



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli † Deo † Gloria

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE
The Mark of True Discipleship
Sermon Notes
Luke 9:23-26
July 15, 2012

²³ And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”

- When we turn to the pages of Scripture, we are reading from God’s revelation of Himself. However, we quickly learn that we are limited, finite beings in our understanding and knowledge of all things. God, on the other hand, is infinite in His being and glory.
- Therefore, when we, as finite creatures, behold the infinite and Holy, we do so in a manner that, **although true, is not complete.**
- **To put it another way, although we cannot fully know God, we can know God through His Word in a manner that is sufficient for salvation, loving God, correcting one another and training in righteousness.**
- Because of this great distinction between the infinite and finite, the Creator and His creation, God often speaks in the Bible in paradoxes. **A paradox is a statement that, although it appears to be a contradiction, is in fact true.**
- The great twentieth century theologian and apologist Cornelius Van Til wrote, “Now since God is not fully comprehensible to us we are bound to come into what seems to be contradictions in all our knowledge. Our knowledge is analogical [*i.e., there is no univocal point at which God’s knowledge is the same as man’s knowledge*] and therefore must be paradoxical” (*The Defense of the Faith*, 44). Furthermore, Van Til writes, “All the truths of the Christian religion have of necessity the appearance of being contradictory” (*Common Grace and the Gospel*, 165).

- Such paradoxical truths include the fact that **God is three, yet He is One** (i.e., the Doctrine of the Trinity).
- Another is that **Christ has two nature**: human and divine, that is He is fully God and fully man (i.e., the two natures of Christ).
- There are also many paradoxes stated in Scripture:
 - The one who humbles himself will be exalted (James 4:10).
 - The first shall be last (Matthew 20:16).
 - When I am weak, I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:10).
 - The poor are blessed, for theirs is the kingdom of God (Luke 6:20).
 - The hungry shall be satisfied (Luke 6:21).
 - Those who weep will laugh (Luke 6:21).
 - Those who are hated and reviled should rejoice and leap for joy (Luke 6:22).
 - We look to things unseen (2 Corinthians 4:18).
 - My yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).
 - We are to be in the world but not of the world (John 15:19).
- There are certainly many more of such paradoxes in Scripture; however, here in Luke 9, we read of another one of the great paradoxes in Scripture:

<p>“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”</p>
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- The context of this paradox involves three great commands by our Lord for true disciples and followers of Him. In these three commands, Christ sums up the essence of not only true Christian discipleship, but what it means to “lose one’s life for Christ’s sake.”

<p>I. Deny Himself II. Take Up His Cross Daily III. Follow Christ</p>
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- Last week, Mike preached on Peter’s answer to Christ’s question, “But who do you say that I am?”
- Peter quickly replied with the great confession, saying, the “Christ of God.”
- It is certainly one thing to make a confession with one’s mouth; however, it is another to truly believe that confession and live it out in one’s daily life.
- And this is the point of Christ’s message in **Luke 9:23-26**.
- That is, for all who believe that Jesus is, indeed, the Christ of God, then they will:

- Deny themselves.
- Take up their crosses daily.
- And follow Christ.

I. Deny Himself

²³ *And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

- The heart of Christian discipleship is self-denial.
- That is, the true follower of Christ will recognize that he or she must deny himself, admitting his or her sin and inability to do anything that pleases God on his or her own.
 - The problem is that sin has blinded us to our own insufficiency.
 - In fact, going all the way back to the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve seized the forbidden fruit, man has sought to live lives of self-sufficiency apart from God.
 - Therefore, we must recognize that **every fiber in our being will seek self-preservation through a self-sufficient life**. Yet, Christ calls us to deny ourselves and follow Him.
- When we deny ourselves, we are declaring that God alone knows best and His way is infinitely better than ours.
 - As parents, we all understand this concept well.
 - Our children, in their fallen natures, truly believe that they know what is best for them and their lives. Yet, we love our children and want what is best for them, and as their parents, we know better than they what is best for their lives. Yet, our children continually resist such wisdom.
 - **And Christ is calling us to trust Him more than ourselves. Yet, the problem is that we truly believe that we can do a better job controlling our lives than our Creator.**
 - It is true that deny ourselves is a terrifying thing, but it is absolutely necessary if we are to live and live as disciples of Jesus.
 - Imagine a child in a burning building on the second floor, with his parents outside out the ground shouting at him to jump from the window into the safety net on the ground below. The child will inevitably hesitate, as every fiber in his being tells him to remain in the building that he has trusted for his safety and protection for so long.

- As which virtually every command of Christ, our Lord is calling us to do what He has already done, for Christ voluntarily “emptied Himself” of the glories of heaven in order to take on human flesh for our salvation.
 - Furthermore, when Christ walked this earth and was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He, unlike Adam before Him and the people of Israel during *their* time in the wilderness denied the pleasures of this world and sin in order to obey the will of the Father.
 - Recall Satan’s temptation of Christ: “⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸ And Jesus answered him, “It is written,

*“You shall worship the Lord your God,
and him only shall you serve.”*

 - **Christ is therefore the only one who has ever perfectly denied Himself of the pleasures of sin for the sake of the Father’s glory. So, He alone is not only our example, but the One who is able to help us obey the commandment He has given.**

Philip Ryken writes, “Instead of gratifying ourselves or indulging ourselves in all the ways our sinful nature desires, we are called to deny ourselves, rejecting anything and everything that will get in the way of offering ourselves for God’s service.”

- And so, when we deny ourselves and follow Christ, it is an unconditional surrender. I think many Christians come to Christ and attempt to “negotiate” terms with Him. Yet, this leads to destruction. **The true disciple of Jesus Christ sees himself as the “poor in spirit” and one who deserves God’s judgment and is in desperate need of a savior.**
- As John MacArthur writes, “Sinners, then, are in no position to set the conditions by which they will come to Christ, they take Him on His terms, not theirs.”
- The seventeenth-century Puritan theologian Thomas Watson wrote:
 “The poor in spirit is content to take Christ upon His own terms. The proud sinner will article and indent with Christ. He will have Christ and his pleasure, Christ and his covetousness. But he that is poor in spirit sees himself lost without Christ, and he is willing to have him upon his own terms, a Prince as well as a Savior, “Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8). A castle that has long been besieged and is ready to be taken will deliver up on any terms to save their lives. He whose heart has been a garrison for the devil, and has held out long in opposition against Christ, when once God has brought him to poverty of spirit, and he sees himself damned without Christ, let god propound what articles He will, he will readily subscribe to them. ‘Lord, what you will

have me to do” (Acts 9:6). He that is poor in spirit will do anything that he may have Christ. He will behead his beloved sin. He will, with Peter, cast himself upon the water to come to Christ.”

- **One of God’s greatest acts of grace, therefore, is to reveal to us the position we are in while in opposition to God. When God does so, we quickly realize that our odds of victory would be better if we were one, unarmed man, facing an entire army of trained, armed soldiers, than to stand in opposition to the Almighty One.**
- This is exactly the state Isaiah was in when God revealed Himself to the prophet in Isaiah 9. Therefore, Isaiah said, “Woe to me! I am ruined!...Here I am Lord, send Me!”
- Isaiah knew he was in no position to negotiate, but rather deserved death.
- And so it is with every true disciple, may we deny ourselves.
- But denial is only the first aspect of our discipleship.
- Just as our conversion involves a negative aspect (turning from our sin) and a positive aspect (putting our faith in Christ); so, our discipleship involves a negative aspect (denying ourselves) and a positive aspect (taking up our cross and following Christ).

II. Take Up His Cross Daily

- This command of Christ must have sounded strange coming from our Lord. Christ had yet to be arrested, tried, and crucified, so the disciples must have been somewhat puzzled at these words.
- However, the concept of crucifixion was certainly **not foreign** to the disciples living in first century Israel.
 - Crucifixion in Judea in the first century was a constant reminder of the Roman yoke that burden the Jewish people. When a man was forced to carry his cross to the place of crucifixion, it demonstrated his submission to the authority of the state.

Leon Morris writes, “When a man from one of their villages took up a cross and went off with a little band of Roman soldiers, he was on a one-way journey. He’d not be back. Taking up the cross meant the utmost in self-denial.”

- Capital crimes were viewed as a crime against the state, therefore the state was the one who carried out the act of execution (much like it is today). It was not a “personal” act of revenge; rather it was an act of justice by the state.

“Cross-bearing publically displayed a person’s submission to the state. The criminal rebelled against the state, and so bore the penalty of punishment from it. Cross-bearing was a visible, public affair that visualized a person’s humility before the state. Thus, the fundamental idea is of submitting to the authority of another – in this case God.” Darrell Bock

- **Certainly one of the primary aspects of “taking up our cross” involves recognition that, apart from Christ, we stand before God as “convicted criminals.”** Therefore, taking up our cross involves humility and a broken and contrite spirit.
 - When we do so, we recognize that it will necessarily involve:
 - **Humility**
 - **Rejection**
 - **The death of “self”**
 - Yet, the “joy” in the cross is that we are identified with our Lord and share in the sufferings of Christ.
- However, unlike the criminals in first century Israel, we are called to – as Christ Himself did – voluntarily and purposefully take up our cross and follow Him.
 - People often complain when difficult times come their way, using the expression, “I suppose it is just my cross to bear.”
 - However, the cross-bearing that Christ is speaking of here is not this type of suffering.
 - **Jesus is speaking of the suffering and, primarily, the rejection by the world that comes from a conscience decision in the life of the believer to “take up” his or her cross and follow Christ.**

Christian author and speaker Joni Eareckson Tada, who happens to be a quadriplegic, writes,

“I have learned that it’s a passion for God that will give you a passion for people. And this utter delight in Him will come from the toughest of trials that you are about to face. Our affliction becomes that which pushes and shoves us down the road to the cross...And that’s what it means to become like Him in His death. Don’t think that the cross is simply the wheelchair, or an irritating job, or an irksome mother-in-law. The cross is the place where you die to sin and live to God.”

Norman Geldenhuys writes, “He who desires to become His disciple and servant will every day have to be willing to put his own interests and wishes into the background and to accept voluntarily and wholeheartedly the sacrifice and suffering that will have to be endured in His service. The ‘cross’ is not the ordinary, human troubles and sorrows such as disappointments, disease, death, poverty, and the like, but the things which have to be suffered, endured and lost in the service of Christ – vituperation, persecution, self-sacrifice, suffering, even unto death, as a result of true faith in and obedience to Him.”

- Another aspect of cross-bearing is that it is a **daily** activity. The Christian life does not consist of making one “grand” decision at one point in our lives that changes everything. It is a daily exercise in denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Christ.
 - Sometimes we will fall, sometimes we will fail, but with God’s grace every disciple will persevere to the end.
- Finally, may we never forget that even the act of “taking up our cross and following Christ” involves **an act of God’s grace**.
 - Christ hung on the cross in the power of the Holy Spirit. So, in order to fulfill even this, we must have the grace of God enabling us.
 - In Hebrews 9:14, we read that Christ offered Himself up to God the Father “through the eternal Spirit.”
 - In other words, Christ hung on the cross in the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - And we must fully rely on the power of the Person of the Holy Spirit in order to take up our cross daily and follow Christ.
 - May the heart-cry of every one of us here today be:

“²⁰I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20

<h3>III. Follow Christ</h3>

- To deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Christ means that we trust God rather than ourselves with the whole of our lives.
 - It also means that we **pursue Christ with all our passion**, not the fading and temporary glories this world may offer.
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- In our American culture, we praise workaholism and self-made millionaires. Yet, we wonder why our families are falling apart, we live in a state of dissatisfaction and even depression in our country. We have convinced ourselves the things of this world will actually satisfy us, and that each generation should work with all its might to achieve a higher standard of living than the one before. In fact, we call this the “American dream.”

²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?
²⁶ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”

- At the NCA Senior Banquet two months ago, Mike Thompson addressed the graduating class and quoted from a speech made by President John F. Kennedy at The American University, Washington, D.C., on June 10, 1963.

“Our problems are man-made — therefore, they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man’s reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable — and we believe they can do it again.”

- This type of rhetoric actually gives most Americans chills – the good kind, and inspires them to pursue the American dream all the more passionately. Yet, tragically, we fail to see that it is godless and leads to death. [NOTE: This is by no means a political statement, as I am confident that just as many Republicans would agree with the quote as Democrats].
- Mike correctly told the seniors and their families that, “As Christians, we know that much of what we are bombarded with on a daily basis is, at its core, a view that is, like President Kennedy’s, distinctly un-biblical.
- We believe that our problems can be solved by us, and that if we work hard enough, we will “gain the world” achieve true “happiness.”
 - The irony is that those who have gained the world are actually unsatisfied on this side of eternity as well. Tragically, when one’s heart’s desire is worldly success, he or she will never be satisfied and will continually thirst for more.

Norval Geldenhuys writes, “Everyone who tries selfishly to secure for himself pleasures and happiness in life will in fact doom his life to failure – he will never find real joy or full life. He commits spiritual suicide. But he who lays his life upon the altar in the service of Christ, who strives for His honor and for the extension of His kingdom, while keeping self in the background, will spontaneously find true joy and life – here and hereafter.”

- Another biblical scholar, Frederick Godet writes, “What gain! To draw in a lottery a gallery of pictures...and at the same time to become blind!”

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- I have come to the realization in recent years that I am a people-pleaser. In other words, I really care what people think of me. And I have also realized that this is not only a sin, but it is like living in a prison chained the ever-changing opinions of man. And the truth is that we are all, to some degree, people pleasers. For, we are motivated to a great measure by what people think of us.

- Yet, in Christ, there is true and perfect liberty. For, when we seek to honor Christ and care about obeying Him, we are freed from the prison of seeking man's approval.
- **Yet, make no mistake about it, the process and the road that leads to freedom is a painful one it leads right to and through the cross.** It will involve pain, rejection and humiliation, but it is a road that leads to life and joy everlasting.
 - We lie to ourselves if we think this is easy. In fact, this, like virtually every command of Christ is impossible. Impossible, that is, apart from the grace of God through Jesus Christ.
 - Yet, may we not forget the words of Christ that
²⁶**For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."**
 - This statement recalls the great passage concern the Son of Man (Daniel 7:13-14) in Daniel. In this case, the Son of Man is the great judge of mankind.
 - May we, therefore, seek to identify ourselves with our crucified and risen Lord, denying ourselves, and taking up our cross and following Him, knowing that only then will we have true life.

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- And so, once again, we behold one of Scriptures greatest paradoxes: "whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."
 - I conclude with a prayer from Arthur Bennett, as recorded in the Puritan prayer book, *The Valley of Vision*:

Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly
 Let me learn by paradox
 That the way down is the way up,
 That to be low is to be high,
 That the broken heart is the healed heart,
 That the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,
 That the repenting soul is the victorious soul,
 That to have nothing is to possess all,
 That to bear the cross is to wear the crown,
 That to give is to receive
 Let me find your light in my darkness,
 Your life in my death,
 Your joy in my sorrow,
 Your grace in my sin,
 Your riches in my poverty,
 Your glory in my humiliation."