

THE NECESSARY COMPONENTS OF SAVING FAITH – PART ONE

Series: The Gospel According to Jesus
Limestone Baptist Church, Bedford, IN
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October 4, 2009 at 10:30am
Luke 9:23-26

OPENING THOUGHTS

• OPEN IN PRAYER

• Take your Bibles and open up with me to Luke 9. Last week we introduced this new series called The Gospel According to Jesus and we looked with sort of a panoramic view of the Gospel records to see what the message was that Jesus taught consistently throughout His ministry on earth. We looked at several passages of Scripture, but no place sums it up better in my opinion than Luke 9:23-26. And so for this morning and the next Lord's Day we're going to be examining this great diamond of truth given to us by our Lord Jesus.

• And so I'd invite you to take out your notes guide in your worship folder, and you'll see several places to follow along throughout the course of this message up here on the projector screen. Now normally I read from the New Living Translation, but I want to read these few verses out of the New American Standard because I believe it renders them much better for our purposes. For those without an NASB, you will find the text up here on the screen. Read with me beginning in verse 23.

23 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.

24 "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.

25 "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?

26 "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.

• Now at the outset of this passage, what we find is a startling revelation to many Christians. This is how Jesus introduced Himself to the lost! Luke records that Jesus is speaking here with His disciples, but if you look at this same account in Mark 8:34, you'll find that Jesus summoned the crowd over to hear what He was telling His disciples too.

• To set up the context of where we're at in Luke, Jesus has just given His disciples a pop quiz, so to speak. There was only one question on the test. Back up to verse 20 and He asks them, "Who do you say that I am?" Jesus is now well into His third and final year of ministry on this earth and it's time He gave His disciples the final exam. Who was He?

- Peter stood up to speak for the group as usual and this time he actually got something right. He confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. And then Jesus proceeds to say to Peter good job. You didn't get to this point on your own. God brought you there. And from there Jesus starts to give them a small preview of what He would have to suffer on the cross.
- Now it's at this point that Peter takes Jesus aside according to Matthew 16:22. He needed to correct Jesus. Jesus had just told them how He was going to build His church on the confession that He is the Christ and that nothing in all the forces of Hell could ever stop it! Now He was saying He was going to die? It didn't make sense to Peter. So Peter took him to the side to start to explain to Jesus the way things needed to be.
- So Jesus has to correct Peter. And that's when Jesus says to Peter this in verse 23 of Matthew 16.
23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."
- Now that right there could well be the motto of some in the church who want to minimize what saving faith looks like in a believer. Peter wasn't setting his mind on God's interests. He was setting his mind only on what he thought should have happened. And it's at this point that Jesus then says to them where we pick up our text at this morning.
- Jesus had some major correcting to do in the lives of these disciples. And so He once again needs to clarify for them what the Gospel is all about and so He calls over the crowds in Mark 8 so they can hear it too. In so doing, Jesus addresses the lost and the saved in one verse.
- The lost need to hear this so they can respond to the call to be saved, but those of us who are saved know that life gets in the way and the same passion and the same devotion that we once had for Jesus when we first became a Christian can start to dissolve over time and we need to be reminded what the Gospel is all about too.
- And what we find in Luke 9:23 is a shock to our human will. If anyone wants to follow Christ; that is to say, if anyone wants to become a Christian; if you want to be saved and have eternal life; if you want to be a disciple; if you want to have a relationship with Jesus, here is what you must do: deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus.
- Three simple things, yet so profound in their meaning. This is what it takes to be saved according to Jesus. Now as we start to look at these three things this morning, I want to start off at the outset here by reminding you that salvation is not based on what you can do to earn it. Salvation is not by works. And Jesus is not saying here that you have to work to get salvation.
- Quite the opposite, if you come to Christ and you begin to have saving faith in Christ, these three things will appear to some degree in your life. They are necessary. You won't have them down perfectly, but they will be there nonetheless.

- I would remind you that salvation does not ever come by your works. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us very clearly:
8 God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.
9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.
- Further, Acts 4:12 tells us that:
12 There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."
- Put those two passages together and you find that salvation is obtained by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone! Sola gratia, sola fide and solus Christus. These were the battle cries of the Reformation in the 1500s that we Protestants came from when the true Gospel was recovered in all its glory.
- John 6:63 elaborates a little further for us:
63 The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing...
- That's very direct and to the point. Put it all together and you have a complete picture of salvation. When someone calls upon the name of the Lord to be saved, it is only because the Spirit of God has created new life in them. Human effort can't accomplish anything. Salvation is rooted in the gracious choice of God and in nothing else that we can do.
- In fact we learn from Ephesians 2 that the very saving faith you had when you first started to follow Christ was God's gift to you. It wasn't something you even mustered up on your own. God gave you the faith it took to be saved. And similarly, Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2:25 that the repentance it takes to be saved also comes as a gift from God.
- When you put all those together what you find is that salvation didn't result from anything you did. God gave it to you and you started to believe because God created that belief in you. You repented because God granted you the ability to repent.
- Now here's where this connects back with Luke 9:23. You cannot deny self on your own; you will never be able to take up your cross on your own; you can't follow after Jesus in your own power. The reality is that unless the Spirit of God creates these in you, they won't happen. They are the outwards signs that everyone can see about what God is doing in your life when you are saved. Their presence in your life doesn't save you; they are there to show that you are saved!

THE FIRST COMPONENT: SELF-DENIAL

- So with that in mind, let's look at these three necessary components of genuine saving faith this morning. The first of these three that we come to is **self-denial – self-denial**. This is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. If anyone wants to come after Christ, that person must deny himself. He must be willing to turn from his selfish ways. But more than just turning from selfishness, this is an entirely different way of thinking.

- Left to its own will, the human mind will always choose selfishness and pride. Pride is simply being self-absorbed. You can pretend to be humble and still be totally self-absorbed. **Pride is not the opposite of humility. Pride is being so self-absorbed you don't see others as more important. At its very core, self-denial is a call to slay foolish pride and relinquish all self-absorption and self-infatuation.**
- Arthur Pink said this: "Growth in grace is growth downward. It is the forming of a lower estimate of ourselves; it is a deepening realization of our nothingness; it is a heartfelt recognition that we are not worthy of the least of God's mercies."
- Growth in grace is growth downward. Self-denial is at the very heart of the Gospel message. There was a saint from the Puritan era who got it right so many years ago. He wrote a prayer that said this:
 - "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 everything, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive. Let me find Thy light in my darkness, Thy joy in my sorrow, Thy grace in my sin, Thy riches in my poverty, Thy glory in my valley, Thy life in my death."
- Thy life in my death? That's the True Gospel. It's not about exalting me. It's about slaying me! Jesus said, "deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me." It's the death of self. You win by losing. You live by dying. And that is the core, the heart message of the Gospel. That is the center of discipleship.
- Now the word that Jesus chooses to use here for "deny yourself" is an interesting one and worth looking into. The Greek word is *arneomai* and it's used 31 times in the New Testament. It literally means "to disavow, reject, abnegate, deny, refuse to associate with, forsake and not accept."
- It's the idea that I hate my old unredeemed self so much that I completely refuse to associate with it any longer. Self has abnegated the throne in place of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not me saying, "I like where I'm at in life, where I'm going and the world I have, but Jesus could you move me up a little higher and a little faster?"
- It's not that at all. It's me saying, "I can no longer stand to be associated with myself. I hate who I am without You. I've had it with me. I don't want anything more to do with my own life. I've had it with everything I am."
- It's disowning yourself. It's desiring to never be associated with yourself the way you are anymore. I've had it with me. I'm sick of myself. I don't want anymore of myself. I've tried everything I know to make something out of my life and I can't do it, I'm overwhelmed with my failure, I'm overwhelmed with my disappointment, I'm overwhelmed with my emptiness, I'm overwhelmed with my sinfulness.

- This is the stuff of true conversion. The heart sees in itself only sin, only failure, only unworthiness and seeks to be rescued. And it really doesn't set any terms. Look, I am in such a desperate situation, You just tell me what I need to do. Self is cast away totally. You give up all dependence on yourself, all trust in yourself, all confidence in what you are by nature. You give up everything and anything.
- At the heart of self-denial, is dying to self. That's why the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 starting in verse 3 and following, if you want to enter the Kingdom you start by being poor in spirit. What is that? That's the word that means spiritually bankrupt. Literally it's the word for poverty that means a beggar. It doesn't mean you have little, it means you have nothing and can't earn anything, you're destitute. So you realize that whatever you have is nothing. You add it all up and it's zero, it's rubbish, it's nothing.
- So this is the foundation virtue. This is the foundation virtue of the heart that's going to come to Christ for salvation: spiritual bankruptcy, destitution...desperation, wretchedness. So that you're not saying, "Well I might like Jesus as my Savior, I don't know if I want to have Him as my Lord. I'd like to carry out some deals of my own." You're past that. You come to spiritual bankruptcy, you've been humbled by the wretchedness of yourself.
- You're like that publican in Luke 18 beating on his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." You come poor in spirit, you come meek. You come mourning over your sin, the Beatitudes say, you come hungering and thirsting after righteousness. You're not offering terms and conditions. You come knowing how desperate you are and how doomed you are. And then you understand how precious His forgiveness is and how magnanimous His gift of eternal life is. And you're not about to set terms.
- Now with dying to self, hating self, self-denial being so important, how then do we know if we are really denying ourselves or not? It's at this point that I want to advise us with a word of caution. In the Christian life, we like checkboxes. We like to know where we're at by being able to check off certain things from our list of spiritual to-do's.
- But that's not what God desires of us. God doesn't define success as a Christian based off of what we don't do. Real spiritual desperation that comes to Christ for salvation is much deeper than something you can check off on a list and move on past it to other things.
- When the Bible talks about us being set apart for Christ, that isn't just saying we need to avoid certain things. The Pharisees avoided certain things and Jesus still said they were like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly looked good, but inside they were rotten to the core. Genuine self-denial means that I am set apart for God not just to avoid doing certain things, but that I'm set apart to a whole new way of thinking. My mind has been changed. My desires have been changed. I not only act different, I think different. It's not just outward, it's inward too!
- I think a quote by Dr. John MacArthur might help us in seeing what self-denial, dying to self, self-hate really looks like.
 - QUOTE "When you are forgotten or neglected or purposely set aside and you sting and hurt with the insult or the oversight, but your heart is happy and you count it a privilege to suffer for Christ, that is dying to self.
 - When you're good is evil spoken of, when you are misunderstood, when your desires are not interesting to others, when your advice is disregarded and your opinions are ridiculed and when you are abused, when you are mistreated, or misunderstood and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself, that is dying to self.
 - When you lovingly patiently bear any disruption, any irregularity, any annoyance, when you can stand face to face with folly and waste and extravagance and insensitivity and endure it as Jesus endured it, that is dying to self.
 - When you never care to refer to yourself in a conversation, or to record and recite your own good works, or to pursue commendation, when you can truly love to be unrecognized for something good, that is dying to self.
 - When you see someone else prosper, someone else reach goals that you desire and you can honestly rejoice with that other person in spirit, feel no envy and not question God while your needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances, that is dying to self.
 - And when you can receive correction and reproof from others and humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, feel no rebellion and feel no resentment rising within your heart, that is dying to self." END QUOTE.
- Are you dead yet? Can these things I have mentioned ring true of you? Self-denial is costly, but it's at the very heart of who we are as Christians.

THE SECOND COMPONENT: CROSS-BEARING

- Now Luke 9:23 records for us a second key component of what saving faith looks like in the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Luke 9:23 again says this:

23 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."
- The second thing we want to look at is cross-bearing, cross-bearing. I've heard so many weird interpretations of this over the years that it's almost ludicrous. Some like to say their in-laws are the cross they have to bear; still other think their rebellious teenagers are their crosses. You get the picture, you've heard these types of things I'm sure.

- I'm sure all of those things can be hard to bear sometimes, but here's the problem with that. What do you think the disciples would have been thinking about when Jesus told them to go pick up a cross? Let's keep in mind that there were no deeper life conferences or spiritual renewal retreats back then to go to! In fact, up till this point they still don't even get that Jesus is going to die on a cross! He just got through telling them He was going to go to Jerusalem to die and Peter took Him aside to correct Him!
- I'll tell you what they were thinking. A little more than a hundred years before Jesus ever walked the earth, King Alexander Janius crucified 800 Pharisees at Jerusalem while he was feasting in public. He forced their wives and children to watch. Antiochus Ephanias, that Greek ruler during the inter-testamental period, had also crucified many Jews for a revolt. Following the death of Herod the Great, the proconsul Varus crucified two thousand Jews. And it has been said that the Romans crucified some thirty-thousand Jews in Palestine during the era around the life of Jesus.
- Now what do you think they were thinking about when Jesus told them to go pick up a cross? I'll tell you what they were thinking about. There was no doubt at all. They were thinking about an instrument of execution. They were thinking that Jesus was telling them to go get ready to die!
- The Romans forced their prisoners to carry part of their own cross. That's why Jesus carried the cross arm through the city streets as He went to Calvary. All Jews would have known what it meant to carry a cross. It was not a pleasant sight to see and it was certainly not something you ever wanted to have to do yourself.
- And here Jesus is telling His disciples and the crowds listening that if they want to become a Christian, they have to be willing to die. That's the plain and simple meaning of this. There's no need to spiritualize it. **It simply means that your devotion to Christ needs to be so complete and so radical that you're willing to endure suffering up to the point of death.**
- Jesus is saying, this is how extreme your devotion has to be, this is willingness to endure persecution, this is willingness to endure hatred, hostility, rejection, reproach, shame, suffering even unto death. They knew exactly what He was talking about. And be ready to do it every day...every day.
- Who in the world would give a Gospel invitation like this? Do you hear much of this going on in the church today? "Come to Christ. He just may make your life harder and you may die!" Who would preach that?! But that's exactly what Jesus was saying to all the crowds gathered here.
- That's what He asks, to literally slay yourself, all your dreams, hopes, desires, ambitions, plans and then to say...here's my life, and if it means life-okay, if it means death-okay, I don't really care, I'm so desperate, I want Your forgiveness, I want eternal life. Whatever the price I will give all.

- So, this whole matter of following Jesus is sort of saying no to self and no to safety. I'm willing to bear the reproach of Christ. I'm willing to suffer the consequence of what it is to be a Christian in the environment that I'm in. This is a message that is clearly understood by people in many parts of the world. There are more Christians today being martyred than ever in history by the tens of thousands every year, mostly under Muslim regimes. There's no equivocation about this with them, they know what it means to name the name of Christ.
- So, it's a serious call here. Serious call. The willingness to accept the cross marks the true disciple. You take up the cross and you take it up as a way of life, daily, it's a way of life.
- The hymn writer said, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone and all the world go free? No, there's a cross for everyone, there's a cross for me. The consecrated cross I'll bear, till death shall set me free and then go home my crown to wear for there's a crown for me."
- So, you know, you look at your life and you say, "Oh, it doesn't matter what my life is to me. I'm thankful for the life the Lord gave me. I'm even more thankful for the death that ushers me into the next life. Whatever the cost, whatever I have to give up of myself I eagerly give up because I've come to the end of myself and I found that I have no value. I'm crying out to be rescued like a drowning man who isn't debating on what the terms are going to be after he gets out of the water."

THE THIRD COMPONENT: LORDSHIP

- So if you want to be saved; if you want to become a Christian, then deny yourself; slay your old self; die to yourself. Then take up your cross; be willing to suffer and endure the most extreme persecution imaginable if Jesus calls you to that, even to the point of death. And now there's the third component that Jesus adds: "follow Me".
- What did Jesus mean by this when He said, "follow Me"? It's really quite a simple concept. To sum it up in one word: Lordship, Lordship. It's a matter of obedience. You want to be a Christian, then you submit your life to the will of the Lord. If you won't do that, you can't be saved.
- As we noted last week and will continue to note throughout this series, the simple truth of the Gospel is this: **you cannot claim Jesus as your Savior if you won't submit to Him as your Lord.** There's no room here for saying that you just want some fire insurance and you want to get the goodies, but you don't want to give anything in return.
- It's interesting for me to note that in the New Testament the word "Savior" is only used 24 times. Now that's certainly a fair number of times, but compare that to how often Jesus is called "Lord". The word "Lord" is used 661 times. **No you tell me, which does God place a greater emphasis on based on that?**
- To submit to Jesus as Lord is to say that you are willing to follow Him wherever He leads you. You'll obey anything He asks of you. You don't live for yourself anymore. You live for the glory of God alone.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- Now at this point you might say to me, “Pastor, if I share the Gospel like this, nobody is going to respond!” But you need to realize this, it wouldn't matter how you did it, nobody could respond on their own anyway. So you might as well do it the right way so that they have the true message, if being prompted by the Spirit of God they can then believe and be saved. It's not up to you to save people. It's only up to you to share the right message in the right way and let God do the rest.
- So you want to be a follower of Jesus, do you? Well say farewell to yourself, pick up your cross and proceed to do everything He asks you to do. Those are the terms. And aren't you glad we live in those terms under grace? Because we fail. But the very desire to do those things is the evidence of a transformed soul. So what about you, do you show the evidence of a transformed soul?
- **LET'S BOW IN PRAYER:**
- *“Our Lord, we are again reminded that this is not a human work, nor could we accomplish it in our own strength. But it is Your mighty work to break us of ourselves, it is Your work to make us have a broken and a contrite heart, to make us able to give up everything, to let go of everything, to lose all self-desire, self-will, to set aside all of our dreams and ambitions, goals, plans, hopes, assumed needs. And in desperation, contemplating our sinfulness, embrace the salvation that Jesus gives and the wonderful spiritual riches that come with it in time and eternity as the pearl of great price for which we would gladly sell everything.*
- *Would we be faithful, O God, by Your strength and by Your truth and by Your Holy Spirit to proclaim this message to sinners that's not minimalistic, that's not superficial or shallow, but that calls for what true discipleship really calls for and that is the death of myself that I might live in Christ. May this glorious gospel become part of us both in our believing and in our witnessing. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.”*

INVITATION

- Have you ever really come to Jesus on His terms?
- **Invite congregation to come to Jesus on His terms.**