

Take Up Your Cross

2026-02-08 – Luke 9:18-27



As the ministry of Jesus continues to grow and more people begin to hear about the kingdom of God, the question for the people becomes "who is this man and what is he here to do?" For Jesus, the question is far different. He knows he is headed to Jerusalem to be rejected, killed, and raised on the third day. The question he asks his followers is "will you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me?" This week we will look at what it looks like to truly follow Jesus and how to make sure we are following the king of kings.

Good morning, good morning. It's good to see you all. If you've got your Bible, I want to invite you to open to Luke chapter 9. We're going to start today in verse 18. And we are in this series in the Gospel of Luke, **The Certainty of the Good News**, where we are looking at what it means to follow Jesus and the confidence we can have as we hear the testimony of what he has done.

Take Up Your Cross Daily

Today we are coming to one of, I think, what is one of the most challenging passages in Luke. Because we're at a moment today where Jesus is going to tell his followers, take up your cross daily if you want to follow me. And we know he took up the cross for us once and for all. We sing and rejoice that the wrath of God was satisfied through the death of Jesus. And we rejoice that he rose again. We would not be here today had he not risen. And so today we are going to talk about the command for us as believers. And this is something often lost in the modern Western world because we are so individualized. The gospel in the 1960s became hyper-individualized. If you don't know this, if you go and look, the movement of the gospel became focused not on following a king, but making it accessible to many people. Now, not everyone was doing this, but a broad movement of Christianity was how do we simplify this message so much that someone can respond quickly? And the problem with this, I mean, the Bible has a problem with this.

Take Up Your Cross Daily

Deny yourself
Take up your cross
Follow Jesus

But Jesus, when he talks about following him, he says you need to deny yourself. He says you need to take up your cross and you need to follow him. Being a Christian is not about I said a prayer, I get to go to heaven. It's about there is a king on a throne and I follow him.

And so today we are going to talk about Taking Up Your Cross Daily. And if you are a believer, my prayer for you is that today is a day where you come away encouraged, recognizing what he has done and remembering how you are called to follow him. If you're a believer today and you listen to this and you feel guilt because you haven't been denying yourself, I pray today is a heart check. And you say, I know I need to turn back to him in this moment. And if you're a non-believer, I pray the Lord opens your eyes today, that by the end of today you recognize how good it is that we can deny ourselves because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross for us.

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To that end, I'm going to pray and we will dive in.

Father in heaven, we thank you for this day. Jesus, we thank you that your name is great. We thank you that one day every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess your glory. We pray right now, Lord, that as we gather together, your spirit would be moving in our midst, that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear what your word has to say. We praise you, Lord, that you humbled yourself and became obedient even to the point of death on the cross. And we pray that we would take seriously the commands that you give us in this passage, that we would walk in this world, following in your example. I pray right now, Lord, that your Spirit would be moving in me, that you would speak to me and speak through me, that these would be your words and not mine. And Jesus, we thank you that as we pray all of these things, we pray them in your name, because as you tell us to bear our cross daily, you bore the cross, and bore our sin and shame, that we could stand before you and have eternal life. We pray all of this in your holy and precious name. Amen.

Well, we're in Luke 9, and we're going to be talking about bearing or taking up your cross daily. And I'm going to accidentally say bearing your cross. It's the same language, just a different translation. I apologize. That's how I memorized it back when I was in Awana. But take up your cross, bear your cross. The imagery today is what we are called to do.

While he was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They answered, "John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, that one of the ancient prophets has come back."

Luke 9:18-19 CSB

And so we're going to start in Luke 9:18, and we're going to work our way to the moment Jesus says, take up your cross and follow me.

Now, Luke 9:18 begins, **"While he was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say that I am?'"** Now, before I read any further, I need to set the stage for you. Because you see, Luke 9:18 through 26 is the pivotal moment of Luke. In this moment, Jesus is going to ask them, "Who do you say I am?" And Peter says, "You are God's Messiah." And then Jesus, for the first time, lays out the plan. "I'm going to go to Jerusalem. I'm going to be rejected and killed by the religious leaders. And three days later, I will rise again." From this moment forward in the Gospel of Luke, everything is oriented towards the crucifixion of Christ and his resurrection.

In the moment we are in, though, we are at the first moment where Jesus is going to acknowledge and admit, yes, I am God's Messiah in language that is abundantly clear. When we read in Luke chapter 9, as they're sitting there, this is also a moment for the disciples where they're coming into this moment very excited. If you've ever watched the Lord of the Rings movies, or better yet, read the books, you know when Frodo and the Hobbits get the ring to Rivendell, and they think the journey's over. They don't know about the box set. They don't know about the extended edition. They don't know that they're at the beginning. They think that they're at the end of the story. The movie, and I could talk about those movies forever, but the movie even just sets it up for you, like the happiness that they have, but then every once in a while there's like the strings come in and like Gandalf looks serious for a minute because they know the ring hasn't been destroyed.

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Now I say this about the disciples because what did the disciples just do? At the start of Luke chapter 9, Jesus sends the disciples out and they go out and they proclaim the gospel and they heal people. And they're doing all of these things in such an incredible way that they're thinking, "Look at this. The king has given us power. We are going out and we are doing what he does." And they are so excited about this kingdom that Jesus has come to bring. In fact, it's not just them who are excited. The crowds are excited.

While he was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They answered, "John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, that one of the ancient prophets has come back."

Luke 9:18-19 CSB

Herod the tetrarch heard about everything that was going on. He was perplexed, because some said that John had been raised from the dead, some that Elijah had appeared, and others that one of the ancient prophets had risen. "I beheaded John," Herod said, "but who is this I hear such things about?" And he wanted to see him.

Luke 9:7-9 CSB

The same things that we're going to hear Jesus ask his disciples to say Herod wondered about. You see, Jesus to his disciples says, "**Who do the crowds say that I am?**" **And they answered, John the Baptist. Some say that, some say Elijah. Still others, that one of the ancient prophets has come back.**

A few verses earlier, Herod said these same things. **He heard about everything that was going on** as these 12 men were spreading the gospel and is what he's been hearing about Jesus. And he wondered **if John had been raised from the dead, because that's what some were saying.** *Some were saying that Elijah had appeared, and others were saying that the ancient prophets had risen.* Herod was confused because **he had beheaded John.** But he wanted to learn. He wanted to know who this Jesus was. He wanted to see him.

Now, this is important because Luke, from the moment Jesus rejects the temptations of the devil to this moment, the key question everyone has been asking is, "Who is he?"

"But you," he asked them, "who do you say that I am?"
Peter answered, "God's Messiah."

Luke 9:20 CSB

And in this moment, Jesus looks at his disciples. **He says, "But you, who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "God's Messiah."** He is confessing that Jesus is the Christ.

Messiah = Christ

Christ is a title, not a last name

Christ refers to the King from the line of David who will sit on the throne forever

Now, you may not know this, but the word Messiah in Greek is the same word as Christ. When we talk about Jesus Christ, Christ is not a last name. It is a title. This is very important. Christ is not a last name. It is a title. This is important because every time we call Jesus Christ, we are saying "He is king." He is a king from the line of David who will sit on a throne forever. When Jesus calls himself Son of Man, as we will see in one verse, he is saying, I'm the guy referenced in Daniel chapter seven, one like the Son of Man who will

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sit at the right hand of God for all eternity. When Peter says you are God's Messiah, he is not meaning you are just a man. He is meaning you are the Christ.

Now, Peter doesn't know the full extent. In Matthew and Mark, right after Peter says this, when Jesus responds, Peter starts to rebuke him. We don't see that in Luke, but in Peter's mind, Jesus is going to go into Jerusalem. He's gonna sit down on a throne and he's gonna reign and take over and they're gonna push out Rome and they're gonna become the power they are supposed to be.

When Peter says God's Messiah he's also thinking we've seen your power, Jesus. We've seen you drive out demons. We've seen you heal. We've seen the catch a fish. We've seen you feed 5,000. We've seen you speak and a storm stopped! We have seen all these things. We know your power. We know you are the Messiah, the Christ.

"But you," he asked them, "who do you say that I am?"

Peter answered, "God's Messiah."

But he strictly warned and instructed them to tell this to no one, saying, "It is necessary that the Son of Man suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day."

Luke 9:20-22 CSB

And Jesus's response is he strictly warned and instructed them to tell this to no one, saying, "It is necessary that the Son of Man suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and scribes, be killed and be raised on the third day." Now, we know that this is what happens, right? But imagine sitting there and being like, "This is the guy who when he preached in his hometown and they went to stone him, he just walked through. This is the guy who stopped a storm with a word. And he's saying he's going to die. We just called him the Messiah, and he's now talking about dying and rising again. No, the Messiah doesn't need to die. The Messiah needs to reign." The disciples would have been very confused at this moment. They would have been wondering. And of course, Jesus, every time he talks about his death, by the way, he always talks about his resurrection. Because this is the mission he came to do. The Son of Man came to suffer in our place, to die in our place, that the wrath of God would be satisfied on the cross. But as Jesus says this, they don't know that yet. We know they don't know that. We know they don't believe that, by the way, because when he dies, none of them are waiting at the tomb three days later. None of them think he's going to rise again, and yet he does.

Then he said to them all, "If anyone wants to **follow** after me, let him:

deny himself,

take up his cross daily,

and **follow** me.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it. For what does it benefit someone if he gains the whole world, and yet 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 that of the Father and the holy angels. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

Luke 9:23-27 CSB

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After Jesus says what's about to happen to him, the first time he says it, the first time he acknowledges he is the Christ, the first time he says, here's where I'm headed, he then says this to his disciples: ******"If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it. For what does it benefit someone if he gains the whole world and yet 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 that of the Father and the holy angels. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."****** (Luke 9:23–27).

Jesus tells them, I'm going to die and I'm going to rise, and if you want to follow me, you need to deny yourself, you need to take up your cross, and you need to follow me. And in case you're thinking this is just to these 12 men, he says, if anyone wants to follow me, which means if you're here and you're a follower of Jesus, the call for you, the command for you is deny yourself, take up your cross, daily, and follow Jesus.

Deny yourself	Take up your cross daily	Follow Jesus
To deny yourself is a righteous recognition of your unrighteousness		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is recognizing you are poor, hungry, and weeping (Luke 6:20-26)• Example: The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14)		

And so we're going to look at just these three verbs: deny, take up and follow. And we're going to start with deny yourself.

To deny yourself, what this means is this is a righteous recognition of your unrighteousness. A righteous recognition of your unrighteousness. Say that a bunch of times fast if you can.

But I put this here because if you remember in Luke chapter 6, blessed are the poor, the hungry, and the weeping. And those are about a spiritual state. Blessed are you if you know you are unrighteous, if you hunger for righteousness, and if you weep because you know you can't be righteous on your own. For yours is the kingdom of God. When Jesus says deny yourself, he is speaking here in very clear language about if you think you are righteous in your own eyes, you have not denied yourself. If you think you can do this within your own strength, you do not understand the law and the prophets, let alone my words. You are blind in your sin if you think you can stand before God in your own strength. Read carefully through scripture and whenever people see God in his glory, what's the first thing they do? They bow, they cover, they realize their unholiness. They realize how alien they are to a holy and perfect God because they are unworthy in any way. You want to follow Jesus you have to deny yourself you have to righteously recognize your unrighteousness.

When Jesus in Luke chapter 4 says, "I'm coming, that the blind would see." This is the spiritual lens of this language. If we are able to see, it is because he has opened our eyes. Because the Spirit has worked to show us that we indeed are unrighteous and we need to be covered by his blood in order to be righteous. Now, a great example of this is from Luke chapter 18. There's a wonderful parable, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, verses 9 through 14. ***Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else. "Two men went up to the temple to pray," he said, "one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector."*** Now, a Pharisee in that day would have been someone who had wealth and someone who had, in the eyes of the public and in the eyes of the day, they were perceived

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to be very righteous by their own strength, their own works, their own wealth. A Pharisee in that day was the person that the people would see as the greatest in the kingdom of Israel that was under Roman rule.

A tax collector also had wealth, presumably, but they would have been seen as the least because they had sided with Rome. Because these weren't Israeli taxes being collected. These would have been taxes of Rome. They would have partnered with Rome. This is why there's a guy by the name of Levi who's also named Matthew. He has a Greek name, Matthew, because when he worked with the Romans, he went by that name. It's like a little thing, but the tax collectors were those that the people of Israel said, "You're the biggest betrayers of us. The Pharisees were the greatest of us." And so they both go into the temple to pray.

The Pharisee was standing and praying like this about himself. "God, I thank you that I'm not like other people, greedy, unrighteous adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of everything I get." Now, I hope you all see the problem with that. But also, there's a really funny thing that might happen. You might say, "Well, I don't pray like that." Do you see? Because if you say, "Well, I don't pray like that," you're praying like that. If your standard of righteousness is based on human comparison, I promise, the only standard you should compare yourself to is the one who died on the cross for your sins. And when you do that, you're never going to come away saying, "Look how great I am."

The tax collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven, but kept striking his chest and saying, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other. Because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:9–14). When Jesus says, "deny yourself," he is saying, "cry out to God for mercy!" Because you will never be righteous in your own strength.

Now, the beauty of the gospel is that through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are redeemed and we become children of God. And then when God sees us, he doesn't see us for our sin. He has mercy on us because of his son's death and resurrection because we've been sealed by the spirit and he sees us as his children. If you are a believer you have been saved by grace not by anything you have done but because God has covered you with the blood of Jesus and you are saved. Denying yourself is recognizing that that truth is the only way by which we must be saved. This is to deny yourself.

Now I want to mention here, this passage, when I was a young man, I know this passage causes a lot of believers to fumble, because I had a friend who in his attempt to deny himself, he got a notebook. And every time he sinned, he wrote it down. And first and foremost, there aren't enough notebooks in the world. There's not enough space on all the computer storages, even for digital notebooks. Whatever you want to do with that, there is no way for us to go down that path, because the point of denying yourself is not in order for you to just sit there listing your sin and to fall back on that, but it is to look to the one who is worthy, to cry out to him for mercy. This can be taken the wrong way if we turn this passage into a legalistic thought; if I do this or if I don't do this, instead of looking to the one who saves, if we turn this into an oppressive way of living, that's what the Pharisees were doing in that day.

I'm going to give what I think is a silly example, but I think is a good example of this. So this week there's a really big sports event on, right? The NBA Celebrity All-Star Game on Friday. My wife didn't think that was funny. So no, the Super Bowl tonight. I've known people who say, if you're a Christian, you can't watch

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that. Now, I'm not talking about the halftime show. The halftime show, if you're a believer, don't watch the halftime show. The music is not honoring the Lord in the 1st place. We've gotten some messages about what should we watch this year during the halftime show. Do you know what we do here, when we do the Super Bowl party like we're doing today? We just turn the TV off for the halftime show. It's the simplest solution every year. So we don't need to make a big deal out of one year or not. That's a whole other thing. But we don't need to watch things that rejoice in the hedonism of the world.

But when you watch a football game, if you're like, I can't watch that because I like that, but I need to deny myself, you might start to find yourself in a trap where there's nothing you can do in this life as you seek to follow the Lord. But you know, last year, I'm not a fan of Ohio State, but a family invited me to watch the national championship last year, and they have bad taste in football teams. They cheered for Ohio State. I'm not going to say if they're here or not today, but one of the things that I remember as we were watching the game, we were just talking about life, we were having fellowship, and then I found out from them, hey, you may not know this, but the Ohio State team, there's like a mini revival on their campus. When they won the game, which they beat Notre Dame, so I was happy about that, but you know, like I, but I can joke about that moment, but what was amazing is after the game and every interview, The Ohio State players were talking about Jesus.

And we can turn this idea of self-denial into a thing where we say, well, you can't watch that, you can't this, you can't that, but instead we should turn it into how are we glorifying God through what we are doing? How are we looking to Jesus in these moments? Because what I don't want you to take today is you're not allowed to watch the Super Bowl. Because I like that, so I have to deny that. No, that's not what this passage is about. It's about how is God being glorified?

There will be people on the winning team who love Jesus and people on the losing team who love Jesus. It's not that the losing team, well, they didn't love Jesus. No, that's not what this is about. It's about how do we glorify God in whatever we are doing. How do we point people to Jesus? This idea of denial is recognizing our unrighteousness and pointing to his and trusting in his. If we allow this to become a thing where we don't do anything because we're not sure what we're allowed or not allowed to do, first off, read the word well and you'll be able to figure it out and we have the Holy Spirit to help us. But if we are focused on ourselves, we are going to crush ourselves in this. I promise if you get a notebook and start writing down all your sins, you'll run out of ink and paper long before you run out of sins.

To deny yourself is a righteous recognition of your unrighteousness. When Jesus tells his followers this, he is saying, if you're going to follow me, you're going to recognize how poor you are and you're going to trust in the righteousness that I give you through the cross.

Deny yourself	Take up your cross daily	Follow Jesus
To take up your cross is you leaving behind all earthly allegiances		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The disciples would have been very familiar with crucifixion• Taking up your cross was the statement of a failed kingdom in the world• His taking up the cross was the means of absolute victory for the kingdom of God		

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And this brings us to take up your cross daily. To take up your cross daily is you leaving behind all earthly allegiances.

Now we got to talk for a minute about crucifixion because we need to root this moment that Jesus says these words in what the disciples would have heard. You know there's three Lord of the Rings books, so the end is not when they get to Rivendell. We know we're only a little, you know, there's a whole lot of Bible left when we read Jesus say, take up your cross daily. And we know he died on the cross and he rose again. But in that day, in that day, crucifixion was used for one thing. If you rebelled against Rome and you were a leader or high up in the rebellion, when Rome crushed your rebellion, the leaders would hold that cross and they would walk to their execution, bearing it. When Jesus says, take up your cross, the disciples maybe in their lives would have seen people crucified or would have seen people hanging who had been crucified. But when Jesus says, take up your cross daily, the language of the people that would have heard this, the 12 men in front of him who don't yet know he's going to rise from the grave, even though he said it, they don't believe it. There's so much evidence of that in the rest of the gospel. They would have listened and said, this is loser language. What on earth do you mean? We're going to follow you. We just went out and proclaimed the kingdom like you told us to. And now you're telling us following you is ultimately going to end with us bearing a cross? What on earth?

This would be like if when they wrote the Declaration of Independence and sent it out and announced to the colonies and to England their intentions, if the founding fathers went out and said, "All right guys, let's get some carpenters, let's build a gallows." This is, and I don't say Jesus is a loser, but this is language in their day that would be tied only to losers. Because how Rome dealt with any measure of rebellion is crucifixion. The men crucified with Jesus on the cross, the language we use is robber, but that is a poor, poor, poor translation because it's insurrectionist. Barabbas, the guy they traded out for Jesus, was someone trying to rise against Rome. Jesus is saying, "I am the King, I am God's Messiah, I am the Christ, and Rome is going to crucify me, and if you follow me, be prepared to bear your cross as well." Again, they don't know death and resurrection. He said it, but I have to imagine that Peter and the other disciples are looking at each other like, "Is this a test? He's got to be. He's got to be testing us here. He's got to be checking us for our faithfulness."

But the reality is that to take up your cross, and the language Jesus is using here, is he is saying, "You, in this life, need to leave everything behind to follow me. You need to leave behind the allegiances you have as citizens of Israel. You need to leave behind your tribe, your nation, everything to follow me." This was radical language. By the way, the language of defeat—this is such that, and I was going to put it up here, but I decided not to, because I don't even want it up here. There's graffiti from between 100 and 200 AD where a guy scraped on a plaster wall a man hanging from a cross with a donkey's head, and then wrote, "Alexander worshiping his god." The Romans thought Christians were hilarious, that they would worship someone that Rome crucified. They could not imagine that he would really rise from the dead. They assumed it was a hoax and a lie. But you know, each disciple that was martyred was martyred saying it's true. You know that the early church exploded in growth despite persecution, all claiming he died on a cross—the death of a failed king—but it turns out that was his victory, because his taking up the cross was the means of absolute victory for the kingdom of God. This world can do nothing to stop the kingdom, because it did everything it could: Jesus breathed his last and he died, and three days later he rose.

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When Jesus says, "Take up your cross daily," he is calling us to follow him, knowing that in this life it will likely involve suffering. If they hate you, if they slander you, if they revile you for my name, rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven (Luke chapter 6). The reality of taking up your cross daily is recognizing that the victory of the kingdom of God in this world is going to look like failure, but you still follow me. To take up your cross is you leaving behind all earthly allegiances.

Deny yourself	Take up your cross daily	Follow Jesus
To follow Jesus is you seeing the gains of this world as loss compared to the glory of the Son of Man		
For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it. For what does it benefit someone if he gains the whole world, and yet 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 that of the Father and the holy angels.		
Luke 9:24-26 CSB		

And this brings us to the last point: to follow Jesus. To follow Jesus is you seeing the gains of this world as loss compared to the glory of the Son of Man.

After Jesus says, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me, he says these words **"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it. For what does it benefit someone if he gains the whole world and yet loses or forfeits himself?"** Now, if we go back to Luke chapter 4, the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness the devil tempts and use your power for your comfort, for food. Worship me and I'll give you the kingdoms of the world. Drop down into the temple grounds and come in glory and Jesus refuses all of that. What he asks for believers to do here is exactly what he has done and shown us he has resisted the temptation. To follow Jesus means we see that the greatest things we could have in this life are nothing compared to the reward in heaven if we follow him.

"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 that of the Father and the holy angels."

Deny yourself	Take up your cross daily	Follow Jesus
To follow Jesus is you seeing the gains of this world as loss compared to the glory of the Son of Man		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Son of Man (Messiah) will be seated on a throne at the right hand of the Father forever (Daniel 7)• Following Jesus means confidently living as if His kingdom has come despite what we see in this world		

The Son of Man will be seated on a throne at the right hand of the Father forever. He bore the cross. He bore our sin and shame. He died on the cross. He rose from the grave. He ascended into heaven. He sent his spirit, and he is right now seated at the right hand of God on a throne. And that is where he will be forever. When he returns for all who believe, we will spend eternity with him. He is the king who death cannot defeat, and he has the only kingdom that will last eternally.

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If you are a believer, you are called to follow him to deny yourself, to take up your cross daily, and to follow after him. Following Jesus means confidently living as if his kingdom has come despite what we see in this world. It's not going to feel like victory very often in this life. Right? You don't look around and say, wow, how great things are in the world. But we're told if we follow Jesus, we have peace that surpasses all understanding. Whatever struggles we face, whatever might happen with our health, with family members losing a loved one, whatever we face in this life, if we follow Jesus ultimately in heaven we will see the reward that comes from him and in this life we have peace knowing that what he has promised he will bring to pass.

Take Up Your Cross Daily

Deny yourself – *Righteously recognize your unrighteousness*

Take up your cross - *Leave behind your earthly allegiances*

Follow Jesus – *See the gains of this world as loss compared to the glory of the Son of Man*

We are called to take up our cross daily.

Now, brothers and sisters, let me make sure this is very clear: even if you were crucified, even if the world goes to the darkest future, even if America becomes a place where Christians are persecuted to the point of death, your death on the cross is not the thing that will save you. It's what he did for us. Do not miss that, because when he says, "Take up your cross and bear it daily," he is not in this moment saying you have to die on a cross in order to be saved. He is saying, "I have died for you, and I call you to follow me, to follow after me, to do as I have done." Deny yourself. Jesus, when he came, humbled himself and became obedient—even to the point of death on a cross. The death, not just of a criminal, but of a defeated leader of a rebellion. Jesus, in dying on the cross for our sins, by the standards of the world, it was the lowest death someone could have. But the good news is the kingdom is upside down, and so his name is exalted above every other name because of what he has done.

If you are a believer, you are called to follow in His example: deny yourself, do not think of yourself as righteous, righteously recognize your unrighteousness, and then seek—this is Ephesians 2:1-10—we are saved by grace, we were dead, we are alive, and we were saved that we would do the good works prepared for us by God. And so, as you seek to do good, don't do good and think, "Well, look at this, look what I've done," but instead say, "Wow, God, You who made me alive through the work of Your Spirit, I'm now doing kingdom works, and it's You working through me and it's You working in me."

Take up your cross. If you're a believer, you are not an American, you are not an Illinoisan, you are not a person of Illinois, you are not whatever nationality, you are not whatever sports—any identity in this life pales in comparison to who you are as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. If you think any other identity is the greatest, if you seek to make yourself great in your own eyes, if your family and your legacy and what you want to leave behind is what you are focused on, take up your cross. Recognize none of that matters. None of that matters. And then, as none of it matters, seek to faithfully follow the Lord. Seek to love those around you.

I know in youth group right now they're going through the Last Supper where Jesus washes the disciples' feet and He talks about His great love for them. As you take up your cross and as you deny yourself, try and live like Jesus for those around you, loving them the way that He has loved us.

THE CERTAINTY OF THE GOOD NEWS

Pastor Matt Johnson

And lastly, follow Jesus. Don't see gains and losses in this world as what matters, but recognize that the true reward is in heaven, and in this life we are called to live so that others would come to see the glory of Jesus. Because for eternity, that's what we will be celebrating, so celebrate it even now.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, Father, we thank you as we talk about the command we are called to follow—the commands to deny ourselves, to take up the cross, and to follow Jesus. We thank you that we are not given abstract commands that we have no idea how to follow, but your Son showed us exactly what it means to walk faithfully before you. We praise you, Lord, that for all who believe, we have been given the Holy Spirit—that as we seek to deny ourselves and take up our crosses and follow you, we thank you that with the Spirit we are able to do it, not in our own strength, but in what you have given us. Father, we pray right now—I pray, Lord, for all the believers here—that they would take seriously these commands, that we would not see our faith as a "get out of hell" card or a "get into heaven" card, but instead, we would recognize the radical kingdom that we have joined through the work of your Son.

And, Father, I pray that if there is anyone here who does not know you, who does not have a saving relationship with you, that even now your Spirit would open their eyes, that as they seek to follow you, you would show them that they can deny themselves. They can recognize that they are a sinner before you, and they can cry out to you, and that you will hear—and for all who cry out to you, they will be saved. We thank you, Lord, that as we pray and as we cry out to you, we do so in confidence, because Jesus, you are at the right hand of your Father, and you hear our prayers. We pray all of this in your holy and precious name. Amen.



Digging Deeper – **Take Up Your Cross** – Luke 9:18-27

1. What stood out to you from the sermon?

Read Luke 9:18-27

2. What stands out to you as you read through the passage?
3. What are the different things Jesus is called leading up to Peter's confession?
4. Why do you think Jesus warns the disciples not to tell others he is the Messiah?
5. How would you feel if you were following Jesus in that day (not knowing what would come), and he announced he would die and rise again? What would that make you want to do?
6. How does the suffering and rejection of Jesus match what he has taught already in Luke? (Hint, Luke 6)
7. What does it mean to deny yourself? How are you denying yourself for the kingdom of God?
8. What does it mean to take up your cross daily? How are you taking up your cross daily?
9. What does it mean to follow Jesus based on how you answered the previous two questions?
10. If someone watched your life from the outside, would they think you have taken up your cross and denied yourself to follow Jesus? Why do you answer the way you do?
11. What action steps do you need to take to more completely follow the commands of Jesus in this passage?
12. Take some time to end in prayer by sharing prayer requests and praying for one another.

Overall Sermon Summary

The sermon, based on Luke 9:18–27, explores the pivotal moment where Jesus reveals his identity as the Messiah and outlines the cost of discipleship. It emphasizes that following Jesus is not a simple, individualized decision but a commitment to a king, involving self-denial, daily cross-bearing, and faithful following. Pastor Matt sets the context with the disciples' excitement after their ministry successes, Jesus' prediction of his death and resurrection, and the call to discipleship. Using biblical examples, personal anecdotes, and cultural references like **The Lord of the Rings**, the message warns against a hyper-individualized gospel and encourages believers to recognize their unrighteousness, abandon earthly allegiances, and view worldly gains as loss compared to eternal glory. It addresses believers for encouragement or conviction and non-believers for salvation, closing with a prayer for obedience through the Holy Spirit.

Take Up Your Cross Daily (Overall Command)

The core command from Jesus in Luke 9:23 is for anyone wanting to follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow him. This is presented as a daily lifestyle, not a one-time event, contrasting with modern Western individualism where Christianity is reduced to a quick prayer for heaven. Pastor Matt notes this was lost in the 1960s gospel simplification, shifting focus from following a king to personal accessibility. Jesus' words follow his first clear prediction of suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection, orienting the gospel toward the cross. The imagery of cross-bearing evokes Roman crucifixion for rebels, signifying ultimate defeat in worldly terms but victory in God's kingdom. Believers are called to live confidently in God's kingdom despite worldly failure, with peace surpassing understanding, knowing eternal reward awaits. Even martyrdom doesn't save; only Jesus' work does. The sermon prays for courage, heart checks for guilt, and eye-opening for non-believers, highlighting Jesus' example of humility and obedience to death.

Deny Yourself

Denying oneself means a righteous recognition of one's unrighteousness, acknowledging spiritual poverty and inability to achieve righteousness alone. Referencing Luke 6 (Beatitudes: blessed are the poor, hungry, weeping spiritually), it stresses that self-perceived righteousness blocks denial. Biblical encounters with God's glory lead to humility and awareness of unholiness. In Luke 4, Jesus brings sight to the spiritually blind, enabled by the Spirit revealing sin and the need for Christ's blood. The parable of the Pharisee and tax collector (Luke 18:9–14) illustrates: the self-righteous

Pharisee thanks God he's not like sinners, boasting works, while the tax collector cries for mercy and is justified. Human comparison fails; compare only to Christ. The gospel's beauty is redemption through Jesus' blood, making believers God's children by grace, not works. Misapplications include legalistic sin-listing or avoiding enjoyable activities like watching sports (e.g., Super Bowl) out of misplaced denial. Instead, focus on glorifying God in all things, trusting the Holy Spirit, not crushing oneself with rules like the Pharisees. For followers, it means trusting Christ's righteousness given through the cross.

Take Up Your Cross

Taking up one's cross daily means leaving behind all earthly allegiances, embracing suffering for Christ's sake. Rooted in Roman crucifixion for rebellion leaders, it's "loser language" to the disciples, who expected a conquering Messiah after seeing Jesus' power (demons cast out, healings, feeding 5,000, storm calming). They don't grasp his predicted death and resurrection yet. Jesus calls followers to abandon national, tribal, or personal identities (e.g., not primarily American or sports fan, but citizen of heaven). Historical graffiti mocks Christians for worshiping a crucified "loser," but Jesus' cross was victory over sin, with resurrection proving the kingdom's unstoppable nature. If hated or slandered for Jesus (Luke 6), rejoice for heavenly reward. Victory looks like failure worldly but is true in God's upside-down kingdom. Martyred disciples and early church growth affirm this. Believers should love others as Jesus did (e.g., washing feet), doing good works (Ephesians 2:1–10) not for self-glory but through the Spirit, recognizing no legacy matters except faithful following.

Follow Jesus

Following Jesus means seeing worldly gains as loss compared to the Son of Man's glory. Jesus explains: saving life loses it, losing for him saves it; gaining the world forfeits the soul; being ashamed of him leads to his shame at his glorious return (Luke 9:24–26). Echoing his wilderness temptations (Luke 4), Jesus resisted comfort, power, and glory for obedience. He now sits eternally at God's right hand, undefeated by death, with an everlasting kingdom. Believers follow by living as if the kingdom has come, despite worldly struggles (health, loss), with peace and hope in promises. Not abstract; Jesus modeled it. Celebrate his glory now, pointing others to it for eternity. Prayer thanks God for the Spirit enabling this, urging serious faith as radical kingdom membership, not a "get out of hell" card. For non-believers, cry out recognizing sin for salvation.