

THE NECESSARY COMPONENTS OF SAVING FAITH – PART TWO

Series: The Gospel According to Jesus
Limestone Baptist Church, Bedford, IN
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Luke 9:23-26

OPENING THOUGHTS

- **OPEN IN PRAYER**

- Take your Bibles and open with me to Luke 9. I want to read verses 23-26 at the outset of this message to frame our thinking.
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.**
- Really for the past two weeks now we've been looking at this passage of Scripture and others related to it. The message is clear and unmistakable. If anyone would come after Christ; that is, if anyone would become a Christian; if anyone would receive eternal life, here is what you have to do to get it. Deny self of all sinful pleasure, be willing to suffer for Christ up to the point of death and submit to Him as Lord.
- Frankly there isn't a lot of preaching like this going on today. And the sad reality is that most preachers today have watered down the Gospel to something that's frankly easier for us to handle. Let's get rid of most of the offensive stuff and tone it down so it's easier for people to take, they'll tell us. And multitudes of people flock to churches where this type of shallow Gospel is preached.
- But the message of Jesus is the opposite of shallow. Jesus call to salvation is a call to total loss. It's a call to exclusive loyalty to Him. It's a call to radical abandonment of all self-interest and a radical adherence to Him and His will for your life.
- Arthur Pink said this some many years ago: "The nature of salvation is woefully misrepresented by the present-day evangelists. He announces a Savior from hell rather than a Savior from sin. And that is why so many are fatally deceived, for there are multitudes who wish to escape the Lake of Fire who have no desire to be delivered from their carnality and worldliness."
- Jesus' teaching makes it clear that if you are not willing to take Christ as Lord, you cannot claim Him as your Savior. In fact, listen to the words of Jesus Himself said in Matthew 7.

21 **"Not everyone who calls out to Me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of My Father in heaven will enter.**

22 **On judgment day many will say to Me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in Your name and cast out demons in Your name and performed many miracles in Your name.'**

23 **But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from Me, you who break God's laws.'**

- Those words haunt me as a pastor. Inevitably in every congregation there are those who are saved and those who are self-deceived. Even here at Limestone, there may be some in here who will meet Jesus face to face someday and hear Him say these words to them. I don't know anything that could be more terrifying than to die and end up in hell with the full realization that you've lived a lie all your life!
- The Gospel is not something to be taken lightly. Yet that's exactly what most Christians think of it. Anytime we take more interest in our own concerns more than God's, we make light of the cross.
- When we'd rather stay at home than to assemble with the other believers here at church on Sunday mornings because we think we're too tired, we make light of the cross. When we relegate discipleship as an optional extra in our lives that we can tuck on sometime when we have more time, we make light of the cross. When we make excuses for not coming to prayer meetings, business meetings and Bible studies because we want some family time, when the reality is we should be taking our families here! – we make light of the cross.
- Oswald Chambers put it this way: "All heaven is interested in the cross of Christ, all hell terribly afraid of it, while men are the only beings who more or less ignore its meaning." Well said, don't you think? I think as Christians we can even be guilty of ignoring its meaning to our lives.
- The Gospel is not about praying a prayer one time and moving on into a church where you have new friends, a new way of talking and a new way of acting. We can have all this Christian culture stuff we want, but when it gets right down to it there are few people who call themselves Christians who really take holiness seriously.
- The Gospel is not a call to self-fulfillment. It is a call to self-denial. The Gospel is not a call to self-indulgence. It is a call to self-hate. It is not a call to shallow, superficial living. It is a call to slaying the very deepest parts of who you are and laying it all on the altar for God to break into pieces, all the while He fills you up with Himself.
- No wonder every where Jesus went, people hated His message. Think about when He returned to Nazareth to preach. In Luke 4 He goes back to Nazareth and speaks in the synagogue. And after He's done they all rush Him out to the edge of a cliff and try to kill him by throwing Him off! Why would they do that? Because they didn't like His message.

- Essentially He told them they were foul, wicked people who needed to repent and turn back to God. He told them in essence to deny self, take up the cross and follow Him. And that was too much to handle for them. They couldn't take it. So they tried to kill Him.
- And frankly there are a lot of people in places we call churches who would do the same. I could think about the seeker-friendly type of quote unquote "churches" where it's all about comfort and not offending anyone. We would be better off if we'd just quit calling those type of things churches because it's an offense to Jesus and His Gospel!
- There are those who would have Christ cheap. They wouldn't count the cost. They want Christ without having to think about the cross and without having to deny self, take up their own cross and submit to Him as Lord. But the price will not come down!

THE PARADOX OF DISCIPLESHIP

- Now in Luke 9:23 basically what we have is one principle stated multiple ways. Self-denial, cross-bearing and Lordship could all be summed up another way with just one term: repentance. That's really the heart message of the Gospel. To repent is to deny self. To repent is to say, "Here's my life. If I get to live great. If I need to die to glorify You, that's fine too." To repent is to submit to Christ as Lord of your life.
- I suppose we could call verse 23 the Principle of Discipleship. It's repentance stated three different ways. But in verses 24-26 what we find is what I would call the Paradox of Discipleship, the Paradox of Discipleship. It's basically taking the principle and restating it in another way for us to understand.
- And really it's two separate questions to consider. First, look at verses 24-25 with 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?"
- **Basically the first paradox is this: you win by losing. You live by dying.** Now that seems counter-productive, doesn't it? I mean, if you were to tell a coach of a sports team that he could win by losing the game, you would be called a lunatic, wouldn't you? I mean, who wins like that?
- You win by losing? You live by dying? Is Jesus crazy? Well many people certainly thought He was. What it really means is this: if you try to hang on to your own life, you will spend eternity in hell. You cannot hold on to your old way of life and just sort of throw Jesus in with it. To hold on to anything is to refuse Jesus as Lord.
- Lots of people in our Westernized version of Christianity would like Jesus to make them better at something. Come to Jesus. He'll fix all your problems. He'll get you out of hell for eternity. He'll teach you to be a better husband, a better employee, a better boss, a better team player.

- He'll do all these things and more just for you. The problem with that mentality is that Jesus is not a "jeanie god"! You don't come to Jesus to make your three wishes and get them to come true. You don't come to Jesus with your own terms. You come on His terms, or you really don't come at all.
- You see that's why on Judgment Day, Jesus is going to look at so many people and tell them He never knew them. Those people came on their terms. They wanted a Jesus that wouldn't make them give up their sinful lifestyle that they want to hold on to. They wanted a Jesus that would clean up the outside just enough to give off the appearance of being a decent church member, but not enough to really change them. It's like putting a thin, pretty veneer of Christianity over your life and calling yourself a new creation. The only problem is that's not what Jesus wants and that's not what a true Christian looks like.
- You want to hold on to something when you come to Jesus? You will end up in hell. That's what Jesus is saying. When you come to Christ, it's a total loss. You give up everything that you are and you take all that He is. You want to save your life as you know it? You'll lose it for all eternity. When you come to Christ, you come on His terms or you don't really come at all. You only fool yourself into thinking you came to Christ.
- There are lots of so-called believers who are in this place right now. And they struggle with deep-rooted sin and they explain it away because it's just something they can't move past. The reality is that it's something they probably don't want to move past. And they can't move past it because Christ doesn't live inside of them.
- Now hear me out here. I'm not saying that believers will never struggle with sin. On the contrary, the further along on this journey I am, the more I struggle with sin because the more sin I recognize in my life! When I first came to Christ, I didn't see all the things I see now that need to go. It's a process that God takes you through.
- But if you aren't moving anywhere on your journey and you're not really even just spinning your wheels because you've given up and you've become really good at explaining it away, what does that mean? DA Carson put it like this:
 - "People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated."

- You will not just drift toward holiness on your own. Apart from God's sanctifying work in your life, you'll never accomplish it. But one thing is for sure, if you are a Christian, God will be at work in your life.
- Paul puts it like this in 2 Corinthians 5:17
17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!
- You claim to be a Christian? Guess what? That means you are a new person inside. The old you is dead and gone. It's been crucified with Christ. You have a whole new set of desires, dreams, hopes, wishes, thoughts and longings. Your deepest desire is for God to be glorified through your life. You want to become more like Christ. You want to look less like what you look like now. In short, a Christian is someone who despises anything to do with the sinful self.
- Does that describe you, beloved? Can you say that your deepest desire is to be more like Christ? Or is your deepest-rooted desire self-pleasure and self-fulfillment? If you truly belong to Jesus Christ as His child, you have died to yourself and you desire Him more than you desire anything else.
- Now there's a second paradox here that we also want to note. It's really another way of stating this same principle, but it's very helpful to us too. Look with me at verse 26:
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."
- **The second paradox is this: you will either be ashamed of yourself and find eternal life or you will be ashamed of Christ and you find eternal wrath.** There is no in-between. People who would have nothing to do with Christ really are saying they are ashamed of Him.
- I want you to focus on this word "ashamed" for a moment. What does it mean to be ashamed of something? To be ashamed is to want nothing to do with something. We all know this feeling. Don't we all have some black sheep in our families, so to speak? The people that just give the family name a bad wrap. You know what I'm talking about. And how many of us have even said before something to the effect of, "I'm ashamed to even call her my sister!" or cousin or whatever the case may be."
- To be ashamed is a strong word. But all unbelievers are ashamed of Christ. They don't want to be associated with Him. Because to be associated with Him means you have to be ashamed of yourself and sinners don't want to hear that.
- A Christian is someone who is deeply ashamed of his sin. A Christian looks at his life and feels guilt for it. What about those who claim to be in the faith, but seem to be pretty smug about their sin? Listen, someone who is not a true Christian will be hard-hearted to their sin. They won't feel shame over their sin because they have no capacity to do that.
- Jeremiah knew this well. There is nothing new under the sun. People are really the same today as they were thousands of years ago. Sin is sin, no matter how it's packaged. And in Jeremiah 6:15 he says this about people who were deep into sin:
15 Are they ashamed of their disgusting actions? Not at all—they don't even know how to blush! Therefore, they will lie among the slaughtered. They will be brought down when I punish them," says the LORD.
- Why would God punish them like this? Because they saw no shame in their actions. The bottom line is this: if you refuse to be ashamed of yourself, God will be ashamed of you for all eternity. Hell is the ultimate place of shame. And you'll go there with a fully informed conscience, feeling the full weight of shame for all eternity that you refused to feel in this life.
- A Christian is someone who is not ashamed of Christ because they are deeply ashamed of themselves and they know just how desperate they are and how desperately they need a Savior to deliver them from sin.
- Hebrews 12:2 tells us:
2... Because of the joy awaiting Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now He is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.
- Have you ever really wondered what the shame in the cross was? It is far more than just the humiliation of dying like a criminal. The real shame in the cross is the sin that Christ bore. The sin that you and I placed on Him when He died in our place. But disregarding that shame, He took it on Himself anyway.
- And what's even more, Hebrews goes on to say in 11:16
16 But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.
- God is not ashamed to be called my God? He isn't ashamed to be associated with such a wretched, horrible, disgusting, filthy worm of a human being like me? And yet He has every reason to be ashamed of me. There is nothing good inside of me but Him. And yet He's not ashamed to be called my God.
- No wonder Paul could say in Romans 1:16
16 I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile.
- So you want to be a Christian? Live by dying. Win by losing. Find eternal life by being ashamed of who you are and embracing all that Jesus is. This is total loss. This is exclusive loyalty. This is taking Jesus on His terms and giving up all rights to self, all rights to life as you know it and even your very life on this earth if God decides to take it. It's giving it all up and confessing with all your soul that Jesus is Lord.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- Beloved, those are the terms Christ call us on. As we wind down our time together, I want you to think about how you would answer this question: how can I really know if I am a Christian? How can I know if I'm not just a wolf in sheep's clothing? How can I know if I'm not just playing church?
- I think the answer to that is simple. Compare your life with the terms that Jesus has established for us here in Luke 9. How do you compare? 2 Corinthians 13:5 says this to us:
5 Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith.
- When some people hear verses like that, they get worried. "Well when I got saved, the preacher told me never to doubt my decision and if I ever did to just think back to this moment in time when I make the choice to follow Christ."
- So many preachers have been well meaning when they said that, but I want you to see that is just not Biblical. Faith is not a one time event. If you aren't living for Jesus right now, you have no assurance of salvation whatsoever.
- You see, we've made that up I think because every one of us has loved ones who at some point have made a decision for Christ, but have failed to follow through with it. And so we want them to be saved, even if they never return to church. So we tell ourselves that they make a decision once and so they're saved, just backslidden.
- The problem with that line of thinking is that it's nowhere to be found in Scripture. The moment you walk away from right living, you have no assurance of salvation anymore. Jesus says this in Matthew 24:13
13 ... the one who endures to the end will be saved.
- So what about those who don't endure to the end? The exact opposite is true. True faith perseveres to the end. If it doesn't, then it's not true, saving faith. Someone who walks away from God and never returns to God and dies doesn't lose their salvation. They were never saved to begin with! Because if they were saved, they would have persevered to the end according to Jesus.
- No wonder God tells us to examine ourselves to see if our faith is genuine. Colossians 1:22-23 also shed some insight on this for us:
22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach--
23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.
- You have salvation, if you continue in the faith. You forget the faith and go your own way, you have no assurance anymore. Jesus Himself said if you become ashamed of Him, He'll be ashamed of you for all eternity.

- So how do we test ourselves to make sure we are in the faith? Well let me give you a few questions to ask yourself this morning as we consider this. Ask yourself this:
 - Are you growing in your walk with Christ?
 - Are you seeing a deepening realization of your sin and are you actively doing something about it?
 - Do you make self-denial, self-hate and dying to self a continual habit in your life?
 - Are you willing to suffer for Christ no matter how severe and no matter how much He allows you to go through, even to the point of death?
 - Have you submitted your life to Jesus Christ as Lord of it?
 - Are you ashamed of your sin? Do you mourn over it?
 - Have you fallen flat on your face before the cross and pleaded with God for mercy on your soul? Is this a continual reality for you everyday of your life?
- I cannot tell you if you are in the faith or not. It's really not for me to judge. But Jesus does say that we'll know them by their fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. Examine your life. Do you have fruit consistent with repentance in your life?
- Test yourself. Have you come to Christ on His terms? Salvation is freely available for all who will call upon His name out of a sincere heart, with full recognition of their wretchedness and utter helplessness.
- Beloved, the Gospel according to Jesus is not some half-hearted, seeker-friendly plea where God is just begging you to come to Him. On the contrary, He has established His terms. If you refuse His terms, you forfeit eternal life.
- I would remind you at this point that the disciples were uncomfortable with this too. In fact in Luke 13:23 one of them asked this:
23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them,
- It's a valid question. With terms like this there are going to be a lot of people who think they're good to go who will be shocked when eternity comes! Jesus responded to them with these words:
24 "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."
- Many will seek to enter. Many will come to Christ. And many will be turned away on the Judgment Day because they wanted to set conditions on what they'd give to Jesus. Jesus' terms are the narrow door. Many won't come on His terms and they'll go to hell forever because of it. So this morning, I ask you the most important question anyone will ever ask you: have you ever really come to Jesus on His terms?
- **LET'S PRAY.**