibility in terms of following Jesus and in terms of proclaiming that message to others. Let's bow in prayer.

Our Lord, we are again reminded that this is not a human work, nor could we accomplish it in our own strength. But it is Your mighty work to break us of ourselves, it is Your work to make us have a broken and a contrite heart, to make us able to give up everything, to let go of everything, to lose all self desire, self will, to set aside all of our dreams and ambitions, goals, plans, hopes, assumed needs. And in desperation, contemplating our sinfulness, embrace the salvation that Jesus gives and the wonderful spiritual riches that come with it in time and eternity as the pearl of great price for which we would gladly sell everything.

Would we be faithful, O God, by Your strength, and by Your truth, and by Your Holy Spirit to proclaim this message to sinners that's not minimalistic, that's not superficial or shallow, but that calls for what true discipleship really calls for, and that is the death of myself that I might live in Christ. May this glorious gospel become part of us, both in our believing and in our witnessing. We pray in the Savior's name. Amen.

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