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

The Gospel: Self-Love or Self-Hate?
Scripture: Luke 9:23-25
Code: 42-121

We are in our study of the Luke gospel in the 9th chapter and we are looking at verses 23 to 27. This is really at the heart of Jesus' teaching, so we've not tried to hurry through what is a rather simple and straight forward passage. And the temptation for me would be to stay here for months, and months, and months, unfolding everything that is either explicit or implicit in this passage, and I'm resisting that and trying to move along.

But when you ask about what Jesus taught and what of His teaching was most central and significant, you find it right here. Because in verse 23 Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me -" And then, at that point, we could stop and say, "That's essential to His mission. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to call people to Himself." And He says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, here's what he must do -"

Here, then, are conditions established for the most important message ever given on this planet and that is the message of following Jesus. What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? What does it mean to come after Him? What does it mean to become a Christian? What does it mean to be saved? That's at the heart of the message.

And what Jesus says here directly speaks to that issue. So you want to follow Christ, do you? You want to come after Christ? You want to be His disciple? You want to be a "little Christ," which is what Christian means? You want to follow Him into His kingdom, the kingdom of God? You want His forgiveness, the forgiveness that He gives? You want the eternal life that He promises?

Well, if you want that, He says, "You must deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow Me." This statement by Jesus is repeated a number of times in the New Testament gospel record. I'm sure He stated this many, many times, hundreds of times in His preaching ministry because this is at the heart of the issue of discipleship and salvation.

Now we've already looked at the three elements: Denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following. But I want to go back and visit them, not in part but as a whole, and try to give you maybe a summary understanding of what He is really saying here. And it's important to do this because what Jesus is saying is fundamentally opposite what preachers are preaching today.

In fact, the fundamental call to salvation, the words of our Lord are utterly opposite how people think in our culture. We live in a culture of self love, to put it simply, a culture that is consumed with self love, ego building, self esteem, feeling good about yourself, thinking you're important, thinking you're valuable, thinking you're a hero, thinking you've achieved something, thinking you're worthy of honor. We're drowning in awards for everything imaginable and unimaginable. Parents are consumed with boosting the egos of their children with every imaginable means, as well as boosting their own sense of self value. This is the generation of self lovers.

And just by way of reminder, in 2 Timothy chapter 3 the apostle Paul classified "love of self" as a sin - in fact, a dominating sin. In one of his familiar lists of iniquities - there are numbers of them in his letters - he begins the list of iniquities in 2 Timothy chapter 3 with "lovers of self," and then "lovers of money," and then goes through the rest of his list. This describes deceivers, unbelievers, those outside the kingdom of God, those who do not know the truth. Self love is at the top of the list in terms of normal human attitude. Sinners are consumed with pride. They're consumed with themselves. We have made that into the prominent, dominant virtue in our society.

So here we are with the gospel, going to a generation of people who are not only proud, but they've turned pride into the virtue of all virtues, who are in love with themselves, and who seek to fulfill every whim, and every desire, and every ambition, and every dream, and every hope; who seek to be everything that they can be, who seek to set value on all that they are, and all that they say, and all that they do. And we confront that culture with the gospel, and at the heart of the gospel is this opening. "So you want to follow Jesus, do you? You want to enter the Kingdom of God? You want your sins forgiven? You want eternal heaven? Then deny yourself and take up your cross and fully submit to Him." You can't even get to the submitting part unless you can get past the cross part, and you can't get there if you can't get past the part about denying yourself.

To give you a term that you likely won't forget, I'll borrow from Martin Luther. Martin Luther, as you know, launched the Protestant Reformation. He was a Roman Catholic priest who came to understand the truth of salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ alone, apart from works, and ceremonies, and all the rest; and so he determined that he would confront the Roman Catholic system, the great monolithic system of error and deception, and he selected 95 different statements, 95 different protests - that's why we're called "Protestants" - 95 different assertions that ran contrary to Catholicism. He wrote them down and he nailed them on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

The fourth of his protests, the fourth of his 95 assertions was that a penitent heart, a heart that comes to God and receives salvation is characterized by - here's his term, "self hate." Self hate. Quoting from Luther's fourth statement. "And so penance remains while self hate remains." He said that self hate was the true interior penitence. "This," said Luther, "is essential to the gospel."

Whereas the Roman system, like every system of self righteousness, and earning salvation by ceremonies and good deeds, is awash in self love; Luther confronted it and said, “Until the sinner comes to hate himself, he does not enter the Kingdom of God.” You have in the very birth of Protestantism, the very birth of the gospel, as it were, out from under its rock where it was hidden for 1,000 years in Catholicism, at its very launch the gospel is defined as being founded upon the sinner’s self hatred.

Hating oneself because one comes to see that there is in the flesh no good thing, that there is nothing of value, nothing of worth. That we are, as Jeremiah said, “deceitful above all things, desperately wicked.” “Every part of us is sick -” as Isaiah put it “- from the head to the toe.” There is no good thing anywhere. There’s nothing about us that has value. There’s nothing about us that has worth. There’s nothing about us that is deserving of honor or accolade. It is to come to the Beatitude attitude again, of understanding spiritual poverty, of understanding bankruptcy, of understanding your utter nothingness, of looking at everything that’s done in your life, whether it’s religious, or whether it’s educational, or whether it’s moral, or whatever it is, and like the apostle Paul saying, “It’s all dung. It’s all manure.” This just does not sell in the cult of self love.

But frankly it’s absolutely absurd to suggest that a person could encounter holy God, the righteous God, and enter into His kingdom without wanting to be delivered from sin, and without wanting to be delivered from understanding sin as sin really has to be understood, that is that it is pervasive and dominant. Those who meet God on God’s terms, those who come to God and enter in to His kingdom, invariably have an overwhelming sense of their own sinfulness.

Job who was the best of men, according to the 1st chapter, in the 42nd chapter said this, “I had heard of God with my ears, but now I’ve seen Him.” And he said this, “I hate myself.” In the Hebrew, “I loathe myself. I despise myself, everything that I am. All that I am apart from God, all that I am in my humanness, anything and everything about me is so stained and tainted with fallenness and corruption and sin, I hate everything about myself.”

The apostle Paul in writing to Timothy said in 1 Timothy 1:15, “It is a trustworthy statement, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost of all.” There was nothing about Paul that commended Paul to Paul. There was nothing about Paul, therefore, that commended him to anybody else.

People today brag unabashedly about how great they are, how good they are, how many things they’ve achieved, how desirable they are, how accomplished they are, how valuable they are. It was Isaiah who said when he saw God, “Woe is me for I am ruined. I’m literally disintegrating before my very eyes. My whole self image is disintegrating. It’s going to pieces.” Because in the presence of God he saw himself only as a wretched sinner, pronounced damnation on himself because he said he

was a man of unclean lips. That's what we're talking about. That's what self denial is.

It's not saying, "I'm going to sell my house and give all my money necessarily to the poor." It's not saying, "I'm going to live in poverty and rags." It's not saying that. It is not saying, "I'm going to deny myself what is mine in terms of physical property, or what is mine in terms of a job, or whatever." It is saying, "I deny that there is in me anything of value, anything of worth, anything good, anything that ought to be awarded anything, anything that ought to be paraded as exemplary, anything that ought to be exalted." It is this overwhelming sense of drowning in your own utter sinfulness.

Peter, again in the presence of God in Christ said, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man." When he was aware of the fact that Jesus was God because He was controlling the fish that day in Luke 5, he had nothing but loathing for himself. He said, "Go away. You shouldn't even be around me. You shouldn't even be near me." Same attitude in Luke 18 of the publican who drops his head and won't look up to heaven because he doesn't even think he has a right to look up, lest God should look into the face of such a wretch, says, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." And he beats on his breast, but he won't even look up. He doesn't even want to get into eye contact, as it were, with God. He's that unworthy.

When you become a Christian it isn't that all of a sudden you wake up to what you could offer God. And there are many other examples in the Scriptures of those men and women who, when they really saw God, were literally crushed under the weight of their own nothingness, their own sinfulness. And frankly, this is absolutely alien to the culture that we live in. It's alien to the culture based on self love and having every whimsical desire legitimized. Anything and everything you want you should have. You can be whatever you can be. You can dream your dream and live your dream. The whole goal of life is for you to desire whatever you want to desire and see it all fulfilled, insisting on rights, insisting on privileges, insisting on respect, insisting on reward and honor, and affirmation.

The people who enter God's kingdom don't insist on any of that. They feel themselves unworthy of any of it. People who enter into God's kingdom are literally overwhelmed with hatred for what they are. I hate what I am. I hate what I am. I hate what I am because all that I am is sin.

Now this produces repentance. This produces a turning, a longing to be delivered and rescued from what you are and to be made into what you are not, but what you long to be, something that is good, and that is worthwhile, and does have value, and is righteous and useful. It's back in Luke 5:32, Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." I can't do anything for people who think they're already righteous. I can't do anything with people who are impressed with themselves, or impressed with their religion, impressed with their morality, impressed with their money, impressed with their education, their achievement. I can't do anything for those people. I didn't come for them. They don't hear My message.

In Luke 13:3 Jesus tells us how important this repentance is. Verse 3. “I tell you, no, unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” And He’s talking about death and hell. Verse 5 He repeats it. “I tell you, no, unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” Twice He tells us you’re going to die and go to hell if you don’t repent. And the only people who repent are people who are sinners, who are self aware of their wretchedness. That’s why the work of the Holy Spirit is to convict of sin.

So what Jesus is saying here is if you want to enter into My Kingdom, if you want to follow Me, if you want to be forgiven of sin, if you want eternal life, you have to start by hating everything you are apart from Me, recognizing that all the good about you is filthy rags, despising everything about you. And now, since all that you might have earned, or all that you might have gained, or all your so-called works have been redefined as wretchedness, and you have seen yourself as consummately unworthy, you are just in the perfect place to reach out, to cry out for mercy and grace. So the real message of the gospel is the message that you need to start by hating everything that you are. That just doesn’t sell well in our society.

And when do you ever hear a preacher preach like that? That’s not seeker-friendly. That’s not meeting the popular culture at its own level, which is the new kind of pragmatism. Try that in the churches where unbelievers are made to feel comfortable. When did you last hear anybody preach on hating yourself, loathing yourself, abhorring yourself, despising yourself, seeing in yourself nothing of value? There’s nothing in you, in your mind, in your emotions, or in your volition, there’s nothing in your achievement that’s really good. There’s nothing worthy of honor, nothing worthy to be established as an example, nothing. At its best, it’s human good which, void of the power of God and the glory of God, is a kind of bad-good.

Jesus was always calling sinners to hate themselves. The message today in the church is - and I heard this again on Saturday, I was listening to an evangelist on the television. “Are you unfulfilled? Do you feel your dreams are not being realized? Do you feel an emptiness in your heart? Come to Jesus and He’ll fill up your heart, and He’ll fulfill your dreams,” and blah, blah, blah. And it was all about you getting what you want from Jesus. That’s not the gospel.

In Luke 24:47 Jesus said, “When you go preach, here’s the subject. Repentance for forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem.” Now you know what He said? Don’t start when you get out of town. Start here. You don’t have one message for Jerusalem and another message for some other place. You start here, and you start now, right here in Jerusalem where it’s not popular. This is where you start, and from here you cross the globe, you go to every nation on the planet, and you do the same thing, you preach that in the name of Jesus people will be forgiven of their sins if they repent. If they repent.

And repentance is the product of self hate. It's the product of that Beatitude attitude. People repent when they look at themselves and they're ashamed of what they see. When they look at themselves and they're brokenhearted over what they see. It is a redirection of their whole self assessment that says, "I'm nothing. I'm less than nothing. I'm sinful. I'm wretched. I'm wicked to the core."

And by the way, this is not a human work, as I said last time. This is not a human work. This is not something a dead, blind, deaf, hard-hearted sinner is going to come up with on his own. The only way the sinner will ever come to realize this is when the sinner is exposed to the Word of God and the Spirit of God, when the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and awakens the sinner to his true condition. But how can the Holy Spirit awaken the sinner to his true condition unless the truth is preached? That's Romans says, "How shall they hear without a preacher?" Somebody has got to say this. And the call to repentance is not a command to sort of make your life right before you come to Christ. It's a total reversal of the way you view yourself and it encompasses every part of your being.

Three Greek words are used in the New Testament to refer to repentance and they illustrate the three sort of elements of repentance. There is the word *metanoe,* it's used a number of places. It's used in Luke 11:32; Luke 15:7, 10. And this word, *metanoe* basically expresses a reversal of your thinking, mental attitude. You change your mind. So that repentance deals with the mind. You have to change your mind about how you view yourself to see yourself the way you really are, to see yourself the way Scripture says you are, see yourself the way God says you are, to see yourself as fallen, and depraved, and corrupt, from the top of your head to the tip of your toe.

The second word that is used is *metamelomai* and that's another Greek word that means "repentance." It's used in Matthew 21:29-32, only it emphasizes regret and sorrow. Once the mind has grasped the new definition of who I am, there is a consequent motion that goes from the mind to the feelings, and emotion kicks in, and there is sorrow, and there is shame, and that's *metamelomai.*

And there's a third word, *epistrephomai,* that is also the word for "repentance." It's used in Luke 17:4, Luke 22:32. And it actually means you change direction in life. And that refers to your will. So it starts in your mind and moves to your emotions and it activates your will.

And those are the three elements that are involved in repentance. You change the way you view yourself, you feel remorse and sadness about that, and so you turn around and you head in the direction of change. And that's going to put you in the direction of God. And you're going to be like the publican in Luke 18. You're going to be saying, "God, God, my mind understands my wretchedness. My emotions feel it so I can't even lift up my eyes, and I'm pounding on my breast. And then my will kicks in and cries to You and says, 'I want You to be merciful to me, a sinner.' "

So, intellectually, repentance begins with the recognition of sin, an understanding of the profound depth and breadth of that sinfulness. It then moves to the emotion, which has an overwhelming sense

of sorrow and brokenness, remorse. It is the sorrow that Paul talked about, leading to repentance. And then volitionally it involves a change of direction away from that sin, toward God, toward Christ, crying out for mercy. It's not just a change of mind, it's a change of mind, emotion and will.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, "Repentance means that you realize you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called 'sin' is in you, that you long to get rid of it, that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world and its mind and outlook, as well as its practice. You deny yourself. You take up the cross. You go after Christ. Your nearest and dearest and the whole world may call you a fool, or say you have religious mania. You may have to suffer financially. It makes no difference. That is repentance."

And that's why Jesus said, "You have to hate your mother, you have to hate your father, your brother, your sister. Follow Me." That is the mark of every true believer.

Now why am I saying this about repentance today? Why am I talking all around this verse? Because there's so much in here I want you to understand the great reality here. Back to verse 23, that's exactly what verse 23 is talking about. It's talking about this kind of self assessment that issues in repentance. You want to come after Christ. You want to turn from the way you're going and go after Him. That's a turning. That's a repentance. That's the volitional. That's the will.

Well, it's going to start with a self assessment that's dramatically different than the way you always viewed yourself. You have to hate yourself. You have to hate yourself to the degree that you are willing to literally die, if need be. And that's consequential. If I see myself for who I really am, then why would I want to make something sacred out of my life? If I see myself for who I really am, and I really want to be something completely other than what I am, then death would be actually fairly attractive to me.

I will never be the man I should be in this world. I won't be the man I should be till I'm dead, right? None of us will. I want forgiveness for my sin. I want righteousness in my life. I want the fullness of God's blessing. When I come to Christ, I want sin out of the picture. I'm sick of my sin. I'm sick of myself. I'm weary and tired of what I am. I want to abandon all of that. I want to come to Christ. I want to go down a different path. I want to be a different person. And the ultimate fulfillment of all of those longings and desires comes after death.

So, like Paul, my life is not precious to me. There is in me this longing to be what I want to be in Christ, what I long to be in Christ, what I desire to be in Christ. There's this hunger and thirst after righteousness that's characteristic. I want to get away from sin. I want to be in a situation where no longer is sin there present. So, death is a welcome friend. That's why Paul said, "For me to die is gain." It's gain. I won't be what I want to be, what God wants me to be, until I'm gone from this life.

So, it’s not a big jump if I’m going to deny myself to then be willing to die. “Take up the cross” simply means to be willing to die. Crosses were instruments on which people were executed. And Jesus is saying here self denial means that you’re so sick of yourself that you’d be willing even to die. Now, if you want to follow Me, if you want to come after Me, you’re going to have to feel this. You’re going to have to understand your true condition. You're going to have to be emotionally overwhelmed with this condition, sorrow, shame, to the degree where you are eager to deny yourself, you’re willing to go whatever the cost. You’re going to follow Christ, even if it’s death. That’s repentance. That’s what it is. It is self hate, self denial.

And, you know, even now there’s sort of a residual - or should be a residual - kind of distrust in what I am, and even a certain self hate. Somebody said to me - I was talking to the students. I’ve been speaking at the college for the last couple of weeks pretty much, and I was saying to the students that there was - someone was speaking with me and saying, “You know, I just want to be used by the Lord. I just want to be useful to the Lord. I want to be useful to the Lord.” And my response was, “Well, you know, I don’t really think like that because I don’t have anything to offer the Lord. So my prayer is not, ‘Lord, I want to be useful to You.’ My prayer is, ‘Lord, I hope I’m somehow able to be used by You.’ I hope - I don’t want to do something for the Lord. I just hope the Lord can do something through me.”

You know the difference? I’m not offering myself, “Lord, I’m going to give my life to do something for You.” Forget that. You know, I’m not a self propelled machine, I’m only a tool. And somebody else has to pick me up, and the somebody who has to pick me up is God. But if I’m a tool that You can use, that’s enough for me that You could use this unworthy vessel, this clay pot, as Paul, you know, this garbage bucket, as Paul identifies us in 2 Corinthians, then that’s bliss. That’s blessedness.

There’s nothing in me of value. There’s nothing in me of usefulness. And so when I come to the point where I want to be delivered from what I am, and I come to that point of self hate, and I cry out to God, I’m not going to set any limits. I’m not going to say, “Well, God, You can only go so far. You can only have this and not this.” There’s a total abandonment because there’s nothing to hold onto. There’s nothing there of value.

This is linked to saving faith. Acts 20:21. Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ so that salvation comes to those who want to follow Christ. And the reason they want to come after Christ, because they believe in Him. But the faith that saves is the faith that is penitent.

Now Jesus in His preaching sought to bring sinners to this point. And the people who resisted the message the most were the people who felt the best about themselves, right? Is that not true? And who were the people who felt the best about themselves? The religious Jews, the Pharisees, the scribes, the chief priests, the religious elite, the religious establishment. In their minds they were very,

very accomplished people. They were free. They had never been in bondage to any man, they said. They were sighted, as it were. They could see things true and spiritual. They were healthy. They were righteous. They were good.

And, of course, Jesus just obliterated that. He told them they were blind. He told them they were corrupt. He told them on the outside they were painted white, on the inside they were full of stinking dead men's bones, corpses. He attacked their self righteousness. And you have to do that because that is the damning dominant sin. And Jesus constantly sought to bring sinners to the point of self hate, to the point where they would say what Job said, "I hate myself." And Job was a righteous man who said that. How much more does an unrighteous man need to say that? But they, because they were so engulfed in self love and self righteousness, despised Jesus' message, and they killed Him for it. It wasn't that they didn't want a Messiah. It wasn't even that they didn't necessarily think He might be the Messiah.

They did want a Messiah desperately. They wanted, as we've already learned, free food. They wanted the most incredible medical plan ever devised, healing for everybody all the time, and resurrection if you die, free, with no premiums, and no process to go through. You just went to Jesus and He took care of it, no paperwork. Of course they wanted that. And they would have embraced it. But Jesus intruded into their thinking with this message that they were going to have to hate themselves instead of love themselves. They were going to have to see themselves as the poor prisoners, blind and oppressed. They were going to have to come to a beatitude attitude, poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, recognizing they were destitute of righteousness, and demonstrating a hunger and thirst for it. They were going to have to be willing to be persecuted and not acclaimed.

They hated that message because they loved themselves. And that's the way it is. If you love yourself terminally, you damn yourself. If you love yourself, you hate this message. That is why Jesus said this, Matthew 21:31. Tax collectors, the rankest, most despised and hated people in Israel were tax collectors who bought a Roman franchise, a taxation franchise, and then extorted money from their people, and did so with a bunch of thugs, and thieves, and strong-armed people that did whatever they needed to do to get the money. "Tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you."

Can you imagine if you're a religious leader in Israel and Jesus said that to you? Tax collectors - you'd spit on a tax collector - and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you. Why? Because they are more likely to loathe themselves than you are. Becoming more moral may well move you away from the Kingdom of God. Something beneficial about wallowing in the consequences of gross iniquity, it has its own capability of awakening you to the reality of who you really are.

I've said this through the years. People become Christians when they get desperate enough, when they are at the point of total panic about wanting to be rescued, when they know they're literally going down for the third time in the sea of their own sin. The wicked riffraff of Israel were far more likely to recognize their sin than the self righteous. And there never is any salvation for anybody apart from repentance.

You can't get saved, folks, apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is, believing in the One who died and rose again for you, the Lord Jesus Christ, and all of the truths about Him. And you can't become saved by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ unless there accompanies that belief repentance. And yet here we - and I've commented on this, but it's in my mind because we keep dialoging about it - and we've got people writing Christian books that say folks somewhere in the world who never heard about God, never heard about Jesus, never heard the Bible, or the gospel can be saved by looking up and saying, "Because I believe You're a Creator up there, and I believe in You as Creator," they're going to heaven. In other words, God, one writer says, would be unjust if He didn't take them to heaven. Not only do they not have to believe in Jesus as Lord, they don't even have to believe in Jesus. They don't even have to know there is a Jesus. But what about repentance? Where's that? What do we do, just eliminate that? That's a convenient thing.

Jesus said, "You want to come into the Kingdom? It's going to take more than believing there's somebody up there. Where's the shame? Where's the remorse? Where's the overwhelming conviction of one's sin?"

And so, the principle is just basic. It's basic gospel truth. You want to follow Jesus, do you? Then hate yourself. The utter disavowing of oneself as having any value in unredeemed condition, and even in redeemed condition our only value is as a tool picked up by the sovereign Lord. So there is self denial, and then cross bearing, and then following, that is righteous obedience as we follow after Christ. That's just reminding you of what's involved in that principle.

Now let me talk about the paradox for just a couple of minutes. Extending this principle into a paradox, Jesus says this in verses 24 and 25. "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he's the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" Here's the paradox. The principle is clear. Here's the paradox. You want to save your life? You're going to have to lose it. You want to lose your life? Then hold on to it.

Here Jesus explains what He's been saying. What He's been saying is you have to deny yourself, that is you give up your life. You sell all. You abandon everything for Christ. You don't add Christ to your life. You abandon everything. You sell all. And by literally self suicide, as it were, self denial, you gain everything.

On the other hand, if you want to save your life, verse 24, “whoever wishes to save his life,” it doesn’t mean, you know, wearing a seat belt and having air bags. Not talking about that. Or going through some surgery to help you with an illness. We’re not talking about physical life. We’re talking about your eternal soul here, your eternal soul. So you want to save your soul, do you? You want to save your life? You want to rescue yourself? Then lose yourself. That’s the only way. You want to lose yourself? You want to be lost in eternal hell, suffering punishment forever? Then hold onto your own life. That’s the simple paradox.

Matthew 10:39 is another place where Jesus says this. This is pretty much routine preaching for Jesus. Matthew 10:39. “He who has found his life shall lose it, he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.” Another place that I think is actually an exposition of what this means is in John 12:25, where Jesus also repeats this same paradox. John 12:25. Listen to these words. “He who loves his life loses it.” See, you want to save your life because you love it, you love the way you are, you love yourself, you love your own desires, your own ambitions, your own dreams and goals. You love your own honors, your own achievements, your own way, your own will. If you do that, you will lose it. And then Jesus said, “And he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to eternal life.” And there Jesus says you have to hate your life. I’m sure that’s where Luther got the term “self hate.”

If you love yourself, if you’re into self love, and self esteem, and making sure all your little needs are met, making sure you’re indulged with all your fantasies, and dreams, and schemes, and hopes, and ambitions; you’re going to lose your life. You’re going to lose your life in eternal hell. If you love yourself so much to hold on like the rich young ruler, you’re going to go away without eternal life. But if you hate yourself, then you’re going to receive eternal life. What a tremendous, tremendous option. I mean, it’s just the ultimate, that’s it. You either save your life now, or lose it forever. Lose your life now, and save it forever. That simple.

And there’s a little phrase in verse 24 that needs to be noted. “For My sake.” For My sake. It’s not talking about some sort of, I guess you could call philanthropic self denial. He’s not saying losing your life in causes of justice, or losing your life in causes of religion, giving yourself up to become a priest or a nun, or immolating yourself, lighting a torch to yourself as a Buddhist priest in order to show your devotion to God, or strapping bombs around yourself as a devout Muslim and think you’re blowing yourself into a heavenly experience with 72 black-eyed virgins who are waiting for you on green pillows, some level of devotion to Allah.

We’re not talking about that kind of - There’s only one kind of self losing here. There’s only one kind of self deprecation, one kind of self denial, and that is “for My sake.” There’s no value or virtue in what those people do. When a Buddhist burns himself up, when a Muslim blows himself up, they burn themselves and blow themselves right into eternal hell. There’s no credit accruing to their account no matter how religiously devout they were, no matter how extreme that level of devotion was. What

Jesus is talking about here is a man abandoning his life, denying himself, hating himself in the desperation of his sinful condition, and giving up his life to Jesus Christ for My sake. “Because of Me,” is what that means. Because of Me. The only way you’ll ever save your life eternally, the only way you’ll ever spend eternity in heaven in the presence of God, in the fullness of joy, is when you have given up your whole life to Jesus Christ.

Verse 25, Jesus makes this really interesting statement, “What is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” This is hyperbole. In fact, in the category of the illustration, this is ultimate hyperbole. Jesus is saying, “I know what you’re thinking. I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking, ‘Well, I’m certainly a good man, and I have this achievement, and that achievement, and this honor, and that honor, and this ambition, and this desire, and I’d like to do this, and do that, and I’ve got some of my own plans, and I’ve got some of my own relationships that I want to protect. And, you know, I’ve got a lot to give up. You’re asking a lot out of me.’ ” The rich young ruler said, “You know, I’m rich, I’ve got a lot. You’re asking a lot.”

So Jesus said, “Okay, here’s a hypothetical illustration. What if you owned the whole world? How about that?” That is the ultimate hyperbole. You can’t go beyond that. “Okay, let’s say you owned the whole world. You have all of its possessions, you have all of its houses, and cars, and clothes, and lands, and all of its honors and prestige, and all of its powers, all of its ability to deliver to you everything that it has in terms of material benefit, in terms of accolades, in terms of prestige, prominence, power, you name it. You have all of it. What profit is it?” So what? What does it profit you?

The word simply means “what benefit is it?” What good is it? What use is it? What help is it? “If you lose or forfeit yourself?” You, the eternal you, or as Matthew records it, “What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” How much is your soul worth? How much is your eternal soul worth? It’s worth more than the whole world in time. You’re going to be dead in a few breaths. You’re going to live forever. You don’t mean the common belief of mankind is that, you know, that whoever possesses the most earthly stuff is the happiest. Just because you get more stuff, or better relationship, or different relationship, or more power, or more influence, or more honor, or more whatever?

But Jesus says if you possess literally the sum total of all earthly riches and lost your eternal soul, that is a bad bargain. That is a bad bargain. What good is it to gain the whole world and lose your own soul? And so Jesus says, “Look, better to give up your life now in the recognition that it isn’t anything anyway, and then it will be something glorious, and something wonderful, and something blessed, and something joyous, and something powerful, something peaceful, and something honorable, forever, and ever, and ever, and ever.” That’s the message of the gospel. That’s the choice you make.

Next time we're going to look at verses 26 and 27 when Jesus says, "Everybody is going to stand before the throne of judgment, at the final tribunal, and be judged eternally on how they responded to this message." Let me summarize it simple. Self love will send you to hell. Self hate will send you to heaven. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is essential. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ tied to genuine repentance is required. Both are a mighty work of the Spirit of God in a willing heart through the truth understood. That's why we preach that truth.

Father, we come now in closing of our wonderful service this morning, thanking You for the hymns, and the music, and songs, and thanking You for the opportunity to come before You in prayer, and to give, and now thanking You for the Word. Again, we have heard from the Savior's own lips. Again, we have been brought, as it were, before Your very presence, and You have spoken. This is Your truth. This is truth given to us graciously, lovingly, truth that didn't have to be revealed, but it was revealed because You are by nature a God who saves, a God who seeks to save sinners.

We pray, O God, that the preaching of this truth, the message of the cross, which is foolishness to the world, would be the power of salvation to many who will hear and believe. We pray, O God, that You would do a work of self hate and self denial in the hearts of many, and even those of us who are believers, would You continue to cultivate that in us so that we never ever fall into the ugly sin of pride and self confidence, but always know that there is a wonder, almost a surprise, whenever You graciously choose to use us as an instrument for Your glory.

We thank You, Father, that the Spirit of God works these things in the heart through the truth. We pray to that end even today in the Savior's name. Amen.

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