

What Does It Mean to Follow Jesus?  
Luke 9:23  
Pastor Jeremy Cagle, September 12, 2021

While I was gone, I noticed you guys were really spoiled by some great preaching. I listened to the sermons of our elders, and they did a fabulous job. In fact, they did so well that I'm going to take a vacation next week so they can come back and do it again. I thought that was fantastic. But if you weren't here, the way it worked is that two weeks ago, Kevin Laser preached on First Corinthians chapter two, which says that when you share the gospel with someone, you don't need to be eloquent, you just need to be faithful. You don't have to be perfect in the presentation and get all your T's crossed and I's dotted and that sort of thing. You just need to tell them what the Bible says. So many times, we get hung up on our words when we evangelize that we don't say anything. We just stay quiet. But God doesn't want us to do that.

And afterwards, the next week, Quentin Smith said the same thing from another angle, because he preached on John 3:16 to say that when you give the gospel to someone, you need to remember that the whole point of it is Christ. That's the whole reason you're talking to them about salvation. Don't worry about other things. Don't get hung up on things like the green movement, or the gender movement, or the push to make this world a better place. Don't get into politics. You just need to tell them about Jesus because he's the only thing that can save them.

And as I listened to that and reflected on what they were saying, it occurred to me that there's one more passage we really need to talk about before we end this discussion on salvation, and it's found in the Gospel of Luke. So if you would, please open your Bibles with me to the Gospel of Luke, which is the third book in the New Testament. It's the third gospel that we see here. And it's important because it shows you what was on Jesus's mind as he evangelized. Luke tells you what he was thinking about when he shared the gospel with someone. And if you look in Luke nine, verse 12, it says this. It says,

Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." But He said to them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each." They did so, and had them all sit down. Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people. And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.

And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, "Who do the people say that I am?" They answered and said, "John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again." And He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God." But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day."

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his [n]life will 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, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

We're going to end the reading there. Just to say a few words about that, the Gospel of Luke has been called the gospel to the Gentiles. It's the gospel to those who are not Jewish people like you and me. As I told the men yesterday at the Iron Man's Bible study, if you were to summarize all the Gospels, you could say that Matthew is the gospel of the Jews, Mark is the gospel of action, John is the gospel of belief, and Luke is the gospel to Gentile peoples. Because each of these men told the story of Jesus from different angles, but Luke's focus was on those who are outside the nation of Israel. Some think that Luke was a Gentile himself based on a comment Paul said about him in Colossians. So he had a heart for these people.

And if you notice in the context of what he's saying here, this is what he's saying in verse 14, it says Jesus had gotten quite a large following for himself at this point in his ministry, because he just fed the 5000. It was a staggering miracle. In fact, to put it in perspective, in verse 14 it says there were 5000 men. But if these men were heading to the Passover in Jerusalem, which John says they were, then they would have brought their families with them, taking the numbers up to about 15 or 20,000. Each man would have had two to three wives and children with them, which was the population of a town around the Sea of Galilee at this time. So Jesus had a city traveling with him at this point in his ministry. We often think of the Lord just having, you know, 12 disciples, going around Israel like that, but there were times when he had many more.

So to calm things down, Jesus tells the 12 that this is what you have to do in order to follow me. You have to deny yourself. Just to put this in perspective. Verse 18 says the crowd had left him at this point in the conversation, they went away. Luke doesn't tell us why, but John says it was because Jesus offended them. He made them mad, which would have been hard to see. I mean, if you're 12 guys, and if you go from 15,000 people to 12 in a few days, that's pretty discouraging. That's church growth in reverse. So Jesus tells them why they left. And he says it was because they weren't willing to do this. They just wanted the fish and the loaves. They just wanted a handout. So he says in verse 23, if anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

We'll talk about this passage in just a moment. But you would think he would say something more encouraging than that. You would think he would be more hopeful to these guys, after he just dashed all their hopes and dreams. They thought he was bringing in the kingdom right now. They thought he was going to be the Messiah, set up the throne, and they were going to reign with Him, and all of it just came crashing down. But he says, guys, you're going to have to do this or else I'm going to reject you. I'm going to throw you out just like the crowd. In one single sentence, Jesus crushes all your warm, fuzzy ideas about him in this passage, because we all love to hear about him feeding the 5000. I mean, if you grew up as a kid in Sunday school, you all saw pictures of that hanging on the wall. But nobody took a picture of this conversation. Nobody showed the faces of these guys, as they heard him say this.

I mean, what does this mean? Deny yourself? We can't do that Jesus, we live in the 21st century. We're supposed to fulfill ourselves, right? We're supposed to love ourselves. Not this. Take up your cross? What's that talking about? That sounds like suicide. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it? What is that even talking about? But Jesus says all this to confront the disciples' wrong ideas about him. He says, you're going to have to give me your souls or nothing else will save you.

And I mention that because I don't think everybody gets this today. I don't think everybody looks at Jesus like this because there's a certain apathy that's crept into the church in the modern age. There's a certain indifference that we see when we gather together, not just at our church, but every church. Because if you ask the average person today, what does it mean to follow Jesus? They'll tell you anything, right? I mean, you can hear any answer to that question in the world. Some people say you have to be a good person. That's what it means to follow Jesus. You need to go to church, pay your tithes, live a decent moral life. As we say in Tennessee, don't cuss or chew or date girls who do. You know, don't get caught swearing. And that's it. That's the only answer they'll ever give you. Or other people will say you need to walk in aisle. That's how you become a Christian. I just came from a part of the US where that kind of thing is rampant. You need to pray a prayer, sign a card, have a Damascus Road experience

where you feel God in a way you've never done before. Others will say you need to get baptized or sprinkled as a child. Some say you need to take communion. Others say you have to go on a mission trip and do something lavish and be passionate and give all your money away.

But I want you to notice this morning, Jesus raises the stakes even higher than that. Jesus says that's not even enough. He says I want your soul. That's how you become a Christian. I want your inner man. Don't just deny your money. Don't just deny your sinful pleasures like drinking and swearing. I want you to deny everything for me. That's a humbling thing to read, isn't it? We all fall short of this. These are the requirements of the standard of following Christ. You know in Quentin's sermon last week, he mentioned that John 3:16 is one of the most famous passages in the Bible. And he's right. I mean, you see it all over the place. You see John 3:16 on people's t-shirts. You see it on their bumper stickers. The famous football player Tim Tebow used to put it on his face before a football game. But he didn't put this verse there. You don't see this plastered everywhere. And here's why. Because you can read John 3:16 and go away with the impression that it doesn't cost you anything. You can hear, "For God so loved the world," and go away with the idea that it's easy. Following Jesus is so simple.

But it's not. Salvation is hard. It is a costly thing. One pastor said when God bids a man come, he bids us come and die. We need to remember that today. You know, while I was studying for this passage this week, it occurred to me that this is one of the verses that led to my salvation. It's one of the passages God used to save me because I grew up in a place where nobody did this. We all said, We believed in Jesus, but we didn't mean it because nobody repented. It didn't cost us anything. And it wasn't until I read this and the Lord opened my eyes that I was saved, because I realized I had my world over here, and God had his world over here, and they were nothing alike. He had his kingdom and I had mine. And I read this and realized that my kingdom had to go, I had to throw it away. When I did that, everything began to change. In fact, I changed so much so much in a short amount of time that people didn't know what happened to me. They thought, these are churchgoers, they thought I rededicated my life to the Lord. They thought I got called to the ministry. I didn't. I was born again. But it all happened the moment that this verse took root in my heart.

And just to give you some more verses on this, you know, Jesus says in Matthew seven, verse 21, that "not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father." And that means on Judgment Day there will be "Christians" who go to hell. Not real ones, but fake ones. There will be churchgoers who will say, "Lord, Lord," and they'll be turned away because they didn't mean it. They were mouthing the words. James 2 verse 19, says, "You believe that God is one. Good. The demons believe that too, and they shudder." But the difference between you and a demon is that you feel sorry for your sin. That's it. The thing that separates you from the devil is that you repent. Revelation 21, verse eight, says, "The cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and liars will have their part in the lake of fire," and the convicting thing there is that it doesn't take a lot to go to hell. All you have to do is be a liar. And keep lying and keep lying and never stop.

So we need to take all these things to heart this morning. There needs to be a change in your life, if you're going to follow Christ, and that's what we're going to talk about today. So if you're taking notes this morning, in Luke 9:23, I want you to see three things that a follower of Jesus does. This is going to be real simple. It's just going to follow the passage here. But if you're taking notes in Luke nine, verse 23, I want you to see three things that a follower of Jesus does. And we're going to do this because like I just said, there's a lot of confusion on this subject today. And there's so much misunderstanding about the gospel that we can't leave it without addressing it some more. Because if you're not careful, you can get the impression that all of this is easy, but it's not. In fact, going back to the sermon from last week, Jesus told Nicodemus, it's impossible by yourself to be saved. He says, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. In other words, you got to start all over. You need a new nature. And this is what the new nature looks like. With three things it means to follow Jesus.

The first one is this. You need to deny yourself. The first thing that a follower of Jesus does, is he denies himself, which means that he gives up everything he has. He doesn't hold anything back from the Lord. When you come to

Christ, all of you comes. When you become a Christian, all of you becomes one, not just the you on Sunday mornings and not just the you at church; the you everywhere. If you read this passage again, in verse 18, it says,

And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, “Who do the people say that I am?” They answered and said, “John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again.” And He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.” But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.”

And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself...”

Just to explain what he's saying here, as I mentioned a moment ago, Jesus had a lot of people following him at this point in his ministry. He had quite a large crowd as his reputation grew and grew as a miracle worker and a confronter of the establishment. He became very popular. And while Luke doesn't say a lot about that, other writers tell us that Jesus didn't just have a crowd following him. They were pretty unruly. Because the word John chapter six uses for crowd actually means a mob. So he had a bunch of people that were on the verge of a riot, kind of like a crowd at a ballgame. They were very raucous. John also says they came because they saw the miracles Jesus was doing. In other words, they didn't come for him. They came for the for the show. They didn't come because they thought Jesus was the Messiah. They just wanted to see him do tricks. And because of this, Jesus has this conversation in verse 18 with the disciples. He asks them, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Peter says, “You're the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And then in verse 23, Jesus says, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself.” And the connection there is Jesus is saying, “Peter, you're right in saying I'm the son of God. You're correct in what you're saying about me. But here's what the Son of God wants from you. You need to deny yourself.” The word deny here is *aparneomai* which means to deny, or affirm that you have no acquaintance with something; you don't even know it anymore. Jesus says that a Christian has to do that with his very self. It sounds very strange to say that. It's kind of an unnatural thing. But he says this to remind them, you can't come to me like the crowd did. It has to mean more than that for you.

And I think this is something that we all need to hear today. It's something we need to take to heart because this may or may not come as a shock to you, but we live in a world that is horrendously selfish, isn't it? We live in a place where people are tremendously proud. Let me just throw some terms out to you that I'm sure you're very familiar with because we all hear them today. Listen to these terms. self esteem, self love, self doubt, self hate, self conscious, self goals, self pity, self sufficiency, self worth, self confidence, self analysis, self assertive, self assurance, self respect, self awareness, self improvement. You know what all those words have in common? They're all selfish. They all focus on the self. They all make me the center of my life. Jesus says that a Christian is not to live that way. Selfishness is against everything Christianity teaches. If you're selfish, then you're either a Christian living in sin, or you're not a Christian at all. As one commentator states, there's nothing self indulgent about being a Christian, because Christianity is not about us. It's about Christ. It's not about you and what you want. It's about him and what he wants. So much so that you are to deny yourselves, not love yourselves, not esteem yourselves, not hate yourselves—deny yourselves for him. Some people get this all wrong and say this means I'm supposed to beat myself. No, it says you're not supposed to think about yourself. You're to give up your needs and wants for his. You're to sacrifice your friends, your career, your money, your health, your comfort, even your family if necessary, all for the glory of Christ.

And let me be blunt with you because this is a blunt passage. There's really no way to say this in a soft manner. So let's just be blunt, as I wish somebody would have been with me when I was young. If you're not willing to do this, what Jesus says here is that you can't be a Christian. If you're not willing to deny yourselves like this, then you're not a follower of his. Because there's no loophole here. There's no exceptions. The word “anyone” here means anyone. Anyone can have this. But this also applies to everybody. If you want it, this is what it is. And just as a side note here, I mean, self denial, it doesn't mean you become a pushover. Or you don't stand up for yourself

if someone is attacking you. There were times when Jesus walked away from a stoning. There's a place for that. It just means your life is no longer lived for you anymore. You're no longer your own master. You gave that up the moment you trusted in Him. Jesus says, if you're willing to do that, you can be His disciple. If you're not, then you can't. You need to follow Jesus for him, not for the things that he gives you, not for the fish and the loaves. And you need to follow Him for His glory, so people will look at you and see him. That's the idea. Because you're supposed to disappear.

You know, when I was on holiday this past week, I read a book of biographies, and one of them told the story of a man named William Borden. He was a wealthy young man who inherited a lot of money in the 1800s, only to get saved and give it all away to become a missionary to the Muslims, but he never made it there. He never made it to the mission field because he contracted spinal meningitis and died at the age of 25. But the ironic thing about it is that he was buried in Egypt just down the street from King Tut's tomb. And if you remember King Tut's tomb, it was the one with all the gold and the trappings and the wealth and all that, all this stuff William Borden gave up. And his grave was just a little Tombstone, and off on a side street. And I guess this really caught the attention of somebody, because somebody wrote on his tombstone. They said, "Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life."

And I tell you that because that's a summary of this passage. That's what this is saying. As a Christian, your life needs to be lived in such a way that there is no explanation for it apart from your love for Christ. That's how you know you're saved. Jesus is everything to you. He is your whole world. That brings us to another point to consider this morning. It brings us to another thing that a follower of Jesus will do. The first one is deny himself, which means he will give up everything that he has to follow him. Unlike this crowd, a true disciple does not come to Jesus for tricks. He comes to Jesus for Jesus. He comes to worship him.

It brings us to another thing to look at, and that is that he will take up his cross daily. A second thing a follower of Christ will do is to take up his cross daily, which means that he will deny Himself to this point of death. Things get very serious here, if they're not already serious. And if you look in verse 23, again, the Lord says this. It's almost like he starts this sentence, and the disciples' faces just keep getting worse and worse, and so he keeps adding more to it. And it says,

He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily."

Just to jump right into this, the Greek word for take up here is *airō*, which is a word that means take up or raise or lift something, but in the context of what he's saying, it was used to describe a system of torture people 2000 years ago were very familiar with and that is crucifixion. It's just another way of describing crucifixion. We've all heard of this before, but let me just read a little bit about it from a Bible Dictionary. It describes the cross this way. It says, "Crucifixion was sometimes preceded by scourging with thongs, to which were sometimes added nails, pieces of bones to heighten the pain, often so intense as to cause death. That process was also called flogging. Afterwards, the criminal carried his own cross, or part of it, in which case another was compelled to share the burden. The place of execution was outside the city. So after arriving there, the criminal was stripped of his clothes, and as the cross had been previously erected in the ground, he was drawn and made fast to it with cords or nails. The limbs of the victim were generally three to four feet above the earth, and the sufferer was left there to die of sheer exhaustion. And when simply bound with the thongs, it might take days to accomplish the process. Instances are recorded of persons surviving a crucifixion for nine days before dying. In most cases, the body was suffered to rot on the cross by the action of the sun and rain or be devoured by birds and beasts."

It was a horrible way to die. It's bad enough to die in an instant. But this is something else. This is prolonged agony. It was a death of embarrassment where the criminal was crucified naked. And even before that he was forced to carry the crossbeam that his arms would be nailed to the place of execution. The way it works is that the vertical beam would have already been in the ground. But to embarrass him, the Romans made the condemned

criminal carry the horizontal beam, called the “patibulum,” through the streets of the city to the place of execution. And while he was carrying it, you see this in the gospels, people would call him names, and they would throw stones at him or rotten food or filth or whatever thing they could find.

And that's what Jesus is referring to in verse 23. If anyone wishes to follow me, he must go through all of that daily. He must begin the crucifixion process by carrying his cross to the place of death. And he must do it every moment. He must be willing to suffer this type of humiliation all the time. I mean, if it wasn't bad enough before, Jesus raises the stakes even higher, and he now says you must metaphorically put yourself to death. He's not promoting suicide here. He's not telling you to actually kill yourself. But he's telling you to kill your pride if you want to follow him. In modern terms, he's telling his audience to go sit in their own electric chairs. Go pick up your own lethal injection needle.

And it makes you wonder why. I mean, this is strong language. And the strong language is there for you to get the point that if you want to be a Christian, you must give up the right to run your own life, and you must do it with a violence. You do it with a passion. Because you can't do this halfway. You can't die partially. You're either dead or you're not. You can't follow Jesus like that. This has to be an all-consuming thing for you.

By the way, the disciples would have gotten this because they knew what it was like for someone to be crucified. They'd seen it before. It was a common death back then of convicts and slaves and the worst people. Some of the disciples might have even had relatives who were crucified. And so when he said this, they got it. They knew what he was talking about. Jesus says, if you're going to follow me, you're going to have to die on a cross.

In his book, *Basic Christianity*, John Stott explains it this way. He says, “Jesus never concealed the fact that his religion included a demand as well as an offer. He gave no encouragement whatsoever to thoughtless applicants for discipleship. To follow Christ is to surrender to Him the rights over your lives, is to abdicate the throne of your heart and do homage to him as King.” Another author a W. Tozer said this, he said, “The Lord will not save those he cannot command. He will not divide his offices. We cannot have a half Christ. We take him for what he is, the anointed Savior and Lord who was King of Kings and Lord of Lords, or we don't get him at all.”

That's a good way to say this. If you want Jesus as your Savior and your sacrifice for sin, you have to take Him as your Lord because he's both. You can't split him up into bits and pieces. That's what everybody's trying to do today. They want to pray a prayer and then go on living like hell. They want to get sprinkled as a child or baptized and go on living like a pagan. They want a Savior, they don't want a Lord, but you can't have that. That's never offered to you in the Bible. Jesus is both.

Since I wasn't in our church this past Sunday, I visited another one. I actually watched it online with my relatives, and I remember the preacher saying over and over again that Jesus loves everybody. He just kept repeating that he accepts everybody no matter what you do. And as I heard that it kind of occurred to me, I read this passage and I remember thinking, that's not true. Jesus turns people away, and he turns people away who won't do this. The day before this, a couple days before this, he had just turned 1000s away.

In fact, if you remember the story of the rich young ruler, that's what you see there. The guy comes to Jesus, says he wants to be saved. Jesus says, Okay, well, here's what you need to do. You need to sell all that you have and then come follow me, and the man refused. He walked away. And the amazing thing about it is that Jesus let him go. He didn't go after him saying no, no, you don't understand. I didn't mean to offend you. No, he said, Look, this is the condition, take it or leave it. If you don't want it, fine. This is something that's drastically missing today. Because we're so consumed with trying to get people in that we forget, there's times when Jesus turned them away. There's times when he told people, look, this is not for you. It's for you if you repent, but it's not for you if you don't. You need to come to me for the right things. And that brings us to one more point to look at in this text here.

Just to review these other ones, the first thing a follower of Jesus will do is deny Himself. Secondly, he will take up the cross daily, which means he will deny himself to the point of death. A horrific death. You will have to give everything up. And you'll have to give it all up with a violence, he says, that the world won't understand. This is a supernatural thing, isn't it? I mean, you read a passage like this, it would only take a work of God to make anybody want to do this. I mean, Buddha had some high demands of his followers, but he never said anything like this. Muhammad had some high demands of the Muslims. He never said this. This is something else.

And it brings us to one more thing to talk about, one more thing a follower of Jesus will do, and that is he will follow him. This is very basic here, very simple, but we're just following the passage. The third thing a follower of Jesus will do is actually follow Him. He will go after him. If you read on, he says this in verse 23, Jesus says,

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

And that phrase, “Follow me,” it's important for the verse because it's in the continuous tense in Greek. So it could be translated, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must continually, regularly consistently follow me.” Jesus piggybacks off what he said earlier to tell us now that if you want to be my disciple, not only are you supposed to do these things, but you have to do them all the time. Not only are you supposed to deny yourself occasionally, or whenever you feel like it, you have to do it on a regular basis. He said this because disciples in his day, or followers of a teacher, would often physically follow their leader. They would eat with them, sleep with them, basically live with them. If you had a teacher like Jesus who traveled around the countryside, you would have to travel with him if you wanted to hear his teachings, because they had no cell phones back then. They had no computers. You guys can listen to preachers 2000 miles away, you don't think anything of it. They couldn't do that back then. So if you wanted to learn from Jesus, you had to literally follow your leader. He goes to Capernaum, you go to Capernaum. He goes to Nazareth, you go to Nazareth. It's just the way it worked.

And Jesus says this applies to the spiritual level as well, because if you want to be my disciple, you have to do that in your heart. I mean, Jesus is no longer with us on the earth anymore. So you can't literally follow him like they did. But you have to do it in a spiritual sense if you want to go to heaven. Which means that you can't hang on to your former way of life and hang on to Christ. That's not the way it works. You can't live however you want to and call yourself a Christian. The disciples couldn't do that. At one point in their ministry, Peter said, “Lord, we've left everything to follow you.” And he wasn't exaggerating. That wasn't it wasn't a joke. He said, “Lord, to whom else shall we go?” And it's the same way for us. In fact, I would say it like this, if you've never done this, you've never been saved. If nothing ever changed in you, nothing ever happened, because that's what Jesus does. He changes people, makes them different. He finds them one way, and he leaves them another.

This is a subject that's been debated a lot in recent years, because there's a movement out there right now called the free grace movement. You might have heard of it. But it says that God's grace is so free, that you don't have to repent in order to get it. You don't have to change, you can just go on living like you want to, because repenting is adding something to the gospel, it's a work. That's what they say. It's also known as the doctrine of carnal Christianity, which means that there's two types of Christians. There's the carnal ones and the spiritual ones. There's the fleshly ones who don't repent, and then there's the godly ones who do, but they're both the same, everybody's okay. One's just more mature than the other.

I want you to notice, that's not what this is saying here. Jesus doesn't say that this is for the spiritual ones to do while the rest of you get off the hook. He says this is for everybody. And he doesn't say this is what I recommend but I understand if you can't do it, this is really hard. He says you have to do this now or else you're lost. And it has to stick. That's what following me means. You can't be a Christian one day and a Muslim the next and an atheist the day after that and just bounce back and forth. You can't be a believer one day and unbeliever the next day and then a “searcher” for the rest of your life, you're undecided. This thing has to go on your entire life. And you might be wondering, okay, well, that's pretty harsh. What do I get if I do that? I mean, deny myself with a

violence and do it every day, follow Jesus and make a break from my former way of life? That's pretty harsh. What's in it for me? That's a great question.

And the disciples must have been wondering this, because Jesus addresses that in verse 24. If you look, it says, This is what you'll get out of this. It says,

“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?”

Jesus says, if you're wondering what you'll get out of this, this is what you'll get: you'll get your life. You'll save your soul from hell. It's kind of a mysterious thing he says here, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it.” But it means that you don't get to keep your life unless you give it to him. You don't get to hold on to it unless you put it in his hands. You can just imagine how hard it was for disciples to hear this. Remember, the day before, Jesus had just had a massive crowd on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. And that's where they were from. The disciples were from the Sea of Galilee, from Galilee. And so this would have included their family and friends. This would have included their loved ones, their neighbors, people they grew up with. They were hometown heroes. They were the star of the show. People were patting them on the back and saying, hey, you're following the Messiah, way to go. And next day, everybody's cursing them. Next day, everybody's gone. Jesus says, that's what it will take the follow me. You're going to have to lose your life. Everything you once knew, gone. Because nothing else will get you into heaven. In fact, to put it in an even stronger terms, he says this in verse 26. He says,

“For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory, and the glory of the Father and the Holy Angels.

That's pretty straightforward. But what Jesus is saying there is that if you're ashamed of me now, I'll be ashamed of you then. He says, Look, guys, if you're embarrassed of all this now, I'll be embarrassed of you in eternity. So don't be that way. Don't do that.

Listen, friends, if you're saved this morning, you're saved by grace alone. I can't make that clear enough. We've talked about that for years as a church, and that holds true in this verse as well. Ephesians two says faith is a gift. And it's the same way with repentance. If you repent of your sins and turn away, that's God's grace in your life, too. That's a gift. Second Timothy two says that. You don't earn it. You don't deserve it. But if you have it, this is what it looks like. You will deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him. So the question is, will you do that today? Will you make that kind of sacrifice for the Lord? And we just read earlier in the service Luke chapter 14. But there Jesus says this. Apparently this was important enough to repeat later on in his ministry. In Luke 14, he says,

“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?”

And what he was saying there is, you have to count the cost of following me. You got to consider what it takes. One scholar said there's far too many half-built towers in Christendom today. There's far too many people that got halfway down the journey with Christ and turned away because it wasn't what they expected. Jesus says, I want you to think about that on the front end. I want you to consider that at the beginning. This is what it will take to be my chosen.

You know, as I told you earlier, we did have quite an experience crossing the border this week. And it was something else, and it was all because we forgot one thing. That was what was ironic about it. If you've ever crossed international lines, you know that you come to the border with a lap full of paperwork. So I had my passport, permanent residency card, I had my driver's license, travel documents, I even had a bright smile on my

face. I looked very pleasant. But I didn't have my test results. So I couldn't get in. And I'm afraid there's a lot of people who are going to hell today for a similar reason, because they're forgetting one thing. They're doing all kinds of stuff. They're going to church, they're reading the Bible, they're praying, singing, giving money. They're not repenting. They're not making Jesus Lord of their life. You don't want to do that today. They have a John 3:16 version of Jesus, but not a Luke 9 one. They have a warm, fuzzy idea of him but not a tough one. But friends, we have to have both, if we will be saved. And let me pray for you now that you would have that. Let's go to the Lord in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we do come to you this morning in some ways grieving over a text like this. Because there may be some here today who don't have this understanding of you. And I know there's many out in the world. Lord, would you help our church to come to grips with what this text teaches us, even as we come to the Lord's Supper, and we think about what the cross meant? Would you turn our minds around as to what you expect us to do as your people? Thank you, Father, that you sent your son to the cross. When you say, take up the cross, you're not asking us to do anything you haven't done. So Lord, may we make this sacrifice as well. Thank you for these words. And Lord, I pray that it would set us apart from the world, and the world would look at us and they would see Jesus. They would see these sacrifices and say, we want that. How can we have it? Would you go with us now father, and help us to take these words to heart. We don't want to be just hearers of the word. We want to be doers in following Christ, and we pray this in his blessed name. Amen.