

**SERMON NOTES**  
**Luke 9:18-36, 51-62**  
***“Take Up Your Cross and Live”***

**Intro:**

- Though we just bought a house a year ago with a pretty good interest rate, interest rates have dropped enough that we are considering refinancing as many of you have done or are considering also
- *A cost-benefit analysis helps with making a wise decision*
- For example, you figure out the costs of refinancing a mortgage, and then you figure out the savings of lowering your monthly payments, and then you figure out how long will it take until your monthly savings outweigh your upfront costs to see if it is wise to proceed
- *To do an accurate cost-benefit analysis – all the costs must be identified*
  
- Our family enjoys going to Chicago at least once a year, and we enjoy staying downtown
- *On one of our after-Christmas trips when the girls were younger, I booked a nice room in an elegant downtown hotel for only \$50 per night on Priceline.*
- But when calculating our costs for the trip, I forgot about one of the hidden costs of staying downtown: *parking*
- *The hotel was only \$50 per night, but parking in their ramp would be another \$48 per night!*
- Nobody likes hidden costs
  
- Sometimes we Christians present the Gospel in such a way as to hide some of the costs of following Jesus
- *We emphasize the free gift of salvation and eternal life in Jesus Christ – and all we need to do to receive that free gift is to say a prayer of faith to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior*
  
- Forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven – all at no cost – many people have accepted that deal – *but they are no longer following Jesus because they did not count of cost of discipleship* – or were never told upfront about those costs
- *That is not how Jesus operated*
- When Jesus called people to follow him – he gave them the costs as well as the benefits – upfront
- *Luke 9 – costs and benefits of following Jesus – to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to commit your life to Jesus Christ*

## I. WHO IS JESUS?

- *Come, Follow Me*
- *Who are you that I should follow you?*
- *Who is this person calling me to follow him? Is he worthy of my commitment?*
- *Before deciding whether or not to become a Christ-follower, you need to know: Who is Jesus Christ?*

### (1) *The crowds' opinion then and now*

**Luke 9:18-19** <sup>18</sup>One day as Jesus was alone, praying, he came over to his disciples and asked them, **“Who do people say I am?”**

<sup>19</sup>“Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other ancient prophets risen from the dead.”

- *One of the prophets – most common answer then and now*
- Islam and many other religions honor Jesus as one of the prophets
- **Most people today would readily admit that Jesus belongs in the Religious Hall of Fame – right next to Moses and Buddha and Krishna and Mohammed and Confucius and Socrates and Gandhi and the Dalai Lama**
- The problem comes when Christians claim any kind of unique status for Jesus that would elevate him above the other prophets

### (2) *Peter's confession*

**Luke 9:20** <sup>20</sup>Then he asked them, **“Who do you say I am?”**

Peter replied, “You are the Messiah sent from God!”

- *There are many prophets, but only one Messiah*
- **The Messiah is God's Son and the appointed Ruler and Savior of all mankind**
- *There is only One King who sits and reigns at the right hand of God in heaven and is coming again to reign over all the earth: his name is Jesus*
- *There is only One Name of One Savior by which we must be saved: that name is Jesus – Salvation is found in no one else*
- Our culture tries to relativize the claims of Jesus and his apostles in the NT
- *One of the greats in the Religious Hall of Fame – sure*

- **But the unique Son of God and only Savior of the world? Heresy! Blasphemy! What arrogance! What intolerance! Everyone today knows that there are many paths to God and heaven – and Jesus is only one of the many**
- **Even in evangelical churches – about half of Christians believe that there are many paths to God // and followers of non-Christian religions will end up in heaven just as surely as believers in Jesus Christ**
- **What's wrong with that?**
- **First of all – Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God, the only Way to God and heaven**
- **If Jesus was wrong about that claim – why should we believe anything else he taught?**
- **And secondly, the NT clearly teaches that salvation is found in Jesus Christ and no one else because only Jesus died for our sins and only Jesus was raised from the dead**
- **If the NT is wrong about that, why should we believe anything else the Bible teaches?**

### **(3) The Voice from heaven**

- **The most important question is not who do the crowds say Jesus is – or even who do the disciples say Jesus is – what really matters is: *Who does God say Jesus is?***
- **Jesus promised his disciples that some of them would see him in the glory of his coming kingdom**
- **Some say Jesus was wrong about that because none of his disciples lived to see His Second Coming – which still has not occurred 2000 years later**
- **But, in fact, 8 days later, three of his disciples did Jesus in the glory of his coming kingdom**
- **As Jesus was praying on a mountain – and as his disciples were sleeping – the appearance of Jesus' face changed and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning**
- **And then two spiritual giants of the OT – Moses and Elijah – appeared in glorious splendor – talking with Jesus about his upcoming “Exodus” – that is, his death in Jerusalem**
- **When Peter, James and John awoke – they were startled to see the glory of Jesus – and to see Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus**

- Not knowing what he was saying – Peter offered to build three booths for these Religious Hall-of-Famers: one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah
- *But as great as Moses and Elijah were as men of God – they did not belong in the same league as Jesus*
- **To make that perfectly clear, God Himself spoke from heaven:**

**Luke 9:35 (NIV)** <sup>35</sup>A voice came from the cloud, saying, *“This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”*

- *And then Moses and Elijah disappeared, and only Jesus was left*
- Put any other two great prophets or teachers or religious leaders or human rulers on the mountain, and the result would have been the same: *Jesus would be left standing alone – utterly unique – the one and only Son of God*
- *“This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”*
- **The voice from heaven confirms what Peter confessed: *Jesus is the unique Messiah and Son of God – there is no one else like him***
- **Therefore, God says: *Listen to Jesus – He is My One and Only Son – Listen to Him // Obey Him // Follow Him // Submit to Him***

## II. WHERE IS JESUS HEADING?

- **Come, Follow Me**
- **Follow you where? Where are you going?**
- Jesus was not a manipulator – *When he called people to follow him – He told them exactly where he was heading*

**Luke 9:22** <sup>22</sup>**“For I, the Son of Man, must suffer many terrible things,”** he said. **“I will be rejected by the leaders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. I will be killed, but three days later I will be raised from the dead.”**

- *The Son of Man must suffer – be rejected – and be killed*
- **Jesus would be a suffering Messiah before he would be a ruling Messiah**
- **Jesus was heading toward a Cross**
- **The Palm Sunday triumphal entry was months away – but the spiritual journey to the Cross began here**

**Luke 9:51 (NIV)** <sup>51</sup>As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

- ***Come, follow Me***
- ***Where?***
- ***To a Cross in Jerusalem***

### III. WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF FOLLOWING JESUS?

- Jesus made no attempt to hide where he was going or what it would cost his disciples to follow him
- *Do you want to join the Messiah's mission? Here is what it will cost you:*

**Luke 9:23 (NIV)** <sup>23</sup>Then he said to them all: **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”**

#### (1) Deny yourself

- We live in a society that tells us everyday: *Indulge yourself // Please yourself // Live for yourself // Life is all about you and your happiness and your material success*
- We live in a society that tells us that our bodily appetites are to be satisfied and indulged – not denied
- *Especially food and sex*
- What does Jesus mean by “Deny yourself”?
- *He certainly means more than deny yourself meat on Fridays during Lent*
- *But it could mean fasting for a day or at least a meal a week on a regular basis in order to spend more time seeking God in prayer and meditation*
- *Or it could involve watching TV less or playing video games less in order to spend more time reading the Bible or other literature that will enrich your mind and grow your faith*
- *Or it could involve putting the interests and needs of your wife or children ahead of your own interests and hobbies*
- *Or it could involve giving a little extra money to church or a missionary or someone in need instead of splurging on something for yourself that you can easily live without*

- But the full meaning of “deny yourself” goes beyond just denying yourself certain desires or pleasures or luxuries
- *To deny yourself is to commit to a counter-cultural way of life – a life of serving God and others ahead of fulfilling your own desires – a life of putting the will of God ahead of your own self-will – a life of swimming upstream against cultural currents rather than floating downstream like any dead fish*
- **Jesus linked “deny yourself” with “take up your cross” – and therefore the full meaning of “deny yourself” includes “die to self”**

**(2) Take up your cross daily**

- Just as the Messiah must suffer – be rejected – and be killed – *so also his disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross – meaning – expect to suffer – be rejected – and even be killed for the sake of Christ and the Gospel*
- Deny yourself and take up your cross does not mean: *go without chocolate for Lent or put up with that pain-in-the-neck boss or mother-in-law*
- **Rather, deny yourself and take up your cross means: *Treasure Christ above anything this world offers – and even more than life itself – and be prepared to be rejected by others when you identify yourself and live as a Christ-follower***
- *Taking up your Cross is about self-denial and suffering and rejection for the sake of Christ and the Gospel*
- Let others pursue material wealth and financial security – *you, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me – die to self so that you can have Life in Me*
- Let others seek recognition and status and power and popularity -- *you, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me – die to self so that you can have Life in Me*
- Let others focus on the pleasures of the moment rather than the lasting joys of the kingdom of heaven – *you, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me – die to self so that you can have Life in Me*
- Let others invest their best energies and spend all their money on the latest stuff and this world’s bling – *you, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me – die to self so that you can have Life in Me*
- Let others give their lives to partying and sex and alcohol and Money and sports and entertainment and career advancement – *you, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me – die to self so that you can have Life in Me*

- Let others have religion as their hobby and material success as their passion and pleasure as their calling and money as their god – *you, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me – die to self so that you can have Life in Me*
- There may be another sense of what it means to take up your cross
- *When Jesus went the Cross – he went bearing the sins of the world in his body*
- Now, Jesus' death is uniquely the atoning sacrifice for our sins
- *But we are called to bear one another's burdens – and that is a form of carrying our cross*
- When someone is carrying a heavy burden – whether a load of sin & guilt // or an addiction // or a burden of grief // or a broken marriage // or a terminal illness // or a life-changing disability // or the trauma of being abused // or prolonged unemployment // or a clinical depression – *within many of us there is a tendency to avoid getting too close because the burden is so heavy and the pain is so unbearable*
- **To take up our cross in that situation is to come alongside the suffering person and do what we can to help bear their burdens**
- *The Way of the Cross is a life of voluntary sacrifice governed by love – it involves letting go of something that is rightfully yours for the sake of others*

### (3) Lose your **life & worldly gain**

**Luke 9:24 - 25 (NIV) <sup>24</sup>For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. <sup>25</sup>What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?**

- *It is impossible to carry a cross while clinging to your life*
- **The cross is an instrument of death**
- *When you pick up a cross, you must be prepared to lay down your life*
- **At the very least, that means laying down our selfish ambitions, and our pursuit of worldly pleasures and wealth and financial independence and security, and our obsession with safety and comfort and upward mobility**
- *At the very least, it means laying down our right to be well-liked and well-respected by the people of this world*
- **At the very least, it means the willingness to sacrifice our time and talents and financial resources for the sake of the Gospel**
- *At the very least, it means to live a life of integrity and sexual purity and obedience to the teachings of Jesus rather than conforming to the ways of this world*

- But don't assume that Jesus is speaking metaphorically about losing your life
- *The Cross was no mere symbol or metaphor for him – nor for the apostles – nor for thousands of persecuted Christians today*
- **We are commanded to take the Gospel to the unreached and spiritually dark places of the world – and many of the most dark and unreached places of the world are also dangerous places to live or raise a family**
- *To take up your cross and follow Jesus wherever He leads is to put the cause of the Gospel ahead of personal safety – or family safety*
- **Jesus does not shrink from warning his disciples that following a crucified Messiah could cost them their very lives**

**(4) Risk rejection by confessing Jesus publicly**

- There is not much risk of rejection if you believe in a Jesus who is enshrined in the Religious Hall of Fame along with Buddha and Mohammed and Krishna and Moses and Elijah and the Dalai Lama and the others
- ***But if you publicly confess a belief in the Jesus of the NT who is the unique Son of God and only Savior of the world – the Only Way to God and heaven – you will face rejection and scorn and ridicule by many in our society***
- You will be called Intolerant and Extremist and Bigoted and other names
- *To take up your cross and follow Jesus is to acknowledge before other men and women your belief that Jesus Christ is Lord and that salvation is found in Him and in no one else*

**Luke 9:26** If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

**(5) Give Jesus your highest allegiance**

**Luke 9:57 - 62 (NIV)** <sup>57</sup>As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” <sup>58</sup>Jesus replied, “*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.*” <sup>59</sup>He said to another man, “*Follow me.*” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” <sup>60</sup>Jesus said to him, “*Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.*” <sup>61</sup>Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but

**first let me go back and say good-by to my family.”** <sup>62</sup>Jesus replied, **“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”**

- Have you ever said to Jesus: *I will follow You wherever you go ??*
- Did you mean it?
- *What if Jesus takes you at your word?*
  
- It is risky to tell Someone on his way to a Cross: *I will follow You wherever you go*
- *He may just send you to Moldova or Reynosa or Morocco or Pakistan or China -- or inner city Chicago*
- He may send you to someplace difficult or dangerous
- **Whoever said it would be safe or comfortable or secure to follow Someone who is heading to a Cross?**
  
- The next would-be follower said to Jesus: *“Lord, first let me go and bury my dead father”*
- **Certainly, Jesus said. By all means, take care of your family responsibilities first. Most definitely, family first. Then come and follow Me when your family situation is settled.**
- No – Jesus said: *“Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead – but you go and proclaim the Gospel so that the spiritually dead might have eternal Life”*
- **The kind of allegiance and commitment that Jesus demands of his disciples is certainly no less than what the Army demands of a soldier**
- Many missionaries have taken their children to risky places or have left behind aging parents for the sake of the Gospel
- **Because of who Jesus is – He does not hesitate to demand from us our highest allegiance in life**
  
- This is clear also in the third encounter in this passage – *This man was actually willing to leave his family in order to follow Jesus – he just wanted to say good-by first*
- And --- unbelievably – Jesus says No! *“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God”*
  
- Think of this analogy:
- When a man and a woman get married – they transfer their highest allegiances from their parents and family-of-origin to their spouse and the new family they are forming as husband and wife

- *The husband-wife relationship now takes priority over the relationships with one's parents and siblings*
- **So it is when we commit to becoming a fully devoted follower of Jesus**
- *We still love our families – but our relationship to Jesus Christ becomes the highest priority and allegiance in life*

#### IV. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF FOLLOWING JESUS?

- **The costs are high – rather intimidating, in fact – so what are the benefits – are they worth the steep price of following Jesus?**

##### (1) Jesus

- *The greatest treasure gained by denying self, taking up your cross and following Jesus – is Jesus Himself*
- **He is our Life // He is our Hope // He is our Peace // He is our Joy // He is our Wisdom // He is our Righteousness // He is our Comfort // He is our Rock // He is our Security // He is our Strong Deliverer // He is our Reason for Living // He is the Living Water // He is the Bread of Life // He is the Light of the World // He is the Resurrection and the Life // He is the Shepherd and Physician of our Souls // He is the Truth // He is the Lover of our Souls above all other lovers**
- **No one ever has or ever will love you as Jesus loves you – There is no one else like Jesus**
- **He is the Treasure that is worth losing everything else in life for – He is the Treasure that is worth denying self and taking up your cross for – He is the Treasure that is worth losing your life for**
- *I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold // I'd rather be His than have riches untold // I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands // I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand*
- *He's fairer than lilies of fairest bloom // He's sweeter than honey out of the comb // He's all that my hungry spirit needs // I'd rather have Jesus and let him lead*

##### (2) Life

- **In Him was Life // Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life // I am the Bread of Life // I have come that they might have Life // I am the Resurrection and the Life // I am the Way and the Truth and I am the Life //**

**Luke 9:23-24 “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross daily, and follow me. <sup>24</sup>If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life.”**

- **The world says: *Life is found in doing your own thing // living life your way // pursuing your own happiness // following your own heart //***
- **Jesus says: *If you live for yourself, you will lose True Life – if you give up your life for Me – you will find true life – True Life is found only in Me***
- **Will you bet your life and your eternal destiny on what the world says?**
- **Or will you fix your hope on the One who gave up his life for you and then conquered death so that you could have true and everlasting life in Him?**
- **Sin causes spiritual death – all who have sinned are spiritually dead – and the sacrificial death of Jesus is God’s only provision for our sin problem – only Jesus can give us spiritual life**
- **And only Jesus has conquered the grave to give everlasting life after death**
- **There is no other hope of life after death because no one else has been able to overcome Death – no other prophet // no other religious leader – all have succumbed to the power of Death**
- **Except Jesus – He alone has conquered the Power of Death by his own Resurrection – He is the only Source of salvation // the only source of true life – spiritual life // and the only Source of eternal life**
- **You must make a choice – if you want true life – and eternal life – then you must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Jesus**

### **(3) Kingdom Glory**

**Luke 9:26 (NIV) <sup>26</sup>If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.**

**Luke 12:8 (NIV) <sup>8</sup>“I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God.**

- *If we die to self with him – then we will share in his resurrection life*
- *If we take up our cross and suffer with him – then we will share in his glory*
- *If we endure the world's rejection and scorn by identifying ourselves publicly with Jesus and his teachings – then we will also reign with him in his glory*

## V. HOW CAN I GROW INTO A FULLY DEVOTED FOLLOWER OF JESUS?

- Yesterday's distressing Iowa Supreme Court decision authorizing same-sex marriage only reinforces the urgent need for churches to make disciples
- *We can blame activist judges and liberals and gay rights activists all we want – but the reality is that our culture is rejecting biblical values because the church has been ineffective in making disciples*
- Not only are we not effectively evangelizing the unchurched – we are not even instilling biblical values in our own youth and young adults who have grown up in our Christian families and evangelical churches
- Now, Churches can no more make their members and attenders deny self, take up their crosses, follow Jesus and obey his teachings than can colleges make students study and learn
- *But we can provide learning and spiritual growth opportunities for those who want to become fully devoted followers of Jesus*
- Here are a few of the opportunities we provide at Cornerstone – basic building blocks for becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ:
  - *(1) Regular attendance and participation in Sunday morning worship*
  - *(2) Participating in a Sunday morning Adult Bible Fellowship or Sunday School class and in a home group*
  - *(3) Taking our Christian Life and Service Seminars – CLASS 101 – 401 series – and following through on these steps of action:*
    - Baptism & Membership
    - Developing the spiritual habits of a growing relationship with Christ
    - Living a Spirit-filled life being controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit
    - Discovering, developing and using your God-given gifts to serve others and build up the church body and strengthen its ministries
    - Learning how to share the love and good news of Jesus Christ in a lost, hurting and broken world
- There are many other good activities, but Worship, ABFs, Home Groups, and the 101-401 Classes are basic and foundational to the discipleship process

- ***But ultimately – you must decide whether or not you are willing to pay the price of becoming a Christ-follower – You must decide if Jesus and His Life and His Kingdom Glory are worth it – Will you take up your cross and Live?***

**Luke 9:23 - 24 (NIV) <sup>23</sup>Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup>For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”**

Prayer

Hymn # 186 “The Old Rugged Cross”