

Luke 9:23-27

"Take Up Your Cross"

January 26, 2025

1. The context...

1. Peter had just made his great confess, that Jesus was "the Christ of God"
 - a. Jesus had then foretold of his death and resurrection, saying that these things MUST happen
 - i. For, according to the Scriptures, it was the will of the Father to crush the Son
 - b. We didn't get to see it in Luke, but Matthew and Mark tell us that, after Jesus told his disciples these things, that Peter took the Jesus aside and began to rebuke him
 - i. Jesus, you're the Anointed One of God... you're the Messiah! Just stop with all this doom and gloom stuff about you suffering and being killed... There's NO WAY that that is how this is all going to go down!"
 1. God the Father had revealed to Peter who Jesus truly was,
 - a. But Peter still had his own preconceived notions about God's plan, and how HE thought it should all go
 2. And so Jesus says to Peter in Matthew 16:23
 - a. "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

2. Luke 9:23-27

- a. *²³And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶For 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. ²⁷But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."*

3. The proposition...

- a. "If anyone would come after me"
 - i. We're reminded here that being a follower of Christ is not just a passive thought
 1. It has become commonplace in our churches today to call people to "make a decision" for Christ
 - a. This might mean coming forward at the end of the service and praying with the pastor
 - b. In many churches, it simply means that you raise your hand in a dimly lit room, where no one is watching you
 - i. You repeat the prayer of the pastor standing up on the stage
 1. And he pronounces everyone who raised their hand and prayed that prayer as "saved"
 - a. And then everyone goes about their lives, just as normal as they had done the day before
 - ii. My friends, this is NOT the example given to us in the Scriptures
 2. To be a follower of Jesus is an ACTIVE call
 - a. You don't get to just raise your hand, pray a prayer, and then slap a Christian bumper sticker on your car
 - i. The call of Christ today is the same call as it was two thousand years ago
 1. "If anyone would come after me..."

- ii. In the Greco-Roman world in which Jesus lived, this term of “come after me” had a very clear meaning
 - 1. It wasn’t just a physical act of walking behind someone
 - 2. But it also carried with it implications of DISCIPLESHIP and ALLEGIANCE
 - a. To follow after a rabbi or a teacher in those days was to adopt both their teachings and their lifestyle
 - b. The Old Testament precedent for this was the relationship between the prophets Elijah and Elisha
 - i. In 1 Kings 19, the great prophet Elijah has confronted the evil king Ahab...
 - 1. He’s defeated the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel
 - 2. And now he was fleeing from the wrath of the wicked queen, Jezebel
 - a. The Lord sends him to Horeb, the mount of God, where he speaks to Elijah in a still, small voice...
 - i. And he tells Elijah, “Go back, and anoint Elisha to be prophet in your place”
 - ii. And in verse 19, we read this...
 - 1. *¹⁹So [Elijah] departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. ²⁰And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, “Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?” ²¹And [Elisha] returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.*
- ii. My friends, this is the picture we must have in our mind when we read these words of Jesus, “If anyone would come after me...”
 - 1. Elisha heard the call of the Master
 - a. He took the yokes that were upon the oxen’s back, and he made a great bonfire out of them
 - b. He sacrificed all of the oxen and made a great feast for his friends and family
 - c. He kissed his mom and dad
 - i. And then he left it all and followed after Elijah
- iii. And if anyone thinks that this is too much of a stretch, and that this Old Testament example is too extreme for our modern days, then look down at the words of Jesus at the end of Luke chapter 9, where Jesus says in verse 62,
 - 1. “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”
 - a. To come after Christ is to forsake EVERYTHING in this world to follow after him
 - i. And then Jesus gives us three conditions for what this looks like
 - 1. “Let him deny himself”
 - 2. “Let him take up his cross daily”

3. "Let him follow me"

4. So first, "let him deny himself"

- a. Now this word, "deny," can have many meanings
 - i. It can mean that one refuses to admit the truth of someone else's claims
 - 1. So we believe that Jesus was resurrected from the grave on the third day, but the non-believer DENIES the truth of that claim
 - ii. It can also mean that someone refuses to give or grant something to someone else
 - 1. If you think about Christians in the heavily persecuted areas of the world, such as Yemen, these Christians are DENIED the rights and opportunities of their country, because of their faith in Jesus
- b. But in our context, Jesus isn't talking about one person denying the truth claims of another, or a country denying the rights of certain individuals
 - i. Jesus is talking about a personal, individual choice...
 - 1. And this is a choice to disregard ALL of your own interests
 - a. The Jewish people of those days longed for the Messiah to reestablish the geo-political rule of Israel
 - i. To lead the people in a revolt against the oppressors in Rome, and to make Israel great once again
 - 1. Jesus said to them, "If you want to come after me, you're going to have to deny yourself of those desires"
 - b. Peter longed for Jesus to stay with them, and to keep preaching and healing and performing all sorts of signs and wonders
 - i. And maybe if he did this for long enough, the people would warm up to him and he would be honored and exalted by all, is it should be
 - 1. And Jesus would say to him, "If you want to come after me, Peter, you're going to have to deny yourself of all your preconceived ideas"
 - c. All across the church today, we're being taught that the message of the Gospel is not just Jesus, but "Jesus PLUS"
 - i. If we would follow after Jesus IN FAITH, then he will surely make us all healthy and wealthy and prosperous in this lifetime...
 - ii. If we would follow after Jesus WITH CONVICTION, then he will surely make our nation great, and all the promises once given to Israel and the Promised Land we'll now be able to apply to US...
 - iii. If we would just follow after Jesus without all that messy doctrine and theology, then surely we would all be happy as we left one another to do whatever THEY want to do...
 - 1. And Jesus would say to all of us who have all these wonderful ideas of "Jesus PLUS"
 - a. "If you want to come after me, you're going to have to deny yourself of ALL of those ideas"
 - i. We must burn the yokes of our desires for wealth and prosperity
 - ii. We must sacrifice the oxen of our rights and privileges
 - iii. We must leave the plows behind of our own personal happiness, and NOT look back
 - d. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself

2. So that is the “putting off” of your self
 - a. But then, Jesus says that there is something that we are to put on in place of our self
 5. And that is OUR CROSS
 - a. If anyone would come after me, let him take up his cross, daily
 - i. Now, what’s fascinating about this condition that Jesus gives here is the simple fact that Jesus had not yet been crucified!
 1. With two thousand years of sermons and books and church history behind us, we understand all of the theological implications of the cross
 - a. This was where Jesus WILLINGLY went and took our sins upon his shoulders
 - b. According to Old Testament law, the cross was the tree upon which Jesus was hung, becoming the curse in our place
 - c. The cross was where Jesus would ultimately be sacrificed as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world
 - i. We get all of that from this image of the cross
 1. But what would the people living in Judea, and really the whole of the Roman Empire...
 - a. What would THEY think of when Jesus said to them, “You must take up your cross, daily”?
 - ii. The cross was the common method of execution in the Roman Empire in those days
 1. But it was an execution reserved for the lowest of the low... the most despised in society
 - a. Roman citizens were actually prohibited from being crucified – they were given the “more humane” punishment of a quick execution by the sword
 - i. But for everyone else, dying upon a cross meant that you were either among the worst criminals in the empire
 - ii. OR, you were a slave
 1. A nobody
 2. A non-person, without any value or worth to society as a whole
2. Throughout the Empire, this symbol of the cross was known as a symbol of shame and suffering
 - a. Instead of getting a quick death from the sword, these criminals were beaten and then nailed to the cross,
 - i. Where they would typically endure DAYS of excruciating pain, as they slowly either bled to death from their wounds, or suffocated to death from the position that they were nailed in
 1. THIS is the image that all of the people would have had in their mind when Jesus said to them,
 - a. If you want to come after me, you must be willing to take up your cross, EVERY SINGLE DAY!
 - ii. The theological implications of the cross would be met by Christ and Christ alone
 1. He alone would atone for our sins upon the cross
 2. He alone would purchase our freedom and forgiveness through his blood
 3. He alone would restore us to be the sons and daughters of God through his sacrificial death

3. But we – all those who truly desire to come after him – WE must take up our own cross
 - a. And we must endure the shame and the suffering that our Savior endured
 - i. WE must be willing to be seen as an outcast, a nobody, a non-person without any value or worth to society
 - ii. WE must be willing to be seen as the most vile of all criminals
 - b. This is a foreign concept for us here in the West, isn't it?
 - i. Sure, we get laughed at for our faith
 - ii. We might get the occasional door slammed in our face as we go around praying for the people in our community
 - iii. We might even get reprimanded at work if we are too open in sharing our faith
 - c. But to be seen as people of no worth in society?
 - i. To be seen as some of the worst criminals in the land?
 1. That just doesn't really register for us, does it?
- iii. But this would very quickly be the reality for all who would come after Jesus
 1. In Mark 14, we read that when Jesus was arrested in the garden, that EVERYONE fled from the scene
 2. Peter would begin to feel the weight of his own cross a few verses later when he was in the courtyard of the high priest
 - a. And three times, the people accused him of being with Jesus – and three times he denied that he even knew Jesus
 3. In the book of Acts, even as the disciples were emboldened by the Holy Spirit, and thousands were added to their numbers,
 - a. As early as chapter 4, Peter and John were taken into custody and questioned by the religious leaders
 - b. In chapter 5, all the Apostles were arrested and flogged
 - c. And then in chapter 6, Stephen, one of the first deacons of the church, was seized by the elders and the scribes
 - i. And in chapter 7, he would be cast out of the city and stoned to death
- iv. The church would continue to grow and expand all throughout the Roman Empire, but it would come at a cost
 1. As the Apostle Paul would write in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13, maybe just a mere twenty years after he stood by, condoning Stephen's death,
 - a. *⁹For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. ¹⁰We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. ¹¹To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, ¹²and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.*
 2. And as one of the early church fathers, the man Tertullian, would write a hundred years later,
 - a. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"
- v. Brothers and sisters, we are not all called to be martyrs for the sake of Christ
 1. But we are ALL called to take up our own cross, each and every day

- a. We are called to embrace being called “fools” for Christ’s sake
 - b. We are called to viewed as weak in the midst of a power-hungry culture
 - c. We are called to cast aside the honor of the world, and be willing to be held in disrepute
 - i. Like the Apostle Paul... like Stephen before him, like the twelve before Stephen... and like Christ who paved the way, WE are to accept our calling to be the scum of the world, the refuse of all things
- vi. If anyone would come after Christ, he must take up his cross
 - 1. Not just in a one-time decision made at the end of the church service
 - 2. Not just in the raising of a hand in a dark room and in repeating someone else’s prayer
 - a. No, friends, if we would truly come after Christ, we must take up our cross, EVERY DAY
- 6. And then the third condition, we must follow him
 - a. In EVERYTHING that we do
 - i. Do you have enemies in your life?
 - 1. Then you are called to follow Christ by loving them and blessing them and praying for them, as he prayed upon the cross,
 - a. “Father, forgive them... for they know not what they do”
 - ii. Do you desire all the worldly treasures of this world, as we are constantly being told that the American Dream is the evidence of God’s blessing in our lives?
 - 1. Then you are called to follow Christ by forsaking the kingdoms of this world and all of their glory, and saying with him,
 - a. “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him ONLY shall you serve.’”
 - iii. Do you struggle with lusts and temptations and all sorts of wars within your own flesh?
 - 1. Then you are called to “lay aside EVERY weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who FOR THE JOY THAT WAS SET BEFORE HIM endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”
 - a. The writer of the book of Hebrews goes on in chapter 12, verses 3 and 4,
 - i. *³Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*
 - b. Christian – all you who desire to come after Christ – you must follow him by PUTTING TO DEATH the sins of your flesh!
 - i. No... we will never do this perfectly on this side of heaven
 - 1. But as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27
 - a. *²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest*

after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

- c. Friends, think about the elite Olympic athletes who train for their event
 - i. They deny themselves all sorts of foods and drinks so their bodies are properly nourished
 - 1. They deny themselves all sorts of comforts and ease so they can instead devote their limited hours to training
 - a. In fact, they deny themselves so much that the world around them often laughs at them or scorns them, don't they?
 - b. Yeah, these men and women are amazing athletes, but they really take their training TOO far these days
 - i. I mean, they don't have time to enjoy themselves
 - ii. They push their bodies way too far
 - iii. Many would say that they've actually turned their one event into an obsession
 - ii. And Paul says that they do ALL of this, for a wreath that will fall apart within a couple of years
 - 1. Or in today's terms, for a gold medal that tarnishes over time, and that can be stolen by thieves
 - 2. But YOU, Christian, you are training for an IMPERISHABLE prize
 - a. You are training for the JOY that is set before you in eternity
 - b. You are training for the prize that awaits you on the other side of glory
 - c. You are training to be in the very presence of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ
 - i. So follow Jesus in denying yourself
 - ii. Follow Jesus by taking up your cross, despising its shame, and enduring to the end
 - iii. Follow Jesus, by losing your life in this world, and gaining EVERYTHING!
7. For these are the only two paths that Jesus gives us, aren't they
- a. You either try to save your life and gain the whole world, and end up losing your self
 - i. Or as Matthew records for us, you "forfeit your soul"
 - b. OR, you lose your life for Jesus sake, and you save your soul
 - i. For what does it profit a man if he gains everything in this life, yet loses his soul for eternity?
 - 1. What does it profit a man, if rises to the top position in the company, makes hundreds of thousands of dollars, and lives in the beautiful mansion at the top of the hill...
 - a. And yet he loses his soul?
 - i. Jesus said of this man in Luke 12:20-21,
 - 1. ²⁰But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."
 - 2. What does it profit A CHURCH, if we become so popular that tens of thousands of people are watching our services every week...

- a. And we broadcast our prayer services out for all to see
 - b. And we make these really big checks so that everyone can see how much we're giving and who we're giving to
 - c. And we make sure to put it all over social media that we are in the middle of a 21-day fast where God is doing AMAZING things
 - i. What does it profit us if we gain such incredible fame and recognition out in the world?
 - 1. Jesus would say of us in Matthew 6:2, and Matthew 6:5, and Matthew 6:16,
 - a. "Truly I say to you, you have received your reward"
 - i. You wanted fame and accolades... here you go
 - ii. You wanted all the recognition and awards... they're all yours
 - iii. You wanted the praise of the peoples of this world...
 - b. That is exactly what you will get
 - i. And that is ALL you will get
- ii. My friends, this is the great danger of chasing after anything OTHER THAN Christ...
 - 1. God MIGHT ACTUALLY GIVE IT TO YOU
 - a. Is political power and influence and favor truly what you want?
 - i. God may just give it to you, and that is all you will get
 - b. Is the American Dream truly what your heart desires?
 - i. God may just give it to you, and that is all you will get
 - c. Is your neighbor's car... or your neighbor's big screen TV, or your neighbor's wife...
 - i. Is that what you truly long for?
 - 1. The danger is, God might just give you ALL those things you want, and in the end, you will forfeit your very soul
 - 2. This is the sobering reality that we read of in Romans chapter 1, as Paul talks about God giving the people up to their dishonorable passions
 - a. We like to apply these verses when we speak out against the sins of homosexuality and sexual immorality
 - i. And this passage certainly DOES apply to those sins
 - b. But Paul goes on in verses 28-32,
 - i. ²⁸And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, GOD GAVE THEM UP to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.
- iii. My friends, the Bible gives us a very straightforward and a very unapologetic picture of the God of all Creation
 - 1. Our God is a JEALOUS God

- a. He will not share the throne with ANY idol, including the idols of our own self-centered hearts
 - i. That is why He graciously gives to us NEW hearts
 - 1. Through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, God gives us a heart of flesh, and we are born again, as new creations in Jesus Christ
 - 2. And in these new hearts, we have a new love
 - a. We have a new love for the God who has formed us out of the dust
 - b. We have a new love for the Son of God, who died on the cross that we might be saved
 - c. And we have a new love for all of THE WORDS given to us through the Holy Spirit
8. For Jesus's caution in verse 26 isn't just for those who are ashamed of him
 - a. But it is also for those who are ashamed of HIS WORDS
 - i. It is for those who are ashamed of THE WORD, the Holy Scriptures given to us by God Himself
 - 1. You might affirm the fact that Jesus was a good, moral example for us to follow...
 - a. But if you are ashamed of what the Scriptures say when it comes to abortion, or gender, or the sanctity of marriage, then Jesus will be ashamed of you when he comes in his glory
 - 2. You might affirm the fact that Jesus was a great teacher who has given us a wonderful set of ethics that we are to live by...
 - a. But if you are ashamed of what the Scriptures say when it comes to loving your enemy, or taking care of the poor and the immigrant, or lowering yourself to the position of a servant to all, then Jesus will be ashamed of you when he comes in the glory of the Father
 - 3. You might even affirm the fact that Jesus was some sort of great prophet, blessed by God to perform all sorts of incredible signs and wonders... maybe even coming back from the dead...
 - a. But if you are ashamed of all the claims of Scripture that undeniably point to him as the very Son of God, the Word made flesh, the King who will return to judge the nations...
 - i. If you are ashamed of those words, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he returns with the holy angels
 - 1. As Jesus said in Matthew 13:41-43,
 - a. *⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, ⁴²and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*
9. Friends, if we are to follow after Christ, we CANNOT be ashamed of him... and we CANNOT be ashamed of his words
 - a. For by his very own words...
 - i. The Son of Man will come in his own glory
 - ii. The Son of Man will come in the glory of the Father
 - iii. And the Son of Man will come with the holy angels

1. "And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."
 - a. This is the promise of what is to come
10. But Jesus doesn't end with the promise of the FINAL Kingdom, does he?
 - a. He ends with verse 27, *"But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."*
 - i. This is a verse that has caused some confusion over the centuries
 1. But I think, if we read it in its plainest meaning, it doesn't have to be so complicated
 - ii. Some have said that Jesus is referring to the Transfiguration, an event that we'll look at next week
 1. We'll see that Peter and John and James certainly do get a glimpse of the Kingdom, as Jesus is transfigured in the fullness of his glory
 - a. But only three of them saw this transfiguration, and it only happened eight days after Jesus' words in verse 27
 - i. So that doesn't seem like the likely application
 - iii. Others have said that Jesus is referring to his resurrection, and his ultimate ascension up to heaven to sit at the right hand of the throne of God
 1. This definitely makes MORE sense, but even still, most of the disciples – in fact, all of them except Judas – we're all still alive for these things
 - a. So again, Jesus' words that SOME won't taste death until they see these things doesn't really fit either
 - iv. The MOST LIKELY explanation is this
 1. As Jesus is talking about the coming of the Kingdom of God... this coming that some will get to witness before they die
 - a. This is the coming of THE CHURCH!
 - i. Just think about what SOME of these men got to see
 1. They all saw the explosion of the church on the Day of Pentecost
 2. James, the brother of John, was the first to taste death, but the others got to watch as the Church then began to spread
 - a. First out of Jerusalem, and then out into Judea, and then even to the Samaritans
 3. And then, they got to watch in awe as this unexpected convert, the Apostle Paul, began travelling all over the Roman empire, now taking the good news of the Gospel to the Gentiles
 - ii. And throughout these few decades, according to Church tradition...
 1. Matthew would taste death around 60AD, as he took the Gospel to Ethiopia, and was slain by the sword
 2. Peter would taste death around 64AD, as he was helping to shepherd the church in Rome, and was crucified upside down
 3. Thomas would taste death around 70AD, as he was planting churches in India, and was run through with spears

2. All of these men who were standing there with Jesus would eventually taste death
 - a. But not until they had seen the Kingdom of God begin to spread and take root and expand towards the end of the earth
- b. Brothers and sisters in Christ, the Kingdom of God will indeed come into its FULL fulfillment when Christ returns in glory with the angels
 - i. But, IN THE MEANTIME, the Kingdom of God is HERE
 1. And it is advancing into all the nations,
 - a. As those who would come after Christ deny themselves, as they take up their crosses every day, and as they follow after him and proclaim ALL of his words
 - b. May the Lord find us among the faithful upon his return!