

The Necessary Components of Saving Faith

Luke 9:23

42-120

Luke chapter 9 is our text for this morning. We return to a section that I've called "the paradox of discipleship." The paradox of discipleship is 9:23-27, actually. Let me read this for you just to set it in your thoughts.

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. But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.'

It was back in 1988 when a book that I wrote was released. The book was called *The Gospel According to Jesus*. I pulled that book off the shelf this week and read it. I don't often read my own books, but I wanted to reacquaint myself with everything I had written that many years ago because I wanted to inform myself regarding the text that I'm speaking on this week, and certainly next week as well.

The Gospel According to Jesus was a book that the publisher assumed would have some meager impact. I remember the publisher saying they thought they would sell about 25,000 the first year. But they sold 300,000. Why did that happen? Was there some great marketing plan? There was no marketing plan whatsoever. But that book sort of found its way into the reading of people who never really understood an issue that was buried sort of under the radar in evangelicalism. And it surfaced that issue and became so volatile that the book had an explosive response. The simple truth of that book - which is still in print in revised form - the simple truth of that book is that salvation and discipleship are the same thing, that following Jesus and being saved are the same thing.

Or to say it in the words of our text, looking at verse 23, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." That is not an invitation to a higher kind of Christian living. That is an invitation to salvation. That was the simple truth of the book. That truth was so obscured and so buried under the dominant evangelical view of evangelism that when I wrote the book people thought it was scandalous to say that to be saved you needed to deny yourself, take up your cross and obey Christ, because the dominant idea in many of the parts of evangelicalism in America, being espoused by very prominent seminary and many Bible colleges and therefore many pulpits, was that all you needed to do to be saved is believe in Jesus and then you're saved, and somewhere down the road you need to make Him Lord of your life and get serious about obedience. But that's certainly not connected to salvation.

I remember as a kid growing up going to hear speakers here and there, and going to camps and conferences where it was pretty common to say, "Now you may have Jesus as Savior, but do you have Him as Lord? Don't you think it's time to receive Him as Lord? Maybe you ought to get serious about obeying Him."

I was speaking at Founders Week at The Moody Bible Institute years ago when this controversy was just raging, and I had five sessions in the morning and I was speaking on the subject of a true invitation to salvation which incorporates discipleship, obedience, following Christ, all these things. And there was another speaker who had another session five times that week who was saying the opposite. It made for an interesting week.

But his orientation was to that institution that believed that you just said, "Jesus, I don't want to go to hell. Please forgive my sin. Keep me out of hell," and sometime later in your life you would confess Him as Lord. And if you just did the first one, you'd be in the kingdom but you wouldn't get the goodies. If you did the second one you'd be in the kingdom and you'd inherit the kingdom.

In fact, I'll never forget one thing that he said during the week cause I heard him say it, he said, "You young people at this point in your life, don't even worry about that second level of declaring Him Lord until you're, say, in your late thirties."

This continues to be an issue today. The simple message of that book - and I had to write a sequel to show that it's not just *The Gospel According to Jesus*, but *The Gospel According to the Apostles* - so I wrote that second book. The simple message is this: Salvation and discipleship are the same thing, and that every time Jesus said, "If you want to follow Me, you have to count the cost, you have to take up the cross, you have to deny yourself, you have to obey Me, follow Me, keep My Word," He was not calling people who were already Christians to a higher level, He was calling people who are not Christians to become saved.

The gospel that Jesus proclaimed was a call to follow Him as Lord. It was a call to follow Him in submissive obedience. It was far more than fire insurance, it was far more than a plea for a prayer, or a plea for somebody to raise their hand, or walk an aisle, or sign a card, a plea for somebody to do some sort of ceremonial thing in order to be off the hook in terms of God's eternal wrath. And while the gospel of Jesus was and is the offer of forgiveness for all sin, and the promise of eternal life, it is at the same time a call to self denial, bearing a cross, and following Christ, and nothing less is a true invitation. So that when the true gospel is presented, it has inherently in it a rebuke to superficiality, a rebuke to shallowness, a rebuke to outward hypocritical response.

The heart and soul of the gospel, as Jesus preached it, as the apostles preached it - if you need to get further detail, you can read those two volumes - the heart and soul of it is God is offering forgiveness of sin and eternal life to those whose faith is not superficial, it is deep as evidenced by self denial, cross bearing, and submission.

There has been this movement in evangelicalism, and it's still around. I think the book had an impact and helped a lot of people who were confused by it, but the movement's still around. This movement separates salvation from obedience, separates Jesus as Savior from Jesus as Lord, separates believing from obeying, separates justification from sanctification. It's a disjointed, it's a disconnected kind of emphasis, and it's a tragically unbiblical distinction. In fact, it's a gospel scandal. It's a gospel

scandal.

Sinners are told if they want to be saved and go to heaven, they just need to accept Jesus Christ, accept the fact that He died for them. They just need to ask Jesus to come into their hearts, or invite Him in - common and unbiblical phrases, by the way, suited to a deluded gospel. Very little is ever said about how they have to view themselves.

Those people who hold this position discard the evangelistic intent of virtually every recorded invitation Jesus gave. They turn Jesus into a deeper life teacher, or a higher life teacher, somebody who is saying to people who are already saved, "You need to come on up and be a disciple. You need to come on up and get serious. You need to start obeying. You need to start self denying." That's the second level of saved experience. So they take everything Jesus said like "Follow Me and deny yourself, and take up your cross, and obey Me, and keep My Word, and keep My commandments, and love Me, and love one another," as not spoken to those people who need to understand that that's the attitude of a person who comes for salvation, but rather making it an attitude of somebody who is already a Christian moving to a second level.

So Jesus then, instead of being an evangelist preaching the gospel, becomes a deeper life teacher. A sort of a Keswick speaker wanting to move people to another level of spirituality. No distinction - no distinction - such as that distinction between salvation and discipleship making them two different things, no distinction has done so much to undermine the authority and the accuracy of Jesus' evangelistic message. Everything that takes that side strips Jesus of the evangelistic intent of what He says. That's not a small issue.

If Jesus said, "I came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost," then we ought to make sure we know that what He said had that in mind. He didn't say, "I came to elevate those who were saved," He said, "I came to those that are lost." I don't really want to reinvent Jesus, and I think it takes an awful lot of brashness to do that.

Jim Boice, treasured friend now with the Lord, a great loss to all of us, wrote a book called *Christ's Call to Discipleship*. He also wrote the forward to *The Gospel According to Jesus*, one of two forwards in the book, because he certainly stood in the great tradition of those who rightly understood the Word of God and he was happy to write it. But he wrote a book called *Christ's Call to Discipleship* and a paragraph in that book is worth quoting.

He said, "This is a common defect, this disconnection between salvation and discipleship. This is a common defect in times of prosperity. In days of hardship, particularly persecution, those who are in the process of becoming Christians count the cost of discipleship carefully before taking up the cross of the Nazarene."

He's absolutely right. I'll stop there for a moment. He's absolutely right. Where there is hardship and persecution, there is no such disconnection, because all you have to do is publicly profess that Jesus is your Savior and that's enough to get you thrown in jail. So at that point you have to be willing if you're going to say that much to pay a price, maybe your life. So he's right.

He says, "In times like that - " further quoting " - preachers do not beguile people with false promises of an easy life, or indulgence of sins. But in good times the cost does not seem so high and people

take the name of Christ without undergoing the radical transformation of life the true conversion implies.”

So what I'm saying is, this view can only happen in America or some other affluent society, some other benign society in the sense of persecution and execution of believers. The call to salvation is a call to follow Christ. It's a call to follow Christ with such extreme devotion that you deny yourself and you take up your cross and you obey. That's what it means to be saved. Anything less than that is not saving faith.

When Jesus gave the great commission, He said, “Go into all the world and make - ” what? “ - make disciples.” That's what we do. A disciple is a believer, a Christian. The word “disciple” is used throughout the book of Acts for believers, Acts 6:1, 2, 7; Acts 11:26; 14:20 and 22; Acts 15:10. It's just a word for “believer.” So when Jesus calls someone to be a disciple, He's calling them to become a Christian, a follower.

True believers are those who have come to Christ to follow Him. They are those - remember last time Luke 14 - who have counted the cost to build the tower and then went about to build it when they knew what it would cost. They're not superficial like the rocky soil where the seed goes in and there's an emotional response but it's superficial, and pressure, and tribulation, and persecution comes, and the plant dies because it has no real root.

They're not like the weedy soil where the love of the things of the world and the love of riches still dominates the heart, and so the seed goes in, there's a momentary response, but the life has never divested itself of itself. And so no fruit ever comes and the plant withers and dies.

True salvation, the really good soil, occurs when somebody understands that when I ask the Lord Jesus to save me from hell and forgive my sin and give me eternal life, I am at the same time submitting everything to His lordship.

John Stott, years ago in his book *Basic Christianity*, wrote, “The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict half-built towers. The ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish, for thousands of people still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow Him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so-called nominal Christianity.

“In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent but thin veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved, enough to be respectable, but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism.”

And again, he's saying the same thing Boice said. Western civilization with its high level of comfort is a perfect place for nominal Christianity to exist. I've never seen it in eastern Europe. You wouldn't see it under Communist oppression because to be any kind of Christian would cost you your life so nobody becomes a shallow, superficial, half-committed Christian, because that would bring about the same effect as the real thing, you'd lose your life. So only those who are willing to do that embrace

the gospel.

The call to salvation, then, is a call to full commitment, nothing knowingly held back, nothing knowingly held back. And there's no more definitive text to go to than this one and those others that are similar to this one, and to hear from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And let's understand what we're talking about here. This is an invitation to salvation. You want to know how to witness to people? How to communicate the gospel? Here it is. It's here. This is how Jesus did it. And frankly, it drops like a bomb, it is an explosive approach to evangelism.

And that's the way my book was basically described, it was described as a bomb dropped in 1988. And it blew a hole in the evangelical turf, and it revealed under the surface the terrible, terrible weakness of the gospel that was being preached. Well it's back again today, I hate to say. This easy believism is back today. We have the same kind of cheap evangelism going on today. Now it's even gotten worse. You don't even need to believe in Jesus and you're going to go to heaven if you just think there's a God up there who made things, let alone confess Jesus as Lord.

But those aren't God's terms, those aren't Jesus' terms. Jesus came as the proto-typical divine evangelist. He's given us the pattern how to evangelize. And what you do when you evangelize is you take somebody to the realization that to be saved, and to follow Christ, and be a true disciple, to be a Christian, you must do these three things: You must deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him. This is the hard message of evangelism.

You say, "Well people aren't likely to buy into this." If they're not, then they can't be saved. We can't change the terms to get the desired effect. So let's go back to the text and let's go back to the principle, just to state the principle so we sort of set our feet on a foundation here.

Back to verse 23, "He was saying to *them* all - " speaking to the 12 Apostles, and also to the other followers in the crowd that were with Him. "He was saying to *them* all - " you need to understand this very basic foundational truth " - 'If anyone wishes to come after Me.' " Let's stop there for a moment.

"If anyone wishes to come after Me," is a gospel invitation. You want to be My true follower. You want to be genuine. Here's what I ask. "Let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." This isn't about you having your needs met. This isn't about you getting what you want. This is about you saying "no" to all of your needs, desires, hopes, ambitions, dreams, schemes, plans. This is about you embracing Mine. This is not about satisfaction. This is about sacrifice.

There's a level of desperation here. You say, "Well, people aren't going to easily buy into that." Well, of course they're not. But then whoever said salvation was easy, or even possible, unaided by the Holy Spirit? But there are, nonetheless, these three ingredients in this first principle. Let's just take them one at a time and they'll help us to understand more as we look at each one.

First, three ingredients in this great principle. These are three elements of this complex of saving faith. It assumes that Jesus is Lord, and Christ, and God, and Savior. So you want to follow Him, do you? You want to come after Him? You believe, you say, "Yes He's Lord. Yes, He died. Yes, He rose." So you want to follow Me, do you?

First, it requires self denial, *arnēsasthō*, strong expression, literally "to disown something." You need

to disown yourself, to disown yourself. It's used to describe refusing association with someone. You need to refuse to associate with yourself. Pretty extreme. It's used of rejecting companionship of someone where you literally do not want their company.

So that you come to Christ, and here's the first thing. You come saying, "I can no longer stand to be associated with myself. I've had it with me. I don't want anything more of my own life." That's the depth of that understanding. It's not, "I like my life, and I like my world, and I like the direction I'm going, but, Jesus, could You move me up a little faster and a little higher?" It's not about that. It's about, "I've had it with everything that I am. I'm sick of my natural, depraved, impotent, sinful self." It's disowning yourself. It's desiring to never be associated with yourself the way you are anymore. I've had it with me. I'm sick of myself. I don't want any more of myself. I've tried everything I know to make something out of my life and I can't do it. I'm overwhelmed with my failure. I'm overwhelmed with my disappointment. I'm overwhelmed with my emptiness. I'm overwhelmed with my sinfulness.

This is the stuff of true conversion. The heart sees in itself only sin, only impotence, only failure, only unworthiness, and seeks to be rescued. And it really doesn't set any terms. Look, I am in such a desperate situation, You just tell me what I need to do. Self is cast away totally. You give up all dependence on yourself, all trust in yourself, all confidence in what you are by nature. You give up everything and anything.

It's like the man who bought the pearl of great price, sold everything to buy the pearl, the pearl is Christ. And the man who bought the treasure in the field sold everything to buy the treasure in the field, literally giving up everything he was, everything he accumulated because Christ was so precious to him. It's really coming to the end of yourself. That's when people get saved. That's when they really get saved, when they come to this very, very clear understanding of their spiritual desperation.

In fact, I'll give you an illustration of it in Philippians chapter 3. Turn over to Philippians chapter 3 because this is just a classic illustration of what we're talking about, of this self denial. The apostle Paul is the illustration, and here you have the account of his conversion on the inside. You have the outside history, the event, in Acts 9, which is the Damascus Road event. But here's what was going on on the inside of Paul. This is the work that God had done in his life, and this is a very good illustration of coming to the end of yourself.

He says in verse 4, "If anyone has a mind - " the second half of the verse " - if anybody has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more." If you want to talk about achievements, if you want to talk about accomplishments, look, I'll go to the head of the class. I've accomplished more than anybody else.

He was in his thirties at this time, lived his whole life with amassing these accomplishments. "Circumcised the eighth day - " according to the prescription of the Old Testament, he was " - of the nation Israel." He had gone through the right ritual, belonged to the right race of people. He was "of the tribe of Benjamin." He belonged to a tribe of great privilege, a very exalted tribe. He was "a Hebrew of Hebrews," which simply means he was kosher. He kept all the traditions to the very letter. As far as the law was concerned, his passion and devotion to the law was as extreme as existed in Israel. He was "a Pharisee." They were the legalists. They were the extremists.

And he went as far as you could go. "As to his zeal," zeal for his religion, he was so zealous for the purity and protection of Judaism that he was "a persecutor of the church," which he saw as an attack on the truth, as an attack on God, as an attack on the Old Testament. And his passions ran so high that he literally got, remember, papers so that he could go places and destroy Christians and throw them in prison. "As to the righteousness which is in the law - " he was externally " - blameless." This is a man who has amassed all of these personal achievements. This has been his - this has been done over the whole of his life. He's been spending his life trying to reach this highpoint of religious zeal, morality. And he comes to Christ.

What is this approach going to be? I'm a good man. I'm as good as men get? I'm devoted to the truth of Scripture as a man can be? I'm as fastidious about the study of Scripture as a man can be? I'm as passionate about the protection of the truth as a man can be? I've done it all? I've toed the line? I've crossed every *t* and I've dotted every *i*?

And now he's met Christ on the Damascus Road. He understands the gospel. And immediately in verse 7 he says, "Whatever things were gained to me - " that all went in the asset column. That all went as gain, all his life achieving that. It all was gain, "whatever things were gain to me, those things immediately I have counted as loss." They went from the asset column to the liability column. They weren't neutral. They weren't limited. They were loss.

In fact, you understand the level of their loss - the next verse, "I count all things to be loss." Now there's self denial. I don't care what it is, it doesn't help. It doesn't contribute. It doesn't add anything. You just have to look at your whole life no matter how religious, how zealous, no matter how you kept the tradition of your fathers, no matter how fastidious you were, you look at it all and you say, "It is loss. All of it, everything that is in me is loss." Why? Romans 7:18, "In my flesh dwells no - " what? " - good thing." And to even go further, he says, "It's all loss." And down at the end of verse 8 he says, "I count it all - " and the Greek word is *skubalon*, "excrement," the grossest word he could find. That's what it is.

Now there's a man who understands self denial. And at this point in his list he hasn't even denied the fact that he loved sin, and he loved iniquity and all of that. He's not just doing that. He's turning from the worst sin in his life, which was self righteousness. Even that to him was filth, garbage.

When I saw Christ I gave up everything that was Paul - everything. And that's the only way you ever come. And it may not be religion and self righteousness for you, it may be wretched immorality, cheating, whatever other things, lying, stealing, whatever other forms of corruption. It may be just that you're consumed with your own promises and pledges to achieve certain things in your own mind in order to reach a certain level of self esteem and whatever it is.

You come and the first thing that has to be realized is that this is the death of you, your hopes, your dreams, your ambitions, your desires. It's not about meeting all the little things that you want, having Jesus jump out of the bottle and give you your three wishes. It's about the death of you.

That's why the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 starting in verse 3 and following, if you want to enter the kingdom you start by being poor in spirit. What is that? That's the word that means "spiritually bankrupt." Literally it's the word for poverty that means "a beggar." It doesn't mean you have a little. It means you have nothing and you can't earn anything. You're destitute. So you realize that whatever

you have is nothing. You add it all up and it's zero. It's rubbish. It's nothing.

So this is the foundation virtue. This is the foundation virtue of the heart that's going to come to Christ for salvation: Bankruptcy, spiritual bankruptcy, destitution, desperation, wretchedness. So that you're not saying, "Well, I might like Jesus as my Savior. I don't know if I want to have Him as my Lord. I'd like to carry out some deals of my own." You're past that. You've come to spiritual bankruptcy. You've been humbled by the wretchedness of yourself. You're like that publican in Luke 18 beating on his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." You come poor in spirit. You come meek. You come mourning over your sin, the Beatitudes say. You come hungering and thirsting after righteousness. You're not offering terms and conditions. You come knowing how desperate you are and how doomed you are.

And then you understand how precious His forgiveness is and how magnanimous His gift of eternal life is. And you're not about to set terms. Out of that carcass comes the honey. Out of that death comes the life. We come in the attitude of Psalm 34:18. "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." It's when you've literally been crushed in your own spirit you're at the end of yourself.

You hear very little preaching that intends to get people to that point. Psalm 51:17. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." God is looking for the crushed and the broken. Isaiah 66. Who is God looking for? The one who is contrite - the one who is not only contrite, the one who is crushed under the impact of God's Word, "who trembles at My Word."

You see, that's the reason the law was given and that's the reason the sermon on the mount was preached. The law was given in order that it might crush men. It wasn't given as a standard by which men could achieve salvation. It was given as a standard by which men would recognize their spiritual bankruptcy. You try to keep the law, you can't. The law then, as Paul says, slays you.

That's why when you preach the gospel you have to preach the law. You have to slay the sinner. He has to be dead before he can be alive. That's why when we give the gospel we've got to emphasize these realities so we don't contribute to superficiality and the more nominal Christianity.

So the law was given in order that it might be a crushing blow delivered to the head of the sinner who can't keep the law and is therefore cursed by the law. Galatians 3, if you break the law in one place, you're guilty of the whole law and you're under the eternal wrath of God. The law crushes us.

But then that's the reason the sermon on the mount is given and I believe that's the reason the Holy Spirit put it early in the New Testament. You're brought into the sermon on the mount and what does the sermon on the mount do? It gives you the law and it explains the depth of the law so that it's not just that you not kill, but that you not hate. That's the same thing. It's not just that you don't commit adultery, but that you don't even do it in your heart. That's the same thing before God.

And the law is reiterated and Jesus exposes the people to the law and says, "Not only do you not keep the law on its superficial level, but you certainly don't keep it on its deeper level. You're guilty of the violation of the law of God." That's why we say you don't even understand the gospel until you understand the law. That's why preaching can't be some kind of marketing strategy to schmooze

people along until they decide they're going to take Jesus into their life. The law is a crushing, devastating experience in which the sinner brought before the law of God either revolts against that work of the law and bolts back to his sin, and wanting to get as far away from the exposure of the law as he possibly can; or he's crushed under that law, at which point he realizes his spiritual bankruptcy, and he cries out for forgiveness and mercy.

And at that point when he does that, he's not making bargains with God, understanding his destitution, realizing he has nothing in his own life to commend himself to God, nothing of value in all that he's accomplished, he throws himself upon the mercy of God, who can provide for him all the heavenly riches that the Word of God speaks of. That's the attitude. You take Christ on His terms, not yours.

The proud sinner wants Christ and his pleasure. The proud sinner wants Christ and his covetousness. The proud sinner wants Christ and his immorality. But the broken sinner is so desperate he'll give up anything just to have Christ, just to have forgiveness, and eternal life, and hope, and deliverance.

Thomas Watson's wonderful book on the Beatitudes, he says, "A castle that has long been besieged and is ready to be taken will deliver up on any terms to save its life. He whose heart has been a garrison for the devil and has held out long in opposition against Christ, when once God has brought him to poverty of spirit and he sees himself damned without Christ, let God prosper, let God offer, and he will simply say, 'Lord, what will You have me to do?' " That's the attitude. That's the attitude. And that really becomes a way of life, becomes a way of life.

You come to Christ in that desperation, at the end of yourself, eager to self deny because you know there's no value in you. And then once you become a Christian, that attitude is still there. It's still there. It becomes a way of life. As you grow in the knowledge of God, in the knowledge of Christ, the roots of self denial go down. A way to understand it is that growth in grace is growth downward. It's growth downward. As you grow in grace, you have a continually lower opinion of yourself. You can spot a person's spiritual maturity pretty easily. Growth in grace is down, it is the forming of a lower estimate of ourselves. It is a deepening realization of our nothingness. It is a heartfelt, increasing recognition that we are utterly unworthy.

I was counseling somebody yesterday and this person said, "I am - I just - I just want to be able to do something for the Lord." With the implication, "Like you do." And I said, "Well, you know, the longer I've been a Christian, the more I've realized that I don't do anything for the Lord. I not only don't do anything for the Lord, I can't do anything for the Lord. And the wonder of wonders is that the Lord can do what He does through me."

So, you go from being a Christian when you're new and say, "I want to do something for the Lord," to maturing through the years to saying, "God, how is it that You have chosen by Your grace to be able to do anything through me?" Humility is a demonstration of a person's spiritual maturity, because when you come in on those terms, you grow down from there. You thought you were humbled at the time of your conversion, if you've walked with the Lord for very long, you should be lower than you were then. Now you understand how profound sin is because even after being a Christian you've understood that it's a part of the fabric of who you are. And wonder of wonders, the Lord has chosen to do things through you. Self denial becomes a life pattern.

Now what does it mean as a Christian? Here are some practical things. When you're forgiven, or neglected, or purposely set aside - when you are not forgiven, I should say - or neglected, or purposely set aside, and you sting and hurt with the insult or oversight, but your heart is happy and you're content to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ, that's dying to self.

When your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed, your advice is disregarded, your opinions are ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself, but take it all in patient, loyal silence, that is dying to self.

When you lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity, or any annoyance, when you can stand face-to-face with foolishness, extravagance, spiritual insensitivity and endure it as Jesus endured it, that is dying to self.

When you're content with any food, any offering, any clothes, any climate, any society, any solitude, any interruption by the will of God, that is dying to self.

When you never care to refer to yourself, or to record your own good works, or seek commendation, when you can truly love to be unknown, that is dying to self.

When you see another brother prosper and have his needs met, and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy, nor even question God while your own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances, that is dying to self.

When you can receive correction and reproof from one of less stature than yourself, and can humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion or resentment rising up within your heart, that is dying to self.

So, you come to Christ with an attitude of self denial and you grow down from there. Our self denial isn't perfect. Our self suicide isn't perfect. We resurrect our egos and our own wills, and thrust them out, and intrude into the will of God, and we have to seek His grace and forgiveness when we do that, but that is the deepest, and purest, and truest desire, and longing, and aspiration, of our redeemed heart, even though it's far short of what we would want it to be.

All right, a second in the three that make up the complex of this essential attitude of following Jesus is cross bearing. Cross bearing. Jesus not only says that you must deny yourself but He adds, "And take up his cross daily." Anyone who would be following after Me must take up his cross daily. Chapter 14 and verse 27 records - and this is something Jesus said often, but there's another similar statement in chapter 14. "Whoever doesn't carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple," as well as in the other gospels where it's recorded also.

Now what does this mean, "take up your cross"? I've heard so many crazy, strange, bizarre, wacky views of this. You know, your mother-in-law is your cross, your boss is your cross, your car is your cross, your leaky faucet is your cross, and everybody's got his cross. Your wayward teenager is your cross. Whatever it is.

Look, we can't read that into this. If you were listening to Jesus that day and He said, "You need to take up your cross every day," what are those people going to think about? They had never been to a deeper life conference. What do they think He's talking about? Well, more than 100 years before Jesus ever walked on earth King Alexander Jannaeus crucified 800 rebels at Jerusalem while he was feasting in public. Antiochus Epiphanes, that Greek ruler during the intertestamental period, had also crucified many Jews for a revolt that followed the death of Herod of the Great. The proconsul Varus crucified 2,000 Jews. It is said that the Romans crucified 30,000 Jews in Palestine during the era around the life of Jesus.

When Jesus said "Take up a cross," they only thought of one thing: Horrible suffering, pain and death. Jesus is saying, "This is how extreme your devotion has to be. This is willingness to endure persecution. This is willingness to endure hatred, hostility, rejection, reproach, shame, suffering even death." They knew exactly what He was talking about. And be ready to do it every day. Every day.

Who in the world would ever give a gospel invitation like that? Who would ever stand up before a big stadium full of people and say, "How many of you are willing right now to die, if need be, for Jesus Christ? You can come and be saved." That's what He asks, to literally slay yourself, all your dreams, hopes, desires, ambitions, plans; and then to say, "Here's my life, and if it means life, okay. If it means death, okay. I don't really care. I'm so desperate. I want Your forgiveness. I want eternal life. Whatever the price, I will give all."

Believe me, the Jews were familiar with crucifixion. It had been done in their own land. It had been done in Egypt. It had been done in Persia, western Asia, even in parts of Italy. Very often the condemned person would carry a piece of the cross, the cross-piece, sometimes drag the whole thing. The imagery is extremely vivid. What He's talking about is not a happy experience. It's not "Jesus loves you, or God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." It's about carrying a cross, the cross in which you yourself may be executed.

So they're not talking about somehow identifying in some spiritual sense with the death of Jesus. The message is you're going to have to suffer possibly for following Me. I mean, Jesus said that, you know, "If the world hates you, don't be surprised. They hated Me. If the world kills you, don't be surprised. They're going to do it to Me. You don't expect that you're going to be treated any different than your teacher, do you?"

Matthew 10, "If you're going to be My disciple, get ready. The disciple is not above his teacher. However they treat the teacher is how they're going to treat you. So realize this, you're going to have to confess Me before men, and you're going to have to confess Me before men knowing that it could cost you your freedom, it could cost you years of your life, imprisonment. It could cost you hated, and alienation, and it even could cost you martyrdom."

So, this whole matter of following Jesus is sort of saying "no" to self and "no" to safety. I'm willing to bear the reproach of Christ. I'm willing to suffer the consequence of what it is to be a Christian in the environment that I'm in. This is a message that is clearly understood by people in many parts of the world. There are more Christians today being martyred than ever in history by the tens of thousands every year, mostly under Muslim regimes. There's no equivocation about this with them. They know what it means to name the name of Christ. They knew it in the years of communist oppression in eastern Europe. They knew exactly what it would cost. But the gospel was so precious, Christ was so precious, eternal life was so important, forgiveness of sin was so valuable that they were eager

and anxious to pay whatever it cost.

See, the attitude that comes to true conversion is the attitude that says Jesus is worth anything and everything. There isn't anything in this life that's temporal that can even be compared to the value of what is eternal. And so that's the gospel, but the invitation is not "Jesus wants to make you happy and healthy and wealthy," it's that He wants your life, and may even ask for your death.

Paul says to the Ephesians elders in Acts 20, "I'm on my way to Jerusalem, and I don't know what's going to happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit told me I'm going to be put in chains and afflictions await me." Then this, "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself." I don't consider my life to matter. That's self denial. I don't really care. It's not about my life. "For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain." "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me, and the *life* I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me," Galatians 2:20.

So Paul says, "I don't live any more. He lives. If I live, I live to the Lord. If I die, I die to the Lord. I am the Lord's." That's it. That's the terms of salvation.

The world is hostile against Him. They're going to be hostile against me. He says that in Matthew 10:24-38, that whole wonderful text. A public profession of Christ as Lord and Savior may cost, but it's also a proof of my genuineness. It may cost me my family. A sword may go between the members of my family, but Jesus said He came to bring a sword. I don't have any self interest that overrules my need for Christ. Do you understand that? I don't have any self interest. I don't have any ambition that overrules my desperate need for Christ. And if I have to die every day, then that's fine. That's a small price to pay because the suffering of this world is not worthy to be compared with the glory which awaits me in Christ.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:31, "I die daily." Every day he woke up he knew it could be the end of his life. Somewhere there was a plot hatching, if already not in motion, to take his life. He said, "Every day with me is a day on the brink of death." All suffering is not a cross. It's suffering the reproach of Christ that's the cross. It's the suffering for the gospel that's the cross.

Are you willing to suffer for the gospel? Is it that important to you? Because that goes with the territory. There won't be a crown unless there's a cross. So if you're coming to Christ and you're not saying to yourself, "Eternal life, the life to come, the forgiveness of sin, and what God has prepared for me in heaven is so precious to me, and so valuable to me, and I am so sick of what I am that I am willing to give up everything I have, none of it has any value anyway, and I am willing, if necessary, to bear the full reproach of Jesus Christ no matter what it costs, even if it costs my life." That's what Jesus said.

So, it's a serious call here. Serious call. The cross then marks - the willingness to accept the cross marks the true disciple. You take up the cross, and you take it up as a way of life, daily. It's a way of life. The hymn writer said, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone and all the world go free? No, there's a cross for everyone, there's a cross for me. The consecrated cross I'll bear, till death shall set me free, and then go home my crown to wear for there's a crown for me."

So, you know, you look at your life and you say, "Oh, it doesn't matter what my life is to me. I'm

thankful for the life the Lord gave me. I'm even more thankful for the death that ushers me into the next life. Whatever the cost, whatever I have to give up of myself I eagerly give up because I've come to the end of myself and I found that I have no value. I'm crying out to be rescued like a drowning man who isn't debating on what the terms are going to be after he gets out of the water.

Thirdly, in Luke 9, he adds the matter of obedience. Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me. Literally, "Let him be following Me." It's a continual pattern of obedience. Your will is out. His is in. You go where I go. You say what I say. You do what I tell you. You do what I do.

You know, in Matthew 7, this whole matter of obedience is at the heart of the sermon on the mount. Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven." It's the doers, not the sayers. It's the people who obey. And, of course, the gospel of John is just loaded with this kind of emphasis, where Jesus talks about how true faith, true saving faith, is made manifest in obedience.

In just - I can't take you through all of them, but John 14:21 is one. "He who has My commandments and keeps them - " or obeys them " - he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I'll love him and disclose Myself to him." It's all about obedience. It's always about obedience, always about following. Lordship isn't an option. Obedience isn't something you do after you're 35.

John 15:10, "If you keep My commandments you'll abide in My love;" If you don't, you won't. That's simple. Chapter 15 verse 14, "You are My friends if you do what I command you." If you do what I command you. Now there are many others.

So, you're coming, you're saying, "I'm at the end of myself. I give You my life, whatever the price. Show me what You want me to do, and I do it." That's where Paul was on the Damascus Road. He says, "What do You want me to do? What do You want me to do?" And that is the right attitude at the point of conversion. What do I do now? You've - I'm done. I'm willing to die for You and live for You. I want to follow You, so what do I do? Now that puts you in a position, then, to submit yourself to this, right? It's all about submission. It's a life pattern of self denial, cross-bearing, bearing the reproach of Christ, and loyal obedience.

Now at this point I don't want to be criticized for saying something I'm not saying, so let me clarify something as I close. What I'm not saying is that in order to be accepted by God, somehow you have to deny yourself sort of on your own and get that in motion, deny yourself for a little while and then kind of move toward being willing to give your life, even unto death. And then move, thirdly, into loyal obedience to the things of God, and if you do that then God will come down and save you.

Listen to this very carefully. This little complex of spiritual realities are not chronological, they're not chronological. It isn't one for a little while, then after a lapse of time another for a little while, and then after another lapse of time another. They're not chronological. They're simply a blend. They are the logical components of saving faith that believes in Jesus as Lord and Christ, believes in Jesus as crucified and risen Savior, and bears this attitude within that faith. They go together. They are a complex that goes together.

The second thing I want you to understand is not only are they not something chronological, but

they're not something you muster up. You can't do it in your own power. On your own power you love yourself, you protect yourself, and you do what you want. That's how fallen people function. So something has to happen dramatic in you. There has to be a shattering of all of your sense of self. There has to be a devastation of what you are normally. And it can't come from you. It's got to come from outside of you, and this is the mighty work of the Spirit of God who moves into the life of a person, convicts that person of sin, shatters that person's self confidence, makes that person who was dead in trespasses and sin come alive, come awake, begin to see, begin to hear, begin to understand. This is the mighty work of God. Not apart from your faith, and not apart from your will, but the work of God through your will expressed in your faith, a mighty work of God.

So, when you go to preach the gospel and you say, "Oh, boy, if I do it this way, nobody is going to respond." Realize this, it wouldn't matter how you did it. Nobody could respond on their own, anyway. So you might as well do it the right way so that they have the true message, if being prompted by the Spirit of God they can then believe and be saved.

So you want to be a follower of Jesus, do you? Well say farewell to yourself, pick up your cross, and proceed to do everything He asks you to do. Those are the terms. And aren't you glad we live in those terms under grace? Because we fail. But the very desire to do those things is the evidence of a transformed soul.

Father, we thank You again this morning for the clarity of the truth. And we pray that You'll use us, first of all, use these truths to help us examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith, if these are the attitudes with which our hearts are ruled and governed which demonstrate then that this is the work of the Spirit of God in us. And then help us as we proclaim the gospel, to be used as an instrument to bring the sinner to the end of himself, to the level of desperation to the brokenness that generates self denial, cross bearing and loyal obedience. Use us, Lord, work some work through us when we ourselves can do nothing. Yet in our weakness Your strength is perfected. To that end we pray for Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

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