

**The Radical Nature of
Discipleship and
True Conversion**

John MacArthur

The Radical Nature of Discipleship and True Conversion

*A Series of Sermons on
Christ's Teaching on Discipleship*

By John MacArthur

These sermons can be accessed through Grace to You
at www.gty.org

or

<https://www.gty.org/library/resources/sermons-library/scripture/1?book=1&chapter=0>

Copyright 2018 by John MacArthur.
Used by permission from Grace to You

CONTENTS

1. The Starting Principle of Discipleship	7
Luke 9:23	
2. The Necessary Components of Saving Faith	23
Luke 9:23	
3. The Gospel: Self-Love or Self-Hate?	45
Luke 9:23-25	
4. The Gospel in Perspective	63
Luke 9:23-26	
5. Whose Ashamed of Who?	79
Luke 9:26	
6. Barriers to True Discipleship	93
Luke 9:57-62	
7. The Extreme Nature of True Discipleship - Part 1	111
Luke 14:26-33	
8. The Extreme Nature of True Discipleship - Part 2	131
Luke 14:26-33.	
9. Losing Your Life to Save It	151
Mark 8:34-38	
10. Christlikeness: The Goal of Discipleship	169
Matthew 10:24-25	
11. The Hallmarks of Discipleship - Part 1	191
Matthew 10:26-31	
12. The Hallmarks of Discipleship - Part 2	213
Matthew 10:32-33	
13. The Hallmarks of Discipleship - Part 3	233
Matthew 10:34-42	
14. Servant or Slave?	255

~ 1 ~

The Starting Principle of Discipleship

John MacArthur

Luke 9:23

11.3.2002

We return to our wonderful study of Luke's gospel. Open your Bible, if you will, to Luke chapter 9. This is how we inform our worship so that we can worship in spirit and in truth. We inform it with the truth of God's Word. Any and every passage is from God and is rich and instructive. But the one we look at this morning is particularly so.

I want to read verses 23 through 26, and then you'll have in mind and we'll begin to talk about it. Luke 9:23. "And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and 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.'"

It's brief, not many verses, not even very many words, but this is at the heart of the teaching of Jesus. This is pure gold, biblical gold. Maybe better, this is a diamond of truth, clear and brilliant. The subject is following Jesus, verse 23, "If anyone wishes to come after Me." This is a text about how to come after Jesus, how to follow Jesus, how to become a Christian, how to be saved, how to be redeemed and born again. That's what it's about. It is critical teaching.

And one thing strikes you at the very outset, and that is coming after Jesus involves self-denial. That's clearly the first thing that's

said. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself." The gospel is a call for self denial. It is not a call for self fulfillment.

And that puts the true gospel in opposition to the contemporary evangelical gospel which is a gospel of self fulfillment, self help. Jesus is viewed as a utilitarian genie. You rub the lamp, He jumps out and says, "You have whatever you want." And you give Him your list, and He delivers. There are those within the framework of evangelicalism in the Charismatic segment who tell you Jesus wants you well, and if you're not well it's because you haven't claimed your healing. Jesus wants you prosperous and rich, and if you're not it's because you haven't claimed it. Jesus wants you free from debt and if you send the televangelists enough money, you'll by virtue of your faith free yourself from debt, or the demon of debt, as it's often referred to, because Jesus doesn't want you having any troubles or any problems. Your salvation is a guarantee of health, wealth, and prosperity, and happiness.

The psychological, man-centered evangelicals tell you that Jesus gives you peace, and Jesus gives you joy, and Jesus makes you a better salesman, and Jesus helps you hit more home runs. Jesus really wants to make you feel better about yourself, and wants to elevate your self image, and wants to put an end to your negative thinking.

It's interesting how this trend has come into the church. I kind of watched it through the years, been around long enough to have seen it arrived. It really arrived, I think, most pointedly through the ministry of Robert Schuller. A number of years ago he wrote a book called *Self Esteem: The New Reformation*. I reviewed that book. It was published in a national magazine, the review that I did. Because I thought it was a turning point, it was an attempt at a new reformation. It was an attempt to replace the gospel - the biblical gospel - with a new gospel. And it worked.

In that book, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*, Robert Schuller writes, "It is precisely at this point that classical theology has erred in its insistence that theology be God-centered and not man-centered." So this is an iconoclastic beginning. The first thing we have to do is put an end to classical theology. We have to put an end to God-centered theology and replace it with man-centered theology. That's pretty blatant, but that was exactly what was going on.

He writes further, "This master plan of God is designed around the deepest needs of human beings." And what are those needs? "Self dignity, self respect, self worth, self-esteem. The pearl of great price is genuine self respect and self-esteem."

He further writes, "If we follow God's plan as faithfully as we can, we will feel good about ourselves." That's the gospel of evangelicalism. It's the feel-good gospel. Feel good about yourself. Then he goes on to say, "God needs you and me to help create a society of self-esteeming people." Pardon me if I don't join. I can't think of a group I'd less like to associate with.

So, in this effort at a new reformation, the first thing you have to do is wipe out classic, God-centered, historic theology, then replace it with a man-centered, psychological, self-esteem theology, and make everything in the Bible and the gospel work toward making people feel better about themselves to fulfill their dreams, and fulfill their visions. Further he says, "God's ultimate objective is to turn you and me into self-confident persons." And then - this is enough - one more quote, "Once a person believes he's an unworthy sinner, it is doubtful if he can really honestly accept the saving grace God offers in Christ."

So, in the new gospel, if you want to be saved, you cannot believe yourself to be an unworthy sinner. How twisted is that? How contrary to the truth is that? But it is that man-centered, self-esteem gospel that was picked up by the number one disciple of Robert Schuller, Bill Hybels, and translated into the seeker-friendly movement which has hijacked evangelicalism. It's a kind of quasi-Christian narcissism, self-love which is characteristic of false teachers, according to 2 Timothy 3, where it says, "Dangerous seasons will come, for men will be lovers of self."

And Christianity has become a "get what you want," rather than a "give" movement. The divine intention for the gospel has been prostituted. The glory of God has been replaced by the satisfaction of man. Abandoning your life to the honor of Christ has been replaced by Christ honoring you. It's all twisted and the real gospel is no longer in vogue.

There was a saint of many centuries ago who got it right. This

is a prayer that he wrote. "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, "If you're going to follow Me, you deny yourself, you take up your cross every day and you 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.

This is not an obscure passage. This is not something that's sort of different than the normal teaching of Jesus. This is principles which He teaches repeatedly throughout His ministry over, and over, and over again, in all different contexts.

Let me show you that. Go back to the 10th chapter of Matthew, for a moment. Matthew 10:34. Jesus has been, in the prior verses, talking about confessing Him, of course confessing Him as Lord and Savior. Verse 32, "Everyone who confesses Me before men, I'll confess before My Father who is in heaven." So He's talking about confessing Christ as Lord. And then in verse 34 He says this. "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword. I came to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's enemies will be the members of his household."

First thing, come to Christ, it may make your family worse, not better. It may send a rift into your family the likes of which you have never heretofore experienced. But that's the way it is, because if you give your life to Jesus Christ, there will be an impassable gulf between you and the people in your family who don't. Verse 37 says so "he who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy

of Me." If you're not willing to pay the price of a permanent rift in your family unless those people come to Christ, if you're not willing to pay the price of greater trauma in your family, greater conflict in your family, greater suffering in your family, then you're not even worthy to be My disciple.

Verse 38, He says, "He who doesn't take his cross - " the cross was associated with one thing, one thing alone. A cross was an instrument of death. It was an instrument of execution. Jesus goes even beyond this. If you're not willing to have conflict in your family, you're not worthy to be My disciple. If you're not willing to have conflict with the world to the degree that it could cost you your life, then you're not worthy of Me.

Verse 39. "He who has found his life shall lose it, he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it." It's about losing your life. It's not a man-centered theology, it's a Christ-centered theology that says, "I give everything to Christ no matter what it costs me." Now that's Matthew 10.

Mark 10 is another illustration of this teaching of Jesus. This is absolutely at the heart of Jesus' teaching, that's why these few verses are going to take us some time to work through because this must be understood. Mark 10:21. Jesus here is speaking to this rich young ruler who wants eternal life. He asks in verse 17 about eternal life. And Jesus, you remember, talks to him, and if you put the whole account together, Jesus confronts his sin. He won't admit it and he won't give up his self-righteousness, which is the worst sin. And then Jesus talks about his money and he's not about to give up his money. He wants Jesus, yes. He wants eternal life, but Jesus throws in his face you're going to have to give up your self-righteousness, that is you're going to have to recognize yourself as an unworthy, wretched sinner, and you're going to have to be willing to give up all your earthly possessions if I ask.

And you remember the story. He wouldn't do it. Verse 21. "Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, 'One thing you lack: go sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; come, follow Me.' " Jesus said, "The price is be willing to give up everything. I might not ask it, but I might. The price is be willing."

12 THE RADICAL NATURE OF DISCIPLESHIP AND TRUE CONVERSION

"At these words his face fell, he went away grieved. He was one who owned much property." I'd rather have my money. I'd rather have my property than Jesus. Then you're not worthy to be His disciple. If you're not willing to be separated in your family, if you're not willing to be separated from the world, if you're not willing to be separated from the material things that you possess, then Jesus isn't that valuable to you. It's an all or nothing proposition.

Now follow along into Luke chapter 9 again, and go to the end of the chapter, verse 57. This is so critical for us to understand and so practical, as I'll point out. They were going along the road, Jesus with some of the people who followed Him, some of the disciples, who would-be disciples. And somebody said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." Really? "Jesus said to him, - " We're not going to the Ritz Carlton, I hope that doesn't affect you negatively. " - The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." If you follow Me, you will lose everything. That's the price. Just know that. Jesus didn't say, "Oh great, follow Me. You will be happy. You will be healthy, wealthy, prosperous, successful." He said, "Just know this. I don't have any place to lay My head. It's going to cost you everything."

"He said to another, 'Follow Me.' He said, 'Oh, I need to go bury my father.'" And the implication is his father wasn't even dead. What does he mean "go bury his father," go to the funeral? No, hang around till he gets the inheritance. He just heard Jesus say he wasn't going to have anything if he followed Jesus. Jesus had nothing to give him, so he wanted to hang around home until he could pack a fortune in his bag and then come after Jesus. He too disappeared.

But Jesus sets the standard as total self-denial. If you turn to the 14th chapter of Luke, just introducing these times and places where Jesus discussed this, you find that the message is always the same. There's a great multitude in 14:25 and they're coming along with Jesus, and He turns and He speaks to them. "If anyone comes to Me - " You all want to follow Me, you want to be My followers. "If you come to Me and you don't hate your own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and even your own life, you can't be My disciple." It's not about you. It's not about

your self esteem. It's about your sin, and your desperation, and you seeing Christ as so priceless, and so valuable as your Savior from sin and death and hell, that you would willingly give up everything. If it cost you your family, if it cost you your marriage and - in verse 27 - you carry your own cross. And if you don't carry your own cross - that is, be willing to die and give your life and come after Me - then you can't be My disciple. It can't be any clearer than that.

In the 17th chapter of Luke, Jesus speaking again on another occasion, says this, verse 33, "Whoever seeks to keep his life shall lose it, whoever loses his life shall preserve it." It's the same principle. You try to hold onto you, your plans, your agenda, your success, your self esteem, you lose. You lose.

In the 12th chapter of John's gospel, so you know that John didn't leave this core teaching from Jesus out, John 12:24. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." "If you're going to be fruitful in following Me," Jesus says, "It's going to cost you your life. You're going to have to die." "He who loves his life - " verse 25, " - loses it, he who hates his life in this world shall keep it till life eternal. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me." And the path that He was going was a path to persecution and death.

So you want to come after Jesus, do you? So you want to follow Jesus, do you? It will just cost you absolutely everything. Oh, the Lord might not take your life. He might not take all your money. He might not take your family or your spouse. He might not take your job, but you need to be willing if that's what He wants. You need to be desperate enough to embrace Christ no matter what the price.

Now let's go back to Matthew 16 for a moment, because we can't understand the full picture of the Luke passage without comparing Matthew 16 because they're parallel, but Matthew has included more information. Now the scene is, it's exam time with the disciples, as you remember from our last message. It's exam time. There's only one question on the exam. The one question on the exam is Matthew 16:15. "He said to them, 'Who do you say that I am?' " After a couple years of training, and disclosure, and revelation, and miracles, and signs, and wonders that Jesus had done, all of

His teaching, it was time to give them the final exam in the school of discipleship. And so there's only one question on the exam, "Who do you say that I am?" They get it right. "Simon Peter answers - " on behalf of all of them, " ' - Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' " And Jesus responds, "That's right. Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonas Barjona, because flesh and blood didn't reveal thisto you, but My Father who is in heaven." You have accepted the revelation of God. You have seen what God has been revealing through Me. You understand that's the right answer. This is the high point of all discipleship training. They have come to the right conclusion about Jesus Christ. That's absolutely necessary for salvation. He is God's Christ, God's Messiah, God's Son, God's Savior, all that the Old Testament promised, and all that Jesus claimed is in fact, true. This is the great confession, the supreme confession.

You remember that the gospels were written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that believing you might have life in His name. Well, they believed and they have life in His name, and this is their great moment of confession. They got it right.

In response to that affirmation comes, "You got the message from God. You saw what God was saying through Me, and you got it right. That's wonderful. And I have something else to say to you, Peter." Verse 18, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I'll build My church." There's a little bit of a contrast here. "You are Peter - " you're a small rock, " - but upon this rock bed - " different word - "I'll build My church." A little contrast. What is the rock bed? The confession of who He is, the reality of who He is.

"I'm going to build My church," He says, "and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." This is wonderful. You've come to the right answer and I'm telling you this. I'm going to build the church and the gates of Hades - what's that? Hades is where dead people are, the gate is how you get dead, and that's by dying. So the "gates of Hades" is simply death. Satan has the power of death. Hebrews 2 says he wields the power of death in the world. That's his greatest power. But even Satan's power of death is not going to stop the Lord from building His church.

This is a triumphant note. You've got the right answer to the question. You passed the exam, A+. And I'm telling you guys it's on that great and glorious reality that I will build My church, and Satan's great power of death will not prevail against it. Furthermore, I'm not only going to build My church, but I'll give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. You're going to be able to open the door to the Kingdom and let people in.

How? Because they're going to proclaim the gospel. How do you get into the Kingdom of Heaven? What's the key that unlocks the door? It's the gospel, isn't it? So you're going to be My gospel preachers, and whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Binding and loosing was an old rabbinical concept. The rabbi would say to a person who didn't repent, "You're bound in sin." He would say to a person who did repent, "You're loosed from sin because God forgives those who repent." And so Jesus says to the apostles, "You're going to do the same. You're going to unlock the Kingdom with the gospel and you're going to tell sinners who repent they're loosed from their sin, and sinners who don't repent, they're bound in their sin. You're going to be My representatives. You're going to be My authoritative agents in the world, and you're going to bring people into the Kingdom."

You can just feel the welling enthusiasm. This is it, guys. This is what we've been bouncing around for the last couple of years hoping would happen. He's the Messiah. He's going to build the church. Nothing's going to stop it. We are going to have the authority to open and close the Kingdom, not the established religion of Judaism, not the scribes and the chief priests and the elders. It's going to be us. We're going to build the premier ones, the preeminent ones in the Kingdom. This is what we've been waiting for. And then in a shocking, shocking statement, verse 20, "He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ."

That doesn't make sense because they're just swept up in the thrill of the moment, of the authority, of the invincibility of the church, at the identity of Jesus, and now He says, "Don't tell anybody." It's not the time. And verse 21, "From that time Jesus Christ

began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day."

What a downer. Jesus says, "Don't tell anybody because the plan is not for Me to take over My Kingdom now. The plan is not for Me to enter into My glory now. The plan is for Me to be killed by the Jewish establishment." I mean, this is just absolutely shattering. After they have been literally exalted by the realities that He is the Messiah, that He will build the church, that even the power of death won't prevail against it, that they're delegated this authority, they could taste the Kingdom. They could feel the glory coming. You could say they could feel the heat of the Shekinah. Health and wealth and prosperity was right around the corner. And surely Jesus would destroy the apostate leaders of Judaism, and they would be the new leaders of Israel, and surely He would destroy the Roman oppressors, and occupiers, and pagans, and surely He would heal all diseases, and He would provide food as He did when He fed the multitudes. This was the great glorious moment they had all been waiting for, for so long. And then Jesus says, "Don't say anything. I have to die first."

Verse 22. "Peter took Him aside." Peter says, "Lord, we need to have a private talk. Come over here." "And he began to rebuke Him." Talk about a type A personality. Man, he rebukes the Son of God, the self-confessed Son of God. The Son of the living God just came out of his mouth and he says, "Come over here. I need to straighten You out."

And he says, "God, forbid it, Lord. This shall never happen to You." That's not going to happen. You're not going to die. That isn't the plan. "And Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan.'" I don't think he even liked being called Simon, let alone Satan. Then He says this, "You are a stumbling block to Me." And here's why. "You are not setting your mind on God's interest but man's." You have a man-centered idea.

You know, that could almost be the motto for contemporary evangelicalism. You are not setting your mind on God's interest but man's. It's all about you, isn't it? And it's all about what you want,

and it's all about the power and the glory, and it's all about the crown, and it's all about the reward and the authority. You don't get it. The way up is down. You're not going to get a crown without a cross.

And then in verse 24, Jesus introduces the principle, "said to His disciples - " the apostles and the rest of the crowd, as Mark 8:34 indicates the crowd was listening, too. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross." Luke adds, "Daily and follow Me." And with that, we transition back to Luke 9. Let's transition back to Luke 9 and pick it up there. Matthew filled in so much for us that was helpful.

This is a shocking experience for the apostles, having come to this glorious confession, and now being told not to say anything, and then being told Jesus is going to die. And not only is Jesus going to die, but He's saying to them all - back to Luke 9:23, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me." And with that statement, Jesus opens up the paradox of discipleship. The paradox of discipleship. We're going to be looking at that not only, of course, this morning, but next Sunday, as well.

Now this section, I'll just kind of break it down into four categories: The principle, the paradox, the Parousia and the preview; which we'll look at as we go. But for this morning and just a few moments left, I want you to look at the principle in verse 23. The principle.

It isn't hard to figure the principle out. It's simply this. If you want to follow Christ, you want to be a Christian, do you? Here's the message. Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him.

Do you hear that in the contemporary gospel? Do you ever hear that? Do you ever hear that in a message given by a television preacher or an evangelist? Do you ever hear anybody say that? Do you ever hear anybody stand up in a crowd and say, "If you want to become a Christian, slay yourself, deny yourself all the things that yourself longs for and wants and hopes for, be willing to die and slavishly submit in obedience to Jesus Christ"? That doesn't sell. That's not smart marketing. It just happens to be the truth.

So what do you want to do? Get someone artificially converted?

That's the popular way. Give people the illusion they're saved when they're not so that some day when they face Christ they're going to say, "Lord, Lord," and He's going to say, "Depart from Me, I never knew you." The gospel has to be the gospel. You want to follow Me then? The principle is, it's the end of you if you want to follow Me. It's the end of you. You don't exist anymore. Paul said it this way. "For to me to live is - " what? " - Christ and to die is - " I've learned how to be abased and how to abound. I've learned how to have things and not have things. It doesn't matter. If I live I live to the Lord. If I die I die unto the Lord. What's the difference? I'm the Lord's." That's the attitude.

Men want glory. They want health. They want wealth. They want happiness. They want all their felt needs met, all their human little itches scratched. They want a painless life. They want the crown without the cross. They want the gain without the pain. That's how people think. That's not God's interest. The author of our salvation, according to Hebrews 2:10, was made perfect through suffering, and so are we as well taken through the crucible of suffering. And where we suffer, first of all, is in the death of all hopes, all ambitions, all desires, all longings, all needs that are human. That's the point.

So you want to be a Christian, it's not easy. You'd think it was easy. Today, if you want to be a Christian, pray these little words. Pray this little prayer, and you'll be a Christian. It's not easy to be a Christian. Let me show you some things.

Matthew 7:13. This is, again, the teaching of our Lord. Matthew 7:13, Sermon on the Mount, familiar words, verse 13, "Enter by the narrow gate." First of all, become a Christian, you're going through a narrow gate. The idea of narrow here means "constricted." I mean, it's one of those things that you have to kind of go through. It's very, very tight. You can't carry anything through it. You come through with nothing. "There is a wide gate, but it leads to destruction."

There's a wide religious gate, and people are going on with all their baggage, and all their self needs, and all their self esteem, and all their desire for fulfillment and self satisfaction, and all of that. They're going on there, but it doesn't go to heaven, it says "heaven"

but ends up in hell. And many go that way.

But there is also, verse 14, this very small, narrow gate and it leads to eternal life, but notice this, "Few are those who find it." And the idea is it's hard to find. And I agree that it's hard to find. It's especially hard to find today. You can go to church, after church, after church, after church, after church and never find it. It's a very narrow gate.

If you turn to the 13th chapter of Luke you'll see some more elements of this same teaching. Luke 13:23. This is very, very important. Someone said to Jesus as He was passing from one city and village to another on His way down to Jerusalem, "someone said to Him, 'Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?'" That was the implication of Jesus' teaching, that this is a narrow gate, that this is hard to find. And so the question comes, "It seems like You're saying there are just a few who are being saved." And He said to them, "Agonize, agonizomai, strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

It's hard to find and it's hard to get through. Why? Why is it so hard to find and why is it so hard to get through Answer, because it's so hard to deny yourself. So hard. That's the reigning reality in human fallenness, that man is the master of his own soul, the captain of his own fate, that man is the monarch of his own world, that man is king and to say he has to slay himself, deny himself, that's too much to swallow. You preach a gospel that doesn't include that and people will flock around to get out of hell into heaven. You start preaching the true gospel that calls for total and absolute self-denial, the recognition that you have nothing of which you are worthy, nothing of which you can be commended, nothing in you that needs to be salvaged. But rather you're willing to slay everything you are, all your hopes, dreams, ambitions for the sake of the pearl, for the sake of Christ and you're coming on God's terms. That's not easy. It's hard, first of all, to find that truth and it's even harder once you've heard it to submit to it because man worships himself. He's his own god. What we need to be telling people is not "come to Christ and you'll feel better about yourself," is not "Jesus wants to meet whatever your needs are." Jesus doesn't want to meet your needs, your worldly,

earthly, human needs. He wants you to be willing to say, "I will abandon all the things I think I need for the sake of Christ."

So, a little further along in the 14th chapter of Luke's gospel, go down to verse 28. "Which of you - " Jesus says " - who wants to build a tower doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all those who observe it begin to ridicule him saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' "

Now if you're going to come to Christ, you're going to have to count the cost. You're going to have to count the cost before you make a pretense that you're going to come to Christ, a pretense that you're going to follow Jesus. Have you counted the cost? Do you understand there's a price to pay? We know what the price is. The price has just been given in verses 26 and 27, which I read earlier, hating your father and mother if necessary, hating your own life, carrying your cross, coming after Me. That's the price, that there's nothing in the world, the human realm, that you hold dear enough to forfeit Christ. "What king - " verse 31 " - if he's going to go out and fight a battle with another king doesn't sit down and take counsel whether he's strong enough with ten thousand men to counter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace." You either make peace with the enemy if you can't conquer him, or you make sure you've got the troops that it's going to take to win the battle. In other words, Jesus is saying, "Don't come to Me unless you've assessed the price." And the price is self denial, self crucifixion and self submission.

In verse 33 He gives the point. Don't think it's anything less than this. "No one of you can be My disciple who doesn't give up all his own possessions." Jesus said, "You have to be willing to give up everything. You're not going to get saved by dumping all your earthly goods, but you have to be willing to give up everything. That's how devoted you are to the cause of Christ. You will deny yourself all of your worldly longings. You will deny your own right to live and give your life, if need be, for the cause of Jesus Christ, and you will submit to His will, following Him whatever He asks,

whether He says you must lose these things, or you can keep them, that's up to Him."

And then Jesus told those two parables in Matthew 13:44-46. He said there was a man who found a treasure hidden in a field and he saw the value of the treasure and he sold everything for the treasure. Then he said there was a pearl of great price, that the man found the pearl of great price, he sold everything to get the pearl. It's the selling everything that is the essence of salvation. It's I give up everything, I deny myself, I offer my life both in terms of death, if need be, and in terms of obedience in life. This is the message of the gospel. So when you go to preach the gospel, that's what you have to say.

Now, you say, "But people aren't going to buy that." Well wait a minute, people aren't going to buy that, of course not, unless the Spirit of God is working in their hearts, right? Unless the Spirit of God is doing the work of conviction, and the Spirit of God is awakening the dead heart, and the Spirit of God is generating faith, and then that's the only true message that connected with the work of the Spirit will produce true salvation. Don't reinvent the gospel to suit you. That's what's being done today.

If anyone, anybody wishes to come after Me, open invitation, any of you wish to come, anybody here want to come? Well, you have to believe in Jesus. You have to confess Him as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and Lord and Savior. Then you have to be willing to have a rift in your family, a rift in your marriage, a rift with the world that could cost you your life, and a rift with your own personal ambitions, and submit your whole life to following Him and doing whatever He asks. It's not the one who says, "Lord, Lord," Jesus said, "It's the one who does the will of My Father. And this is the will of My Father, that you submit to the Son."

This is the gospel. It's a gospel of self denial. It's a gospel of self sacrifice and self submission. Deny yourself, take up your cross every day, put your life on the line for the cause of Christ, and follow in the sense that you do whatever He asks.

If you give anything less than that as the terms of the gospel, then somebody could be deceived, right? You say, "But what if they

don't respond?" That's not the issue. That's within the power of God to determine. What you're responsible for is the purity of the gospel.

Well, next time we're going to go into these elements of the principle in verse 23: Self denial, taking up the cross, and following Him. I wish I could give this all in one message, but I can't, and I can't shortcut the material because it's too critical and it's too germane to the essence of the gospel. But I think you can tell by now how critical important this is, how replete it is in the teaching of Jesus, and as we get into these elements next time and move from the principle to the paradox, you're going to see clearly what is your responsibility in terms of following Jesus and in terms of proclaiming that message to others. 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 the Savior's name. Amen.

~ 2 ~

The Necessary Components of Saving Faith

John MacArthur

Luke 9:23

Nov. 10, 2002

Luke chapter 9 is our text for this morning. We return to a section that I've called "the paradox of discipleship." The paradox of discipleship is 9:23-27, actually. Let me read this for you just to set it in your thoughts.

Luke 9:23, "And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and 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. But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.'"

It was back in 1988 when a book that I wrote was released. The book was called *The Gospel According to Jesus*. I pulled that book off the shelf this week and read it. I don't often read my own books, but I wanted to reacquaint myself with everything I had written that many years ago because I wanted to inform myself regarding the text that I'm speaking on this week, and certainly next week as well.

The Gospel According to Jesus was a book that the publisher assumed would have some meager impact. I remember the publisher saying they thought they would sell about 25,000 the first year. But

they sold 300,000. Why did that happen? Was there some great marketing plan? There was no marketing plan whatsoever. But that book sort of found its way into the reading of people who never really understood an issue that was buried sort of under the radar in evangelicalism. And it surfaced that issue and became so volatile that the book had an explosive response. The simple truth of that book - which is still in print in revised form - the simple truth of that book is that salvation and discipleship are the same thing, that following Jesus and being saved are the same thing.

Or to say it in the words of our text, looking at verse 23, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." That is not an invitation to a higher kind of Christian living. That is an invitation to salvation. That was the simple truth of the book. That truth was so obscured and so buried under the dominant evangelical view of evangelism that when I wrote the book people thought it was scandalous to say that to be saved you needed to deny yourself, take up your cross and obey Christ, because the dominant idea in many of the parts of evangelicalism in America, being espoused by very prominent seminary and many Bible colleges and therefore many pulpits, was that all you needed to do to be saved is believe in Jesus and then you're saved, and somewhere down the road you need to make Him Lord of your life and get serious about obedience. But that's certainly not connected to salvation.

I remember as a kid growing up going to hear speakers here and there, and going to camps and conferences where it was pretty common to say, "Now you may have Jesus as Savior, but do you have Him as Lord? Don't you think it's time to receive Him as Lord? Maybe you ought to get serious about obeying Him."

I was speaking at Founders Week at The Moody Bible Institute years ago when this controversy was just raging, and I had five sessions in the morning and I was speaking on the subject of a true invitation to salvation which incorporates discipleship, obedience, following Christ, all these things. And there was another speaker who had another session five times that week who was saying the opposite. It made for an interesting week.

But his orientation was to that institution that believed that you just said, "Jesus, I don't want to go to hell. Please forgive my sin. Keep me out of hell," and sometime later in your life you would confess Him as Lord. And if you just did the first one, you'd be in the kingdom but you wouldn't get the goodies. If you did the second one you'd be in the kingdom and you'd inherit the kingdom.

In fact, I'll never forget one thing that he said during the week cause I heard him say it, he said, "You young people at this point in your life, don't even worry about that second level of declaring Him Lord until you're, say, in your late thirties."

This continues to be an issue today. The simple message of that book - and I had to write a sequel to show that it's not just The Gospel According to Jesus, but The Gospel According to the Apostles -so I wrote that second book. The simple message is this: Salvation and discipleship are the same thing, and that every time Jesus said, "If you want to follow Me, you have to count the cost, you have to take up the cross, you have to deny yourself, you have to obey Me, follow Me, keep My Word," He was not calling people who were already Christians to a higher level, He was calling people who are not Christians to become saved.

The gospel that Jesus proclaimed was a call to follow Him as Lord. It was a call to follow Him in submissive obedience. It was far more than fire insurance, it was far more than a plea for a prayer, or a plea for somebody to raise their hand, or walk an aisle, or sign a card, a plea for somebody to do some sort of ceremonial thing in order to be off the hook in terms of God's eternal wrath. And while the gospel of Jesus was and is the offer of forgiveness for all sin, and the promise of eternal life, it is at the same time a call to self denial, bearing a cross, and following Christ, and nothing less is a true invitation. So that when the true gospel is presented, it has inherently in it a rebuke to superficiality, a rebuke to shallowness, a rebuke to outward hypocritical response.

The heart and soul of the gospel, as Jesus preached it, as the apostles preached it - if you need to get further detail, you can read those two volumes - the heart and soul of it is God is offering forgiveness of sin and eternal life to those whose faith is not superficial,

it is deep as evidenced by self denial, cross bearing, and submission.

There has been this movement in evangelicalism, and it's still around. I think the book had an impact and helped a lot of people who were confused by it, but the movement's still around. This movement separates salvation from obedience, separates Jesus as Savior from Jesus as Lord, separates believing from obeying, separates justification from sanctification. It's a disjointed, it's a disconnected kind of emphasis, and it's a tragically unbiblical distinction. In fact, it's a gospel scandal. It's a gospel scandal.

Sinners are told if they want to be saved and go to heaven, they just need to accept Jesus Christ, accept the fact that He died for them. They just need to ask Jesus to come into their hearts, or invite Him in - common and unbiblical phrases, by the way, suited to a deluded gospel. Very little is ever said about how they have to view themselves.

Those people who hold this position discard the evangelistic intent of virtually every recorded invitation Jesus gave. They turn Jesus into a deeper life teacher, or a higher life teacher, somebody who is saying to people who are already saved, "You need to come on up and be a disciple. You need to come on up and get serious. You need to start obeying. You need to start self denying." That's the second level of saved experience. So they take everything Jesus said like "Follow Me and deny yourself, and take up your cross, and obey Me, and keep My Word, and keep My commandments, and love Me, and love one another," as not spoken to those people who need to understand that that's the attitude of a person who comes for salvation, but rather making it an attitude of somebody who is already a Christian moving to a second level.

So Jesus then, instead of being an evangelist preaching the gospel, becomes a deeper life teacher. A sort of a Keswick speaker wanting to move people to another level of spirituality. No distinction - no distinction - such as that distinction between salvation and discipleship making them two different things, no distinction has done so much to undermine the authority and the accuracy of Jesus' evangelistic message. Everything that takes that side strips Jesus of the evangelistic intent of what He says. That's not a small issue.

If Jesus said, "I came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost," then we ought to make sure we know that what He said had that in mind. He didn't say, "I came to elevate those who were saved," He said, "I came to those that are lost." I don't really want to reinvent Jesus, and I think it takes an awful lot of brashness to do that.

Jim Boice, treasured friend now with the Lord, a great loss to all of us, wrote a book called *Christ's Call to Discipleship*. He also wrote the forward to *The Gospel According to Jesus*, one of two forwards in the book, because he certainly stood in the great tradition of those who rightly understood the Word of God and he was happy to write it. But he wrote a book called *Christ's Call to Discipleship* and a paragraph in that book is worth quoting.

He said, "This is a common defect, this disconnection between salvation and discipleship. This is a common defect in times of prosperity. In days of hardship, particularly persecution, those who are in the process of becoming Christians count the cost of discipleship carefully before taking up the cross of the Nazarene."

He's absolutely right. I'll stop there for a moment. He's absolutely right. Where there is hardship and persecution, there is no such disconnection, because all you have to do is publicly profess that Jesus is your Savior and that's enough to get you thrown in jail. So at that point you have to be willing if you're going to say that much to pay a price, maybe your life. So he's right.

He says, "In times like that - " further quoting " - preachers do not beguile people with false promises of an easy life, or indulgence of sins. But in good times the cost does not seem so high and people take the name of Christ without undergoing the radical transformation of life the true conversion implies."

So what I'm saying is, this view can only happen in America or some other affluent society, some other benign society in the sense of persecution and execution of believers. The call to salvation is a call to follow Christ. It's a call to follow Christ with such extreme devotion that you deny yourself and you take up your cross and you obey. That's what it means to be saved. Anything less than that is not saving faith.

When Jesus gave the great commission, He said, "Go into all the world and make - " what? " - make disciples." That's what we do. A disciple is a believer, a Christian. The word "disciple" is used throughout the book of Acts for believers, Acts 6:1, 2, 7; Acts 11:26; 14:20 and 22; Acts 15:10. It's just a word for "believer." So when Jesus calls someone to be a disciple, He's calling them to become a Christian, a follower.

True believers are those who have come to Christ to follow Him. They are those - remember last time Luke 14 - who have counted the cost to build the tower and then went about to build it when they knew what it would cost. They're not superficial like the rocky soil where the seed goes in and there's an emotional response but it's superficial, and pressure, and tribulation, and persecution comes, and the plant dies because it has no real root.

They're not like the weedy soil where the love of the things of the world and the love of riches still dominates the heart, and so the seed goes in, there's a momentary response, but the life has never divested itself of itself. And so no fruit ever comes and the plant withers and dies.

True salvation, the really good soil, occurs when somebody understands that when I ask the Lord Jesus to save me from hell and forgive my sin and give me eternal life, I am at the same time submitting everything to His lordship.

John Stott, years ago in his book *Basic Christianity*, wrote, "The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict half-built towers. The ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish, for thousands of people still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow Him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so-called nominal Christianity.

"In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent but thin veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved, enough to be respectable, but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life while changing its place

and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism."

And again, he's saying the same thing Boice said. Western civilization with its high level of comfort is a perfect place for nominal Christianity to exist. I've never seen it in eastern Europe. You wouldn't see it under Communist oppression because to be any kind of Christian would cost you your life so nobody becomes a shallow, superficial, half-committed Christian, because that would bring about the same effect as the real thing, you'd lose your life. So only those who are willing to do that embrace the gospel.

The call to salvation, then, is a call to full commitment, nothing knowingly held back, nothing knowingly held back. And there's no more definitive text to go to than this one and those others that are similar to this one, and to hear from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And let's understand what we're talking about here. This is an invitation to salvation. You want to know how to witness to people? How to communicate the gospel? Here it is. It's here. This is how Jesus did it. And frankly, it drops like a bomb, it is an explosive approach to evangelism.

And that's the way my book was basically described, it was described as a bomb dropped in 1988. And it blew a hole in the evangelical turf, and it revealed under the surface the terrible, terrible weakness of the gospel that was being preached. Well it's back again today, I hate to say. This easy believism is back today. We have the same kind of cheap evangelism going on today. Now it's even gotten worse. You don't even need to believe in Jesus and you're going to go to heaven if you just think there's a God up there who made things, let alone confess Jesus as Lord.

But those aren't God's terms, those aren't Jesus' terms. Jesus came as the proto-typical divine evangelist. He's given us the pattern how to evangelize. And what you do when you evangelize is you take somebody to the realization that to be saved, and to follow Christ, and be a true disciple, to be a Christian, you must do these three things: You must deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him. This is the hard message of evangelism.

You say, "Well people aren't likely to buy into this." If they're

not, then they can't be saved. We can't change the terms to get the desired effect. So let's go back to the text and let's go back to the principle, just to state the principle so we sort of set our feet on a foundation here.

Back to verse 23, "He was saying to them all - " speaking to the 12 Apostles, and also to the other followers in the crowd that were with Him. "He was saying to them all - " you need to understand this very basic foundational truth " - 'If anyone wishes to come after Me.' " Let's stop there for a moment.

"If anyone wishes to come after Me," is a gospel invitation. You want to be My true follower. You want to be genuine. Here's what I ask. "Let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." This isn't about you having your needs met. This isn't about you getting what you want. This is about you saying "no" to all of your needs, desires, hopes, ambitions, dreams, schemes, plans. This is about you embracing Mine. This is not about satisfaction. This is about sacrifice.

There's a level of desperation here. You say, "Well, people aren't going to easily buy into that." Well, of course they're not. But then whoever said salvation was easy, or even possible, unaided by the Holy Spirit? But there are, nonetheless, these three ingredients in this first principle. Let's just take them one at a time and they'll help us to understand more as we look at each one.

First, three ingredients in this great principle. These are three elements of this complex of saving faith. It assumes that Jesus is Lord, and Christ, and God, and Savior. So you want to follow Him, do you? You want to come after Him? You believe, you say, "Yes He's Lord. Yes, He died. Yes, He rose." So you want to follow Me, do you?

First, it requires self denial, *arn sath*, strong expression, literally "to disown something." You need to disown yourself, to disown yourself. It's used to describe refusing association with someone. You need to refuse to associate with yourself. Pretty extreme. It's used of rejecting companionship of someone where you literally do not want their company.

So that you come to Christ, and here's the first thing. You come

saying, "I can no longer stand to be associated with myself. I've had it with me. I don't want anything more of my own life." That's the depth of that understanding. It's not, "I like my life, and I like my world, and I like the direction I'm going, but, Jesus, could You move me up a little faster and a little higher?" It's not about that. It's about, "I've had it with everything that I am. I'm sick of my natural, depraved, impotent, sinful self." 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 any more 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 impotence, 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.

It's like the man who bought the pearl of great price, sold everything to buy the pearl, the pearl is Christ. And the man who bought the treasure in the field sold everything to buy the treasure in the field, literally giving up everything he was, everything he accumulated because Christ was so precious to him. It's really coming to the end of yourself. That's when people get saved. That's when they really get saved, when they come to this very, very clear understanding of their spiritual desperation.

In fact, I'll give you an illustration of it in Philippians chapter 3. Turn over to Philippians chapter 3 because this is just a classic illustration of what we're talking about, of this self denial. The apostle Paul is the illustration, and here you have the account of his conversion on the inside. You have the outside history, the event, in Acts 9, which is the Damascus Road event. But here's what was going on on the inside of Paul. This is the work that God had done in his life, and this is a very good illustration of coming to the end of yourself.

He says in verse 4, "If anyone has a mind - " the second half of the verse " - if anybody has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more." If you want to talk about achievements, if you want to talk about accomplishments, look, I'll go to the head of the class. I've accomplished more than anybody else.

He was in his thirties at this time, lived his whole life with amassing these accomplishments. "Circumcised the eighth day - " according to the prescription of the Old Testament, he was " - of the nation Israel." He had gone through the right ritual, belonged to the right race of people. He was "of the tribe of Benjamin." He belonged to a tribe of great privilege, a very exalted tribe. He was "a Hebrew of Hebrews," which simply means he was kosher. He kept all the traditions to the very letter. As far as the law was concerned, his passion and devotion to the law was as extreme as existed in Israel. He was "a Pharisee." They were the legalists. They were the extremists.

And he went as far as you could go. "As to his zeal," zeal for his religion, he was so zealous for the purity and protection of Judaism that he was "a persecutor of the church," which he saw as an attack on the truth, as an attack on God, as an attack on the Old Testament. And his passions ran so high that he literally got, remember, papers so that he could go places and destroy Christians and throw them in prison. "As to the righteousness which is in the law - " he was externally " - blameless." This is a man who has amassed all of these personal achievements. This has been his - this has been done over the whole of his life. He's been spending his life trying to reach this highpoint of religious zeal, morality. And he comes to Christ.

What is this approach going to be? I'm a good man. I'm as good as men get? I'm devoted to the truth of Scripture as a man can be? I'm as fastidious about the study of Scripture as a man can be? I'm as passionate about the protection of the truth as a man can be? I've done it all? I've toed the line? I've crossed every t and I've dotted every i?

And now he's met Christ on the Damascus Road. He understands the gospel. And immediately in verse 7 he says, "Whatever things were gained to me - " that all went in the asset column. That all went as gain, all his life achieving that. It all was gain, "whatever

things were gain to me, those things immediately I have counted as loss." They went from the asset column to the liability column. They weren't neutral. They weren't limited. They were loss.

In fact, you understand the level of their loss - the next verse, "I count all things to be loss." Now there's self denial. I don't care what it is, it doesn't help. It doesn't contribute. It doesn't add anything. You just have to look at your whole life no matter how religious, how zealous, no matter how you kept the tradition of your fathers, no matter how fastidious you were, you look at it all and you say, "It is loss. All of it, everything that is in me is loss." Why? Romans 7:18, "In my flesh dwells no - " what? " - good thing." And to even go further, he says, "It's all loss." And down at the end of verse 8 he says, "I count it all - " and the Greek word is skubalon, "excrement," the grossest word he could find. That's what it is.

Now there's a man who understands self denial. And at this point in his list he hasn't even denied the fact that he loved sin, and he loved iniquity and all of that. He's not just doing that. He's turning from the worst sin in his life, which was self righteousness. Even that to him was filth, garbage.

When I saw Christ I gave up everything that was Paul - everything. And that's the only way you ever come. And it may not be religion and self righteousness for you, it may be wretched immorality, cheating, whatever other things, lying, stealing, whatever other forms of corruption. It may be just that you're consumed with your own promises and pledges to achieve certain things in your own mind in order to reach a certain level of self esteem and whatever it is.

You come and the first thing that has to be realized is that this is the death of you, your hopes, your dreams, your ambitions, your desires. It's not about meeting all the little things that you want, having Jesus jump out of the bottle and give you your three wishes. It's about the death of you.

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 a little. It means you have nothing and you

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: Bankruptcy, 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've 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. Out of that carcass comes the honey. Out of that death comes the life. We come in the attitude of Psalm 34:18. "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." It's when you've literally been crushed in your own spirit you're at the end of yourself.

You hear very little preaching that intends to get people to that point. Psalm 51:17. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." God is looking for the crushed and the broken. Isaiah 66. Who is God looking for? The one who is contrite - the one who is not only contrite, the one who is crushed under the impact of God's Word, "who trembles at My Word."

You see, that's the reason the law was given and that's the reason the sermon on the mount was preached. The law was given in order that it might crush men. It wasn't given as a standard by which men could achieve salvation. It was given as a standard by which men would recognize their spiritual bankruptcy. You try to keep the law, you can't. The law then, as Paul says, slays you.

That's why when you preach the gospel you have to preach the law. You have to slay the sinner. He has to be dead before he can be alive. That's why when we give the gospel we've got to emphasize these realities so we don't contribute to superficiality and the more nominal Christianity.

So the law was given in order that it might be a crushing blow delivered to the head of the sinner who can't keep the law and is therefore cursed by the law. Galatians 3, if you break the law in one place, you're guilty of the whole law and you're under the eternal wrath of God. The law crushes us.

But then that's the reason the sermon on the mount is given and I believe that's the reason the Holy Spirit put it early in the New Testament. You're brought into the sermon on the mount and what does the sermon on the mount do? It gives you the law and it explains the depth of the law so that it's not just that you not kill, but that you not hate. That's the same thing. It's not just that you don't commit adultery, but that you don't even do it in your heart. That's the same thing before God.

And the law is reiterated and Jesus exposes the people to the law and says, "Not only do you not keep the law on its superficial level, but you certainly don't keep it on its deeper level. You're guilty of the violation of the law of God." That's why we say you don't even understand the gospel until you understand the law. That's why preaching can't be some kind of marketing strategy to schmooze people along until they decide they're going to take Jesus into their life. The law is a crushing, devastating experience in which the sinner brought before the law of God either revolts against that work of the law and bolts back to his sin, and wanting to get as far away from the exposure of the law as he possibly can, or he's crushed under that law, at which point he realizes his spiritual bankruptcy, and he cries out for forgiveness and mercy.

And at that point when he does that, he's not making bargains with God, understanding his destitution, realizing he has nothing in his own life to commend himself to God, nothing of value in all that he's accomplished, he throws himself upon the mercy of God, who can provide for him all the heavenly riches that the Word of

God speaks of. That's the attitude. You take Christ on His terms, not yours.

The proud sinner wants Christ and his pleasure. The proud sinner wants Christ and his covetousness. The proud sinner wants Christ and his immorality. But the broken sinner is so desperate he'll give up anything just to have Christ, just to have forgiveness, and eternal life, and hope, and deliverance.

Thomas Watson's wonderful book on the Beatitudes, he says, "A castle that has long been besieged and is ready to be taken will deliver up on any terms to save its life. He whose heart has been a garrison for the devil and has held out long in opposition against Christ, when once God has brought him to poverty of spirit and he sees himself damned without Christ, let God prosper, let God offer, and he will simply say, 'Lord, what will You have me to do?'" That's the attitude. That's the attitude. And that really becomes a way of life, becomes a way of life.

You come to Christ in that desperation, at the end of yourself, eager to self deny because you know there's no value in you. And then once you become a Christian, that attitude is still there. It's still there. It becomes a way of life. As you grow in the knowledge of God, in the knowledge of Christ, the roots of self denial go down. A way to understand it is that growth in grace is growth downward. It's growth downward. As you grow in grace, you have a continually lower opinion of yourself. You can spot a person's spiritual maturity pretty easily. Growth in grace is down, it is the forming of a lower estimate of ourselves. It is a deepening realization of our nothingness. It is a heartfelt, increasing recognition that we are utterly unworthy.

I was counseling somebody yesterday and this person said, "I am - I just - I just want to be able to do something for the Lord." With the implication, "Like you do." And I said, "Well, you know, the longer I've been a Christian, the more I've realized that I don't do anything for the Lord. I not only don't do anything for the Lord, I can't do anything for the Lord. And the wonder of wonders is that the Lord can do what He does through me."

So, you go from being a Christian when you're new and say, "I

want to do something for the Lord," to maturing through the years to saying, "God, how is it that You have chosen by Your grace to be able to do anything through me?" Humility is a demonstration of a person's spiritual maturity, because when you come in on those terms, you grow down from there. You thought you were humbled at the time of your conversion, if you've walked with the Lord for very long, you should be lower than you were then. Now you understand how profound sin is because even after being a Christian you've understood that it's a part of the fabric of who you are. And wonder of wonders, the Lord has chosen to do things through you. Self denial becomes a life pattern.

Now what does it mean as a Christian? Here are some practical things. When you're forgiven, or neglected, or purposely set aside - when you are not forgiven, I should say - or neglected, or purposely set aside, and you sting and hurt with the insult or oversight, but your heart is happy and you're content to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ, that's dying to self.

When your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed, your advice is disregarded, your opinions are ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself, but take it all in patient, loyal silence, that is dying to self.

When you lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity, or any annoyance, when you can stand face-to-face with foolishness, extravagance, spiritual insensitivity and endure it as Jesus endured it, that is dying to self.

When you're content with any food, any offering, any clothes, any climate, any society, any solitude, any interruption by the will of God, that is dying to self.

When you never care to refer to yourself, or to record your own good works, or seek commendation, when you can truly love to be unknown, that is dying to self.

When you see another brother prosper and have his needs met, and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy, nor even question God while your own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances, that is dying to self.

When you can receive correction and reproof from one of less

stature than yourself, and can humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion or resentment rising up within your heart, that is dying to self.

So, you come to Christ with an attitude of self denial and you grow down from there. Our self denial isn't perfect. Our self suicide isn't perfect. We resurrect our egos and our own wills, and thrust them out, and intrude into the will of God, and we have to seek His grace and forgiveness when we do that, but that is the deepest, and purest, and truest desire, and longing, and aspiration, of our redeemed heart, even though it's far short of what we would want it to be.

All right, a second in the three that make up the complex of this essential attitude of following Jesus is cross bearing. Cross bearing. Jesus not only says that you must deny yourself but He adds, "And take up his cross daily." Anyone who would be following after Me must take up his cross daily. Chapter 14 and verse 27 records - and this is something Jesus said often, but there's another similar statement in chapter 14. "Whoever doesn't carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple," as well as in the other gospels where it's recorded also.

Now what does this mean, "take up your cross"? I've heard so many crazy, strange, bizarre, wacky views of this. You know, your mother-in-law is your cross, your boss is your cross, your car is your cross, your leaky faucet is your cross, and everybody's got his cross. Your wayward teenager is your cross. Whatever it is.

Look, we can't read that into this. If you were listening to Jesus that day and He said, "You need to take up your cross every day," what are those people going to think about? They had never been to a deeper life conference. What do they think He's talking about? Well, more than 100 years before Jesus ever walked on earth King Alexander Jannaeus crucified 800 rebels at Jerusalem while he was feasting in public. Antiochus Epiphanes, that Greek ruler during the intertestamental period, had also crucified many Jews for a revolt that followed the death of Herod of the Great. The proconsul Varus crucified 2,000 Jews. It is said that the Romans crucified 30,000 Jews in Palestine during the era around the life of Jesus.

When Jesus said "Take up a cross," they only thought of one thing: Horrible suffering, pain and 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 death." They knew exactly what He was talking about. And be ready to do it every day. Every day.

Who in the world would ever give a gospel invitation like that? Who would ever stand up before a big stadium full of people and say, "How many of you are willing right now to die, if need be, for Jesus Christ? You can come and be saved." 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."

Believe me, the Jews were familiar with crucifixion. It had been done in their own land. It had been done in Egypt. It had been done in Persia, western Asia, even in parts of Italy. Very often the condemned person would carry a piece of the cross, the cross-piece, sometimes drag the whole thing. The imagery is extremely vivid. What He's talking about is not a happy experience. It's not "Jesus loves you, or God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." It's about carrying a cross, the cross in which you yourself may be executed.

So they're not talking about somehow identifying in some spiritual sense with the death of Jesus. The message is you're going to have to suffer possibly for following Me. I mean, Jesus said that, you know, "If the world hates you, don't be surprised. They hated Me. If the world kills you, don't be surprised. They're going to do it to Me. You don't expect that you're going to be treated any different than your teacher, do you?"

Matthew 10, "If you're going to be My disciple, get ready. The disciple is not above his teacher. However they treat the teacher is how they're going to treat you. So realize this, you're going to have to confess Me before men, and you're going to have to confess Me before men knowing that it could cost you your freedom, it could

cost you years of your life, imprisonment. It could cost you hatred, and alienation, and it even could cost you martyrdom."

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. They knew it in the years of communist oppression in eastern Europe. They knew exactly what it would cost. But the gospel was so precious, Christ was so precious, eternal life was so important, forgiveness of sin was so valuable that they were eager and anxious to pay whatever it cost.

See, the attitude that comes to true conversion is the attitude that says Jesus is worth anything and everything. There isn't anything in this life that's temporal that can even be compared to the value of what is eternal. And so that's the gospel, but the invitation is not "Jesus wants to make you happy and healthy and wealthy," it's that He wants your life, and may even ask for your death.

Paul says to the Ephesians elders in Acts 20, "I'm on my way to Jerusalem, and I don't know what's going to happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit told me I'm going to be put in chains and afflictions await me." Then this, "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself." I don't consider my life to matter. That's self denial. I don't really care. It's not about my life. "For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain." "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me, and the life I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me," Galatians 2:20.

So Paul says, "I don't live any more. He lives. If I live, I live to the Lord. If I die, I die to the Lord. I am the Lord's." That's it. That's the terms of salvation.

The world is hostile against Him. They're going to be hostile against me. He says that in Matthew 10:24-38, that whole wonder-

ful text. A public profession of Christ as Lord and Savior may cost, but it's also a proof of my genuineness. It may cost me my family. A sword may go between the members of my family, but Jesus said He came to bring a sword. I don't have any self interest that overrules my need for Christ. Do you understand that? I don't have any self interest. I don't have any ambition that overrules my desperate need for Christ. And if I have to die every day, then that's fine. That's a small price to pay because the suffering of this world is not worthy to be compared with the glory which awaits me in Christ.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:31, "I die daily." Every day he woke up he knew it could be the end of his life. Somewhere there was a plot hatching, if already not in motion, to take his life. He said, "Every day with me is a day on the brink of death." All suffering is not a cross. It's suffering the reproach of Christ that's the cross. It's the suffering for the gospel that's the cross.

Are you willing to suffer for the gospel? Is it that important to you? Because that goes with the territory. There won't be a crown unless there's a cross. So if you're coming to Christ and you're not saying to yourself, "Eternal life, the life to come, the forgiveness of sin, and what God has prepared for me in heaven is so precious to me, and so valuable to me, and I am so sick of what I am that I am willing to give up everything I have, none of it has any value anyway, and I am willing, if necessary, to bear the full reproach of Jesus Christ no matter what it costs, even if it costs my life." That's what Jesus said.

So, it's a serious call here. Serious call. The cross then marks - 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.

Thirdly, in Luke 9, he adds the matter of obedience. Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me. Literally, "Let him be following Me." It's a continual pattern of obedience. Your will is out. His is in. You go where I go. You say what I say. You do what I tell you. You do what I do.

You know, in Matthew 7, this whole matter of obedience is at the heart of the sermon on the mount. Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven." It's the doers, not the sayers. It's the people who obey. And, of course, the gospel of John is just loaded with this kind of emphasis, where Jesus talks about how true faith, true saving faith, is made manifest in obedience.

In just - I can't take you through all of them, but John 14:21 is one. "He who has My commandments and keeps them - " or obeys them " - he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I'll love him and disclose Myself to him." It's all about obedience. It's always about obedience, always about following. Lordship isn't an option. Obedience isn't something you do after you're 35.

John 15:10, "If you keep My commandments you'll abide in My love;" If you don't, you won't. That's simple. Chapter 15 verse 14, "You are My friends if you do what I command you." If you do what I command you. Now there are many others.

So, you're coming, you're saying, "I'm at the end of myself. I give You my life, whatever the price. Show me what You want me to do, and I do it." That's where Paul was on the Damascus Road. He says, "What do You want me to do? What do You want me to do?" And that is the right attitude at the point of conversion. What do I do now? You've - I'm done. I'm willing to die for You and live for You. I want to follow You, so what do I do? Now that puts you in a position, then, to submit yourself to this, right? It's all about submission.

It's a life pattern of self denial, cross-bearing, bearing the reproach of Christ, and loyal obedience.

Now at this point I don't want to be criticized for saying something I'm not saying, so let me clarify something as I close. What I'm not saying is that in order to be accepted by God, somehow you have to deny yourself sort of on your own and get that in motion, deny yourself for a little while and then kind of move toward being willing to give your life, even unto death. And then move, thirdly, into loyal obedience to the things of God, and if you do that then God will come down and save you.

Listen to this very carefully. This little complex of spiritual realities are not chronological, they're not chronological. It isn't one for a little while, then after a lapse of time another for a little while, and then after another lapse of time another. They're not chronological. They're simply a blend. They are the logical components of saving faith that believes in Jesus as Lord and Christ, believes in Jesus as crucified and risen Savior, and bears this attitude within that faith. They go together. They are a complex that goes together.

The second thing I want you to understand is not only are they not something chronological, but they're not something you muster up. You can't do it in your own power. On your own power you love yourself, you protect yourself, and you do what you want. That's how fallen people function. So something has to happen dramatic in you. There has to be a shattering of all of your sense of self. There has to be a devastation of what you are normally. And it can't come from you. It's got to come from outside of you, and this is the mighty work of the Spirit of God who moves into the life of a person, convicts that person of sin, shatters that person's self confidence, makes that person who was dead in trespasses and sin come alive, come awake, begin to see, begin to hear, begin to understand. This is the mighty work of God. Not apart from your faith, and not apart from your will, but the work of God through your will expressed in your faith, a mighty work of God.

So, when you go to preach the gospel and you say, "Oh, boy, if I do it this way, nobody is going to respond." Realize this, it wouldn't matter how you did it. Nobody could respond on their own, any-

way. 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.

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.

Father, we thank You again this morning for the clarity of the truth. And we pray that You'll use us, first of all, use these truths to help us examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith, if these are the attitudes with which our hearts are ruled and governed which demonstrate then that this is the work of the Spirit of God in us. And then help us as we proclaim the gospel, to be used as an instrument to bring the sinner to the end of himself, to the level of desperation to the brokenness that generates self denial, cross bearing and loyal obedience. Use us, Lord, work some work through us when we ourselves can do nothing. Yet in our weakness Your strength is perfected. To that end we pray for Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

The Gospel: Self-Love or Self-Hate?

John MacArthur

Luke 9:23-25

Nov. 17, 2002

We are in our study of the Luke gospel in the 9th chapter and we are looking at verses 23 to 27. This is really at the heart of Jesus' teaching, so we've not tried to hurry through what is a rather simple and straight forward passage. And the temptation for me would be to stay here for months, and months, and months, unfolding everything that is either explicit or implicit in this passage, and I'm resisting that and trying to move along.

But when you ask about what Jesus taught and what of His teaching was most central and significant, you find it right here. Because in verse 23 Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me -" And then, at that point, we could stop and say, "That's essential to His mission. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to call people to Himself." And He says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, here's what he must do -"

Here, then, are conditions established for the most important message ever given on this planet and that is the message of following Jesus. What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? What does it mean to come after Him? What does it mean to become a Christian? What does it mean to be saved? That's at the heart of the message.

And what Jesus says here directly speaks to that issue. So you want to follow Christ, do you? You want to come after Christ? You want to be His disciple? You want to be a "little Christ," which is what Christian means? You want to follow Him into His kingdom,

the kingdom of God? You want His forgiveness, the forgiveness that He gives? You want the eternal life that He promises?

Well, if you want that, He says, "You must deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow Me." This statement by Jesus is repeated a number of times in the New Testament gospel record. I'm sure He stated this many, many times, hundreds of times in His preaching ministry because this is at the heart of the issue of discipleship and salvation.

Now we've already looked at the three elements: Denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following. But I want to go back and visit them, not in part but as a whole, and try to give you maybe a summary understanding of what He is really saying here. And it's important to do this because what Jesus is saying is fundamentally opposite what preachers are preaching today.

In fact, the fundamental call to salvation, the words of our Lord are utterly opposite how people think in our culture. We live in a culture of self love, to put it simply, a culture that is consumed with self love, ego building, self esteem, feeling good about yourself, thinking you're important, thinking you're valuable, thinking you're a hero, thinking you've achieved something, thinking you're worthy of honor. We're drowning in awards for everything imaginable and unimaginable. Parents are consumed with boosting the egos of their children with every imaginable means, as well as boosting their own sense of self value. This is the generation of self lovers.

And just by way of reminder, in 2 Timothy chapter 3 the apostle Paul classified "love of self" as a sin - in fact, a dominating sin. In one of his familiar lists of iniquities - there are numbers of them in his letters - he begins the list of iniquities in 2 Timothy chapter 3 with "lovers of self," and then "lovers of money," and then goes through the rest of his list. This describes deceivers, unbelievers, those outside the kingdom of God, those who do not know the truth. Self love is at the top of the list in terms of normal human attitude. Sinners are consumed with pride. They're consumed with themselves. We have made that into the prominent, dominant virtue in our society.

So here we are with the gospel, going to a generation of people who are not only proud, but they've turned pride into the virtue of

all virtues, who are in love with themselves, and who seek to fulfill every whim, and every desire, and every ambition, and every dream, and every hope; who seek to be everything that they can be, who seek to set value on all that they are, and all that they say, and all that they do. And we confront that culture with the gospel, and at the heart of the gospel is this opening. "So you want to follow Jesus, do you? You want to enter the Kingdom of God? You want your sins forgiven? You want eternal heaven? Then deny yourself and take up your cross and fully submit to Him." You can't even get to the submitting part unless you can get past the cross part, and you can't get there if you can't get past the part about denying yourself.

To give you a term that you likely won't forget, I'll borrow from Martin Luther. Martin Luther, as you know, launched the Protestant Reformation. He was a Roman Catholic priest who came to understand the truth of salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ alone, apart from works, and ceremonies, and all the rest; and so he determined that he would confront the Roman Catholic system, the great monolithic system of error and deception, and he selected 95 different statements, 95 different protests - that's why we're called "Protestants" - 95 different assertions that ran contrary to Catholicism. He wrote them down and he nailed them on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

The fourth of his protests, the fourth of his 95 assertions was that a penitent heart, a heart that comes to God and receives salvation is characterized by - here's his term, "self hate." Self hate. Quoting from Luther's fourth statement. "And so penance remains while self hate remains." He said that self hate was the true interior penitence. "This," said Luther, "is essential to the gospel."

Whereas the Roman system, like every system of self righteousness, and earning salvation by ceremonies and good deeds, is awash in self love; Luther confronted it and said, "Until the sinner comes to hate himself, he does not enter the Kingdom of God." You have in the very birth of Protestantism, the very birth of the gospel, as it were, out from under its rock where it was hidden for 1,000 years in Catholicism, at its very launch the gospel is defined as being founded upon the sinner's self hatred.

Hating oneself because one comes to see that there is in the flesh no good thing, that there is nothing of value, nothing of worth. That we are, as Jeremiah said, "deceitful above all things, desperately wicked." "Every part of us is sick -" as Isaiah put it "- from the head to the toe." There is no good thing anywhere. There's nothing about us that has value. There's nothing about us that has worth. There's nothing about us that is deserving of honor or accolade. It is to come to the Beatitude attitude again, of understanding spiritual poverty, of understanding bankruptcy, of understanding your utter nothingness, of looking at everything that's done in your life, whether it's religious, or whether it's educational, or whether it's moral, or whatever it is, and like the apostle Paul saying, "It's all dung. It's all manure." This just does not sell in the cult of self love.

But frankly it's absolutely absurd to suggest that a person could encounter holy God, the righteous God, and enter into His kingdom without wanting to be delivered from sin, and without wanting to be delivered from understanding sin as sin really has to be understood, that is that it is pervasive and dominant. Those who meet God on God's terms, those who come to God and enter in to His kingdom, invariably have an overwhelming sense of their own sinfulness.

Job who was the best of men, according to the 1st chapter, in the 42nd chapter said this, "I had heard of God with my ears, but now I've seen Him." And he said this, "I hate myself." In the Hebrew, "I loathe myself. I despise myself, everything that I am. All that I am apart from God, all that I am in my humanness, anything and everything about me is so stained and tainted with fallenness and corruption and sin, I hate everything about myself."

The apostle Paul in writing to Timothy said in 1 Timothy 1:15, "It is a trustworthy statement, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost of all." There was nothing about Paul that commended Paul to Paul. There was nothing about Paul, therefore, that commended him to anybody else.

People today brag unabashedly about how great they are, how good they are, how many things they've achieved, how desirable they are, how accomplished they are, how valuable they are. It was

Isaiah who said when he saw God, "Woe is me for I am ruined. I'm literally disintegrating before my very eyes. My whole self image is disintegrating. It's going to pieces." Because in the presence of God he saw himself only as a wretched sinner, pronounced damnation on himself because he said he was a man of unclean lips. That's what we're talking about. That's what self denial is.

It's not saying, "I'm going to sell my house and give all my money necessarily to the poor." It's not saying, "I'm going to live in poverty and rags." It's not saying that. It is not saying, "I'm going to deny myself what is mine in terms of physical property, or what is mine in terms of a job, or whatever." It is saying, "I deny that there is in me anything of value, anything of worth, anything good, anything that ought to be awarded anything, anything that ought to be paraded as exemplary, anything that ought to be exalted." It is this overwhelming sense of drowning in your own utter sinfulness.

Peter, again in the presence of God in Christ said, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man." When he was aware of the fact that Jesus was God because He was controlling the fish that day in Luke 5, he had nothing but loathing for himself. He said, "Go away. You shouldn't even be around me. You shouldn't even be near me." Same attitude in Luke 18 of the publican who drops his head and won't look up to heaven because he doesn't even think he has a right to look up, lest God should look into the face of such a wretch, says, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." And he beats on his breast, but he won't even look up. He doesn't even want to get into eye contact, as it were, with God. He's that unworthy.

When you become a Christian it isn't that all of a sudden you wake up to what you could offer God. And there are many other examples in the Scriptures of those men and women who, when they really saw God, were literally crushed under the weight of their own nothingness, their own sinfulness. And frankly, this is absolutely alien to the culture that we live in. It's alien to the culture based on self love and having every whimsical desire legitimized. Anything and everything you want you should have. You can be whatever you can be. You can dream your dream and live your dream. The whole goal of life is for you to desire whatever you want to desire and see

it all fulfilled, insisting on rights, insisting on privileges, insisting on respect, insisting on reward and honor, and affirmation.

The people who enter God's kingdom don't insist on any of that. They feel themselves unworthy of any of it. People who enter into God's kingdom are literally overwhelmed with hatred for what they are. I hate what I am. I hate what I am. I hate what I am because all that I am is sin.

Now this produces repentance. This produces a turning, a longing to be delivered and rescued from what you are and to be made into what you are not, but what you long to be, something that is good, and that is worthwhile, and does have value, and is righteous and useful. It's back in Luke 5:32, Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." I can't do anything for people who think they're already righteous. I can't do anything with people who are impressed with themselves, or impressed with their religion, impressed with their morality, impressed with their money, impressed with their education, their achievement. I can't do anything for those people. I didn't come for them. They don't hear My message.

In Luke 13:3 Jesus tells us how important this repentance is. Verse 3. "I tell you, no, unless you repent you will all likewise perish." And He's talking about death and hell. Verse 5 He repeats it. "I tell you, no, unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Twice He tells us you're going to die and go to hell if you don't repent. And the only people who repent are people who are sinners, who are self aware of their wretchedness. That's why the work of the Holy Spirit is to convict of sin.

So what Jesus is saying here is if you want to enter into My Kingdom, if you want to follow Me, if you want to be forgiven of sin, if you want eternal life, you have to start by hating everything you are apart from Me, recognizing that all the good about you is filthy rags, despising everything about you. And now, since all that you might have earned, or all that you might have gained, or all your so-called works have been redefined as wretchedness, and you have seen yourself as consummately unworthy, you are just in the perfect place to reach out, to cry out for mercy and grace. So the real mes-

sage of the gospel is the message that you need to start by hating everything that you are. That just doesn't sell well in our society.

And when do you ever hear a preacher preach like that? That's not seeker-friendly. That's not meeting the popular culture at its own level, which is the new kind of pragmatism. Try that in the churches where unbelievers are made to feel comfortable. When did you last hear anybody preach on hating yourself, loathing yourself, abhorring yourself, despising yourself, seeing in yourself nothing of value? There's nothing in you, in your mind, in your emotions, or in your volition, there's nothing in your achievement that's really good. There's nothing worthy of honor, nothing worthy to be established as an example, nothing. At its best, it's human good which, void of the power of God and the glory of God, is a kind of bad-good.

Jesus was always calling sinners to hate themselves. The message today in the church is - and I heard this again on Saturday, I was listening to an evangelist on the television. "Are you unfulfilled? Do you feel your dreams are not being realized? Do you feel an emptiness in your heart? Come to Jesus and He'll fill up your heart, and He'll fulfill your dreams," and blah, blah, blah. And it was all about you getting what you want from Jesus. That's not the gospel.

In Luke 24:47 Jesus said, "When you go preach, here's the subject. Repentance for forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem." Now you know what He said? Don't start when you get out of town. Start here. You don't have one message for Jerusalem and another message for some other place. You start here, and you start now, right here in Jerusalem where it's not popular. This is where you start, and from here you cross the globe, you go to every nation on the planet, and you do the same thing, you preach that in the name of Jesus people will be forgiven of their sins if they repent. If they repent.

And repentance is the product of self hate. It's the product of that Beatitude attitude. People repent when they look at themselves and they're ashamed of what they see. When they look at themselves and they're brokenhearted over what they see. It is a redirection of their whole self assessment that says, "I'm nothing. I'm less than nothing. I'm sinful. I'm wretched. I'm wicked to the core."

And by the way, this is not a human work, as I said last time. This is not a human work. This is not something a dead, blind, deaf, hard-hearted sinner is going to come up with on his own. The only way the sinner will ever come to realize this is when the sinner is exposed to the Word of God and the Spirit of God, when the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and awakens the sinner to his true condition. But how can the Holy Spirit awaken the sinner to his true condition unless the truth is preached? That's Romans says, "How shall they hear without a preacher?" Somebody has got to say this. And the call to repentance is not a command to sort of make your life right before you come to Christ. It's a total reversal of the way you view yourself and it encompasses every part of your being.

Three Greek words are used in the New Testament to refer to repentance and they illustrate the three sort of elements of repentance. There is the word *metanoeo*, it's used a number of places. It's used in Luke 11:32; Luke 15:7, 10. And this word, *metanoeo* basically expresses a reversal of your thinking, mental attitude. You change your mind. So that repentance deals with the mind. You have to change your mind about how you view yourself to see yourself the way you really are, to see yourself the way Scripture says you are, see yourself the way God says you are, to see yourself as fallen, and depraved, and corrupt, from the top of your head to the tip of your toe.

The second word that is used is *metamelomai* and that's another Greek word that means "repentance." It's used in Matthew 21:29-32, only it emphasizes regret and sorrow. Once the mind has grasped the new definition of who I am, there is a consequent motion that goes from the mind to the feelings, and emotion kicks in, and there is sorrow, and there is shame, and that's *metamelomai*.

And there's a third word, *epistrephomai*, that is also the word for "repentance." It's used in Luke 17:4, Luke 22:32. And it actually means you change direction in life. And that refers to your will. So it starts in your mind and moves to your emotions and it activates your will.

And those are the three elements that are involved in repentance. You change the way you view yourself, you feel remorse and sadness about that, and so you turn around and you head in the

direction of change. And that's going to put you in the direction of God. And you're going to be like the publican in Luke 18. You're going to be saying, "God, God, my mind understands my wretchedness. My emotions feel it so I can't even lift up my eyes, and I'm pounding on my breast. And then my will kicks in and cries to You and says, 'I want You to be merciful to me, a sinner.' "

So, intellectually, repentance begins with the recognition of sin, an understanding of the profound depth and breadth of that sinfulness. It then moves to the emotion, which has an overwhelming sense of sorrow and brokenness, remorse. It is the sorrow that Paul talked about, leading to repentance. And then volitionally it involves a change of direction away from that sin, toward God, toward Christ, crying out for mercy. It's not just a change of mind, it's a change of mind, emotion and will.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, "Repentance means that you realize you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called 'sin' is in you, that you long to get rid of it, that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world and its mind and outlook, as well as its practice. You deny yourself. You take up the cross. You go after Christ. Your nearest and dearest and the whole world may call you a fool, or say you have religious mania. You may have to suffer financially. It makes no difference. That is repentance."

And that's why Jesus said, "You have to hate your mother, you have to hate your father, your brother, your sister. Follow Me." That is the mark of every true believer.

Now why am I saying this about repentance today? Why am I talking all around this verse? Because there's so much in here I want you to understand the great reality here. Back to verse 23, that's exactly what verse 23 is talking about. It's talking about this kind of self assessment that issues in repentance. You want to come after Christ. You want to turn from the way you're going and go after Him. That's a turning. That's a repentance. That's the volitional. That's the will.

Well, it's going to start with a self assessment that's dramatically different than the way you always viewed yourself. You have to hate yourself. You have to hate yourself to the degree that you are willing to literally die, if need be. And that's consequential. If I see myself for who I really am, then why would I want to make something sacred out of my life? If I see myself for who I really am, and I really want to be something completely other than what I am, then death would be actually fairly attractive to me.

I will never be the man I should be in this world. I won't be the man I should be till I'm dead, right? None of us will. I want forgiveness for my sin. I want righteousness in my life. I want the fullness of God's blessing. When I come to Christ, I want sin out of the picture. I'm sick of my sin. I'm sick of myself. I'm weary and tired of what I am. I want to abandon all of that. I want to come to Christ. I want to go down a different path. I want to be a different person. And the ultimate fulfillment of all of those longings and desires comes after death.

So, like Paul, my life is not precious to me. There is in me this longing to be what I want to be in Christ, what I long to be in Christ, what I desire to be in Christ. There's this hunger and thirst after righteousness that's characteristic. I want to get away from sin. I want to be in a situation where no longer is sin there present. So, death is a welcome friend. That's why Paul said, "For me to die is gain." It's gain. I won't be what I want to be, what God wants me to be, until I'm gone from this life.

So, it's not a big jump if I'm going to deny myself to then be willing to die. "Take up the cross" simply means to be willing to die. Crosses were instruments on which people were executed. And Jesus is saying here self denial means that you're so sick of yourself that you'd be willing even to die. Now, if you want to follow Me, if you want to come after Me, you're going to have to feel this. You're going to have to understand your true condition. You're going to have to be emotionally overwhelmed with this condition, sorrow, shame, to the degree where you are eager to deny yourself, you're willing to go whatever the cost. You're going to follow Christ, even if it's death. That's repentance. That's what it is. It is self hate, self denial.

And, you know, even now there's sort of a residual - or should be a residual - kind of distrust in what I am, and even a certain self hate. Somebody said to me - I was talking to the students. I've been speaking at the college for the last couple of weeks pretty much, and I was saying to the students that there was - someone was speaking with me and saying, "You know, I just want to be used by the Lord. I just want to be useful to the Lord. I want to be useful to the Lord." And my response was, "Well, you know, I don't really think like that because I don't have anything to offer the Lord. So my prayer is not, 'Lord, I want to be useful to You.' My prayer is, 'Lord, I hope I'm somehow able to be used by You.' I hope - I don't want to do something for the Lord. I just hope the Lord can do something through me."

You know the difference? I'm not offering myself, "Lord, I'm going to give my life to do something for You." Forget that. You know, I'm not a self propelled machine, I'm only a tool. And somebody else has to pick me up, and the somebody who has to pick me up is God. But if I'm a tool that You can use, that's enough for me that You could use this unworthy vessel, this clay pot, as Paul, you know, this garbage bucket, as Paul identifies us in 2 Corinthians, then that's bliss. That's blessedness.

There's nothing in me of value. There's nothing in me of usefulness. And so when I come to the point where I want to be delivered from what I am, and I come to that point of self hate, and I cry out to God, I'm not going to set any limits. I'm not going to say, "Well, God, You can only go so far. You can only have this and not this." There's a total abandonment because there's nothing to hold onto. There's nothing there of value.

This is linked to saving faith. Acts 20:21. Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ so that salvation comes to those who want to follow Christ. And the reason they want to come after Christ, because they believe in Him. But the faith that saves is the faith that is penitent.

Now Jesus in His preaching sought to bring sinners to this point. And the people who resisted the message the most were the people who felt the best about themselves, right? Is that not true? And who

were the people who felt the best about themselves? The religious Jews, the Pharisees, the scribes, the chief priests, the religious elite, the religious establishment. In their minds they were very, very accomplished people. They were free. They had never been in bondage to any man, they said. They were sighted, as it were. They could see things true and spiritual. They were healthy. They were righteous. They were good.

And, of course, Jesus just obliterated that. He told them they were blind. He told them they were corrupt. He told them on the outside they were painted white, on the inside they were full of stinking dead men's bones, corpses. He attacked their self righteousness. And you have to do that because that is the damning dominant sin. And Jesus constantly sought to bring sinners to the point of self hate, to the point where they would say what Job said, "I hate myself." And Job was a righteous man who said that. How much more does an unrighteous man need to say that? But they, because they were so engulfed in self love and self righteousness, despised Jesus' message, and they killed Him for it. It wasn't that they didn't want a Messiah. It wasn't even that they didn't necessarily think He might be the Messiah.

They did want a Messiah desperately. They wanted, as we've already learned, free food. They wanted the most incredible medical plan ever devised, healing for everybody all the time, and resurrection if you die, free, with no premiums, and no process to go through. You just went to Jesus and He took care of it, no paperwork. Of course they wanted that. And they would have embraced it. But Jesus intruded into their thinking with this message that they were going to have to hate themselves instead of love themselves. They were going to have to see themselves as the poor prisoners, blind and oppressed. They were going to have to come to a beatitude attitude, poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, recognizing they were destitute of righteousness, and demonstrating a hunger and thirst for it. They were going to have to be willing to be persecuted and not acclaimed.

They hated that message because they loved themselves. And that's the way it is. If you love yourself terminally, you damn yourself.

If you love yourself, you hate this message. That is why Jesus said this, Matthew 21:31. Tax collectors, the rankest, most despised and hated people in Israel were tax collectors who bought a Roman franchise, a taxation franchise, and then extorted money from their people, and did so with a bunch of thugs, and thieves, and strong-armed people that did whatever they needed to do to get the money. "Tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you."

Can you imagine if you're a religious leader in Israel and Jesus said that to you? Tax collectors - you'd spit on a tax collector - and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you. Why? Because they are more likely to loathe themselves than you are. Becoming more moral may well move you away from the Kingdom of God. Something beneficial about wallowing in the consequences of gross iniquity, it has its own capability of awakening you to the reality of who you really are.

I've said this through the years. People become Christians when they get desperate enough, when they are at the point of total panic about wanting to be rescued, when they know they're literally going down for the third time in the sea of their own sin. The wicked riffraff of Israel were far more likely to recognize their sin than the self righteous. And there never is any salvation for anybody apart from repentance.

You can't get saved, folks, apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is, believing in the One who died and rose again for you, the Lord Jesus Christ, and all of the truths about Him. And you can't become saved by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ unless there accompanies that belief repentance. And yet here we - and I've commented on this, but it's in my mind because we keep dialoging about it - and we've got people writing Christian books that say folks somewhere in the world who never heard about God, never heard about Jesus, never heard the Bible, or the gospel can be saved by looking up and saying, "Because I believe You're a Creator up there, and I believe in You as Creator," they're going to heaven. In other words, God, one writer says, would be unjust if He didn't take them to heaven. Not only do they not have to believe in Jesus as Lord, they don't even have to believe in Jesus. They don't even have to

know there is a Jesus. But what about repentance? Where's that? What do we do, just eliminate that? That's a convenient thing.

Jesus said, "You want to come into the Kingdom? It's going to take more than believing there's somebody up there. Where's the shame? Where's the remorse? Where's the overwhelming conviction of one's sin?"

And so, the principle is just basic. It's basic gospel truth. You want to follow Jesus, do you? Then hate yourself. The utter disavowing of oneself as having any value in unredeemed condition, and even in redeemed condition our only value is as a tool picked up by the sovereign Lord. So there is self denial, and then cross bearing, and then following, that is righteous obedience as we follow after Christ. That's just reminding you of what's involved in that principle.

Now let me talk about the paradox for just a couple of minutes. Extending this principle into a paradox, Jesus says this in verses 24 and 25. "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he's the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" Here's the paradox. The principle is clear. Here's the paradox. You want to save your life? You're going to have to lose it. You want to lose your life? Then hold on to it.

Here Jesus explains what He's been saying. What He's been saying is you have to deny yourself, that is you give up your life. You sell all. You abandon everything for Christ. You don't add Christ to your life. You abandon everything. You sell all. And by literally self suicide, as it were, self denial, you gain everything.

On the other hand, if you want to save your life, verse 24, "whoever wishes to save his life," it doesn't mean, you know, wearing a seat belt and having air bags. Not talking about that. Or going through some surgery to help you with an illness. We're not talking about physical life. We're talking about your eternal soul here, your eternal soul. So you want to save your soul, do you? You want to save your life? You want to rescue yourself? Then lose yourself. That's the only way. You want to lose yourself? You want to be lost in eternal hell, suffering punishment forever? Then hold onto your own life. That's the simple paradox.

Matthew 10:39 is another place where Jesus says this. This is pretty much routine preaching for Jesus. Matthew 10:39. "He who has found his life shall lose it, he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it." Another place that I think is actually an exposition of what this means is in John 12:25, where Jesus also repeats this same paradox. John 12:25. Listen to these words. "He who loves his life loses it." See, you want to save your life because you love it, you love the way you are, you love yourself, you love your own desires, your own ambitions, your own dreams and goals. You love your own honors, your own achievements, your own way, your own will. If you do that, you will lose it. And then Jesus said, "And he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to eternal life." And there Jesus says you have to hate your life. I'm sure that's where Luther got the term "self hate."

If you love yourself, if you're into self love, and self esteem, and making sure all your little needs are met, making sure you're indulged with all your fantasies, and dreams, and schemes, and hopes, and ambitions; you're going to lose your life. You're going to lose your life in eternal hell. If you love yourself so much to hold on like the rich young ruler, you're going to go away without eternal life. But if you hate yourself, then you're going to receive eternal life. What a tremendous, tremendous option. I mean, it's just the ultimate, that's it. You either save your life now, or lose it forever. Lose your life now, and save it forever. That simple.

And there's a little phrase in verse 24 that needs to be noted. "For My sake." For My sake. It's not talking about some sort of, I guess you could call philanthropic self denial. He's not saying losing your life in causes of justice, or losing your life in causes of religion, giving yourself up to become a priest or a nun, or immolating yourself, lighting a torch to yourself as a Buddhist priest in order to show your devotion to God, or strapping bombs around yourself as a devout Muslim and think you're blowing yourself into a heavenly experience with 72 black-eyed virgins who are waiting for you on green pillows, some level of devotion to Allah.

We're not talking about that kind of - There's only one kind of self losing here. There's only one kind of self deprecation, one kind

of self denial, and that is "for My sake." There's no value or virtue in what those people do. When a Buddhist burns himself up, when a Muslim blows himself up, they burn themselves and blow themselves right into eternal hell. There's no credit accruing to their account no matter how religiously devout they were, no matter how extreme that level of devotion was. What Jesus is talking about here is a man abandoning his life, denying himself, hating himself in the desperation of his sinful condition, and giving up his life to Jesus Christ for My sake. "Because of Me," is what that means. Because of Me. The only way you'll ever save your life eternally, the only way you'll ever spend eternity in heaven in the presence of God, in the fullness of joy, is when you have given up your whole life to Jesus Christ.

Verse 25, Jesus makes this really interesting statement, "What is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" This is hyperbole. In fact, in the category of the illustration, this is ultimate hyperbole. Jesus is saying, "I know what you're thinking. I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, 'Well, I'm certainly a good man, and I have this achievement, and that achievement, and this honor, and that honor, and this ambition, and this desire, and I'd like to do this, and do that, and I've got some of my own plans, and I've got some of my own relationships that I want to protect. And, you know, I've got a lot to give up. You're asking a lot out of me.'" The rich young ruler said, "You know, I'm rich, I've got a lot. You're asking a lot."

So Jesus said, "Okay, here's a hypothetical illustration. What if you owned the whole world? How about that?" That is the ultimate hyperbole. You can't go beyond that. "Okay, let's say you owned the whole world. You have all of its possessions, you have all of its houses, and cars, and clothes, and lands, and all of its honors and prestige, and all of its powers, all of its ability to deliver to you everything that it has in terms of material benefit, in terms of accolades, in terms of prestige, prominence, power, you name it. You have all of it. What profit is it?" So what? What does it profit you?

The word simply means "what benefit is it?" What good is it? What use is it? What help is it? "If you lose or forfeit yourself?" You,

the eternal you, or as Matthew records it, "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" How much is your soul worth? How much is your eternal soul worth? It's worth more than the whole world in time. You're going to be dead in a few breaths. You're going to live forever. You don't mean the common belief of mankind is that, you know, that whoever possesses the most earthly stuff is the happiest. Just because you get more stuff, or better relationship, or different relationship, or more power, or more influence, or more honor, or more whatever?

But Jesus says if you possess literally the sum total of all earthly riches and lost your eternal soul, that is a bad bargain. That is a bad bargain. What good is it to gain the whole world and lose your own soul? And so Jesus says, "Look, better to give up your life now in the recognition that it isn't anything anyway, and then it will be something glorious, and something wonderful, and something blessed, and something joyous, and something powerful, something peaceful, and something honorable, forever, and ever, and ever, and ever." That's the message of the gospel. That's the choice you make.

Next time we're going to look at verses 26 and 27 when Jesus says, "Everybody is going to stand before the throne of judgment, at the final tribunal, and be judged eternally on how they responded to this message." Let me summarize it simple. Self love will send you to hell. Self hate will send you to heaven. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is essential. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ tied to genuine repentance is required. Both are a mighty work of the Spirit of God in a willing heart through the truth understood. That's why we preach that truth.

Father, we come now in closing of our wonderful service this morning, thanking You for the hymns, and the music, and songs, and thanking You for the opportunity to come before You in prayer, and to give, and now thanking You for the Word. Again, we have heard from the Savior's own lips. Again, we have been brought, as it were, before Your very presence, and You have spoken. This is Your truth. This is truth given to us graciously, lovingly, truth that didn't have to be revealed, but it was revealed because You are by nature a God who saves, a God who seeks to save sinners.

We pray, O God, that the preaching of this truth, the message of the cross, which is foolishness to the world, would be the power of salvation to many who will hear and believe. We pray, O God, that You would do a work of self hate and self denial in the hearts of many, and even those of us who are believers, would You continue to cultivate that in us so that we never ever fall into the ugly sin of pride and self confidence, but always know that there is a wonder, almost a surprise, whenever You graciously choose to use us as an instrument for Your glory.

We thank You, Father, that the Spirit of God works these things in the heart through the truth. We pray to that end even today in the Savior's name. Amen.

~ 4 ~

The Gospel in Perspective

John MacArthur
Luke 9.23-26
11.24.2002

Well, we find ourselves at the heart of the message of Jesus, Luke chapter 9. We're looking at a paragraph that begins in verse 23 and really runs down to verse 26. We'll see how verse 27 is connected later.

These are the words of Jesus that are at the very heart of His gospel. Let me read the text to you, 9:23. Luke writes, "And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and 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.'"

The gospel according to Jesus Christ given in the New Testament is radically different from the typical modern message that is so often preached. In our contemporary times evangelists often portray Jesus as a somewhat frustrated, would-be Redeemer who stands outside anxiously awaiting an invitation from someone to come into his life. This is, I think, because of a misrepresentation of a text in the book of Revelation in which the Lord says He stands at the door and knocks. It's not really a true interpretation to make that the door of a human heart. It's the door of the church. It's Christ wanting to come into His church in the context there. But based on that verse,

we have sort of portrayed Jesus as waiting for an invitation from us, waiting for an opportunity from us, standing quietly, as it were, by until we make the decision to invite Him in.

But in reality, the New Testament presents Christ as the inviter, the Savior who comes into the world, God in human flesh who invades the realm of humanity, who confronts sinners, challenges them, calls them, commands them to come to Him, to believe in Him, to turn from sin, to embrace Him as Savior and Lord. Rather than waiting for an invitation from sinners, He issues His own invitation to sinners in the form of a command to repent, and to believe, and to submit. And this is essentially what He is saying in our text. This is at the very core of Jesus' message, the gospel message. If you want eternal life, if you desire to have all your sins forgiven forever, if you want to come into the eternal kingdom of God, and receive blessing, peace and joy forever and ever, Jesus says here's what you need to do.

Look at verse 23. "If anyone wishes to come after Me - " you want to follow after Me, be My disciple, come into My kingdom, receive My forgiveness, here's what you must do. "Let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."

Now, as we have been saying over the last couple of weeks looking at this passage, this is a gospel invitation. Jesus initiates the invitation to sinners and He clarifies the terms: Self denial, cross bearing daily, and loyal obedient following. Now we have called this the principle that is at the heart of Jesus' message. And we have learned over the last couple of weeks that coming after Christ, becoming a disciple of Christ, receiving salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life, entering God's kingdom calls for and demands self suicide, the death of self, a willingness to embrace suffering, persecution, and maybe execution, which is pictured by the torturous cross, and does require submission. That is to say becoming a Christian is not easy. Being saved is not easy. You don't just roll out of bed and find yourself in the kingdom of God.

It was said of Matthew in his own gospel as his story is reported and he is the writer that Jesus came by one day and saw him. He was a tax collector, the most despicable of all people in Jewish society, a Jew who had sold his soul to Rome for money. Jesus came along and

amazingly said to Matthew, "Follow Me." Matthew records his own response. He did that. He walked away from his profession, which he could never return to since a tax franchise was a very desirable thing by traitorous Jews, and once Matthew abandoned his post, somebody would have been immediately taking his place. He never would have been able to go back. So he did forsake his career and all that went with it.

In fact, when Luke tells the story of Matthew's conversion, Luke adds in 5:28 that he left everything behind. That's exactly what Jesus is saying. If you're going to come after Me, if you want to be one of Mine, belong to Me, be saved from sin, be in My kingdom, it will cost you everything. You walk away from everything.

And what do we mean by that, "everything"? We're talking about those things that are a part of self. In fact, a good way to understand what that means is to drop down to verse 25. "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" This is hyperbole. This is impossible, of course, no one person could literally possess the entire world. But what if you could? What if you could have everything that the world has? What would you have? Well this is what you would have according to 1 John 2:15. "All that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." And it's all passing away and it's all perishing. And if that's what you want, you can't have God. "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

So what are we talking about when we talk about the world? All that your passions hunger for, all that your eyes covet, and all that your pride demands. What if you got all of it? What if you had every lust fulfilled? Every vision acquired? And every self aggrandizement available? Every honor won? What would it matter? If you got all of that in time and lost your soul eternally, how much is your soul worth?

So, Jesus when He says, "Let him deny himself," is basically saying deny everything that yourself longs for in the world. Because if you could gain the whole world, you'd make a bad bargain because it would cost you your soul. So this is how it is. You have lived - all men do - driven by the passions of desire to fulfill their bodily de-

sires, driven by the passions of vision, coveting what they can see, driven by the immense desire to be honored, rewarded, esteemed, to be powerful, all that pride envelops. This is how we all live our lives.

And that's exactly what you have to give up. You have to say, "I no longer care about what my lust craves. I no longer care about what my eyes see. I no longer care about what my proud heart wants. In fact, as I look at it all, I see it as sin and so I deny myself." To deny myself is to say "no" to all of those cravings that are part of the fabric of fallenness.

So Jesus says - here's the principle - "If you want to come after Me, you deny yourself." You say, "I no longer will live for my own bodily lusts. I no longer will live for the things I can see. I no longer will live for my own self glorification. And I am willing to deny myself, and if need be, I will even give my life in death on a cross, and I commit myself to follow obediently." That's the gospel of Jesus. That's what He's calling for.

It's an attitude of penitence, repentance, brokenness, contrition, poverty of spirit, sense of your own bankruptcy, mourning, meek, sorrowful over your sin. It's the level of desperation that beats on the chest and says, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." That says, "In my flesh is no good thing." This is the heart of Jesus' message, and if a sinner is going to come after Jesus into the kingdom, it's going to be in an absolute and total abandonment of himself. And we've been looking at that in the last couple of weeks.

Now this is paradoxical, as verse 24 says. So we've gone from the principle to the paradox. Verse 24 says, "Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it. Whoever loses his life for My sake, he's the one who will save it." That's the paradox. In order to gain your life eternally, you have to give your life up. If you hold onto your life, that is if you hold onto your life in the world and you do not want to give up your lusts, and your longings, and your desires, and your pride; you will forfeit your eternal soul. The only one who enters My kingdom is the one who gives himself up.

This teaching of Jesus, by the way, is not certainly isolated to this portion of Luke. It is scattered throughout all the gospels, all four of the gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John record Jesus

teaching this. The words are the same in some other places and they vary in some other places. Jesus gives this message time and time again in various places and events. This is at the heart of His gospel. And the question is if you want salvation, are you willing to give up the earthly for the heavenly? Are you willing to give up the kingdom of men for the kingdom of God? Are you willing to give up the temporal for the eternal? Are you willing to give up the sinful for the holy?

I know that's not easy. And the gospel has to be presented on that basis. Today we want to make it as easy as possible and so we have this poor, sad Jesus waiting there for some sinner to come to his senses and invite Him in. That's just not going to happen. It's frankly impossible for any sinner to do that, to awaken himself from the dead, to give sight to his blind eyes, hearing to his deaf ears, and soften his hard heart. It's not easy to become a Christian. In fact, it's impossible. In fact, it's actually a violent experience.

Let me show you another passage of Scripture that fits perfectly into this that will illustrate what our Lord is saying here. Turn to the 7th chapter of Matthew which, of course, gets us in the sermon on the mount, the greatest evangelistic sermon ever. And in the sermon on the mount, as Jesus is presenting His message, His gospel, He gives an invitation at the end in verse 13 by way of a command. Matthew 7:13. "Enter - " He's telling them to come into the kingdom. "Enter - " that's a command "by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it."

No passage in Scripture more clearly and directly attacks the modern kind of easy believism with more power than this passage. This is not a very encouraging passage for those who think they're forgiven and saved from hell by some casual belief in the facts about Jesus Christ. These closing words of the sermon on the mount are pure gospel, they are as pointed an invitation as has ever been issued, and the hearer is faced with a choice. And the choice is not a momentary decision to be forgiven and to go to heaven. The choice is a choice that has eternal implications, and lifelong ones as well.

The choice is pretty simple. Two gates. One is wide and one is narrow. Two roads. One is broad and one is narrow. Two destinations. One is life, the other is destruction. Two crowds. One is many, and the other is few. Later on in this text Jesus speaks of two trees, one with fruit and one without; two builders, one whose building collapses, the other whose building stands; and two foundations, one of sand and one of rock. Everything in this passage puts the hearer at the crossroads. You go one of two ways, and there are only two ways to go. And Jesus tells you which way to go, "Enter by the narrow gate." This is a command. This is imperative. This is urgent. Go through that gate.

I think there are a lot of people who stand and admire the gate. Well, you say, what is the gate? Well it's not what is the gate, it's who is the gate? If you want to get on the road to eternal life, there's only one gate, and that gate is whom? Jesus Christ. That's why in John 10:9 He said, "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me he shall be saved." John 14:6. "I am the way, no man comes to the Father but by Me." "There is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." 1 Timothy 2:5. "There's no other name under heaven where men can be saved except Jesus." Acts 4:12. This is the gate that is Christ, and this is the only gate that leads to life.

You say, "Well, John, aren't there a lot of other gates? Aren't there as many gates as there are religions?" No, there's only one other gate. There's a gate that leads to heaven, and there's a gate that leads to hell. The gate that leads to hell says "heaven." It doesn't get there. It's a lie and a deception. There are only two gates. You either go the way of Christ, or you go the other way. You either go the way of Christ, which is by grace through faith in Christ alone, or you go some other way. It's not talking about comparing Christianity, or comparing religion with paganism. It's talking about comparing Christianity with every other religion. There are only two religions in the world, just two. There is the religion of grace alone which saves, and the religion of works, which damns. Only two ways.

Only through Christ do you go to life. Only through Christ. There's no salvation in any other than Christ. God saves those who put their trust in Christ by grace alone because of the work of

Christ on the cross and in the resurrection. Every other religion is a broad road leading to destruction. I don't care what the name of the religion is or what the particulars of the religion, they're all the same. They're all some kind of works system, some kind of human achievement as opposed to divine accomplishment, which is true in the Christian faith. Whether that human achievement is some ceremonial, sacramental works system connected to Christianity, or whether it's some pagan religion like Hinduism or any other thing, anything that imposes works, ceremonies, religious duties, moral accomplishments as a necessity for salvation is part of the broad road.

It has many names and they all say it goes to heaven, but they lie, it goes to hell. Anything other than Christianity takes you to hell. And you can't get on the road to heaven unless you go through the gate, and the gate is whom? Jesus Christ. There isn't any other way. If you want to go to heaven, there's one gate.

Now it also notes for us that many enter the broad road through the broad or wide gate and they end up in destruction. That's a word describing hell, eternal punishment. So the Lord says enter by the narrow gate. And the term here describes a gate, commentators say, that is extremely small. It's one of those kind that it's very difficult to get through. You can't take anything. You go through one at a time. People don't come to the Lord and come into the kingdom of God in mass, one at a time. And it's not easy to get through. You can carry nothing.

Luke 13 records that while Jesus was teaching in the villages, someone asked Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" Why would they ask the Lord that? Because that was the message He preached. There's just a few. It's hard to find, and it's very narrow, and it's hard to get through. And you can't get through at all if you don't drop everything worldly. His answer was this to the question "are there just a few who are being saved?" His answer was, "Strive to enter by the narrow door for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and won't be able." Isn't that an amazing statement?

People are going to find the narrow gate, the narrow door. They're going to want to enter, but they won't be able to enter. You, He says, strive. The Greek word is *agonizomai*, agonize. It implies

an agonizing, personal, intense struggle. Same word is used in 1 Corinthians 9:25 to describe an athlete battling, struggling to win a victory. It's used in Colossians 4:12 of a man named Epaphras who was laboring fervently, even to the point of death. It's used in 1 Timothy 6:12 to describe a soldier who fights the good fight of faith. It's a word about battling and struggling. It's a word that contains violence in it.

Jesus is actually saying, "You need to come into My kingdom. You need to be on the road to heaven. But it's a violent, self denying experience to get through that gate." And Jesus even said that in Matthew 11:12. He said, "The kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force." You don't, as I said, roll out of bed and end up in the kingdom of God. It is a violent experience to get through that narrow gate. In fact, in Luke 16:16 Jesus said "the gospel of the kingdom is preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it." Peter says in 1 Peter 4:18, "It is with difficulty that the righteous is saved."

Well, you would think the easiest thing possible is to be saved. All you have to do is just reach out and take this gift, or pray this prayer, or walk this aisle, repeat after me. That isn't what the Bible says. Peter was right. He knew what Jesus preached, and he said, "It is with difficulty that the righteous is saved." The person who is truly saved is saved with difficulty. Salvation is not easy. The gate is small. It's hard to find. And there's a certain violence in getting through it.

Jeremiah had this in mind in Jeremiah 29:13 when Jeremiah said, "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." He meant what he said. Not with part of your heart, not with half of your heart, not with a quarter of your heart, but when it matters more than anything so as to consume you. The kingdom is not for people who want Jesus to fix their life a little. The kingdom is not for people who want Jesus to bump them up the social scale. The kingdom is not for people who want to escape hell.

The kingdom is for people who want their life changed, who want to avoid hell, but who have come to the point where they are willing to go through a violent time of conviction, and self hatred -

as we saw last time - and penitence, and brokenness, to the degree that they literally abandon everything for Christ. That's seeking with all your heart.

Why is it so hard to become a Christian? Let's go back to our text. It's hard because you have to deny yourself. That's what makes it hard. Self denial to the degree of cross bearing, to the degree of submissive obedience to Christ as Lord. That is hard. That goes against the grain of everything human. As I said earlier, everything in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - that's what dominates us.

Look at the world around you. What makes people do what they do? It all comes from inside of them. It's the desire to have all their passions fulfilled. It's the desire to have all their visions realized. They see a more beautiful this, or a more beautiful that, or a fancier this, or a fancier that, and they want it. They're driven by these passions and, of course, the third one, and the dominating one, is the longing for honor, acceptance, prestige, prominence, power, influence, affection, respect, pride. That's people's lives. That's the way they live. That is their world.

And that's why Jesus said if you could get all the world delivered to you on those terms, everything you lust for, everything you long for, everything you see, and everything you desire for your own self glory, if you had it all it would be a bad bargain if you lost your soul. That's why in verse 24 He says, "If you're going to save your life, you have to lose it. If you're going to lose your life, you're going to find it, you're going to save it. So you've got to give up everything you are." Literally, across the grain of everything you are. That's the violent part of it.

Now the rich young ruler got up to the gate, saw the gate, spoke to the gate, "What do I do to receive eternal life?" Jesus told him. He said, "Too narrow for me," took his money bags and split, took his self righteousness and split. He wanted what his money could buy. He wanted the desires of his heart fulfilled. He wanted the desire of his eyes fulfilled with his money. And he wasn't about to admit he was a sinner in order to keep his self righteous pride intact. So with all of that in hand, he turned and walked away into destruction.

He was on a religious road, but it was the broad one. It said "heaven." It went to hell. But he could get on that one easily with all his baggage. He could carry the whole world on it. Much more appealing. The broad way is easy, easy to get on, just join the religion, plenty of latitude, no limitations, no boundaries, tolerance for everybody.

But that's not the gospel that Jesus preached. Jesus said things that were so stark and narrow. He said in John chapter 6, "If you don't eat My flesh and drink My blood - " He wasn't talking about cannibalism. What He was saying is you've got to take Me in in total. You have to embrace everything about Me, and if you're not willing to do that, if you're not literally willing to make Me the singular food for your soul, you're not going to enter My kingdom. And John 6 says, "And many of His disciples walked no more with Him." They got to the gate, they saw the gate. "Too narrow. We're out of here." They went back on the broad road that led to hell, the road of Judaism, in their case. And then Jesus turned to the ones that stayed and said, "Will you also go away?" And Peter on behalf of them said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You and You alone have the words of eternal life." And what they said was, "We know You're the only way and we've gone through the narrow gate."

Turn to Luke 14 for a minute. In Luke 14:25 here's an incident in the life of Jesus which gives you good insight into His evangelistic technique. Great multitudes are going along with Him. He's got this huge mass of humanity following Him everywhere. "He turned and said to them - " now this is an important opportunity. What is He going to say to them? He's going to turn and, in the vernacular, He's going to share Himself with them. What's He going to say? Listen to what He said. They're all following. They're all kind of physically following. Spiritually He says, "If anyone comes to Me - " if you're coming spiritually, "and doesn't hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever doesn't carry his own cross - " that is a willingness to die " - and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

What a strange message. What a way to send a crowd home. If

you're not willing to come to Me with such complete abandon, such total commitment that it might cost you your father, your mother, your wife, your children, your brothers, your sister, and your life, you're not coming on My terms. What He means, of course, by that is you're stepping away from their religion and it's going to cost you that relationship. Many people know this, of course. You become a Christian, everybody else in your family who's not a Christian is immediately alienated. It is especially severe if you happen to come out of a family like these people were in, steeped in the midst of historic Judaism, the price was high.

And so this is another way of Jesus saying it will cost you everything. And if you're not willing to pay that price - although He may not require it - if you're not willing to pay it, you're not desperate enough. You don't understand the narrowness. You're coming through without the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, the baggage you've always carried. You're coming through without holding on to all the relationships. You can't drag everybody with you through the narrow gate. You come alone. You can't even consider your life something to hold on to because the Lord may require that. This is a true invitation and it's what it's saying back in our text - go back to chapter 9 - in the words, "Let him deny himself."

I really am convinced that most popular evangelism today lures people into deception. It promises a wonderful, comfortable plan for everybody's life. It says nothing of a small gate, narrow way. Its subject is the love of God. There's no mention of the wrath of God. It tends to see people as deprived rather than depraved. It's full of compassion and understanding without a mention of sin and wrath and judgment. No summons to repentance, no warning of judgment, no call for brokenness, no expectation of a contrite heart, no desire for sorrow over sin. It just calls for a moment, a hasty decision, a few words, and then some promises of health and happiness and blessing.

That's not what Jesus said. It is a crossroads and to become a Christian is violent because you want to hold onto yourself, and that's why the Spirit of God has to come, as John tells us in his gospel, with immense conviction. The Spirit coming to convict you of

sin, and righteousness, and judgment. And then a violent battle engages. It's in that violence that some come to contrition and repentance, desperation, abandoning everything that they've held dear in the past, they embrace Christ at any cost.

Now Jesus puts some teeth into His message in the next verse, and we'll just stop at the next verse. Here is the force that He uses to endeavor to cause these people to make the right choice. "For whoever is ashamed of Me and 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."

Jesus identifies those who will not repent and those who will not believe as those who are ashamed. Those who are ashamed. Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, whoever doesn't like Me and My gospel, and you can't separate the two. A lot of people have stood back to admire Jesus but they hate the gospel. A lot of people who admire Jesus and admired the non-saving and non-biblical gospel that they have heard. But Jesus says, "If you're ashamed of - " that is, if you reject, if you despise, if you find unacceptable " - Me and My words, then I'm going to find you unacceptable. I'm going to find you shameful. I'm going to find you despised. If you think this gospel is foolish, I'm going to find you foolish."

In Matthew 10:32-33 Jesus said similarly, "If you confess Me before men, I'll confess you before My Father who is in heaven. But if you deny Me before men, I'll deny you." It comes down to that. Are you willing to confess the Christ of the New Testament, who is the true Christ, and the gospel which He proclaimed, which is the true gospel? Are you not ashamed of that so that you will openly and publicly confess it? Or are you ashamed of Him and His words and consequently deny that He is who He says He is, or that His gospel is the true message? If you are a denier, if you are ashamed of Him, if the preaching of the cross is to you foolish, then you are among the perishing.

You may admire Jesus. You may say, "Lord, Lord, we did many wonderful works in Your name, we preached in Your name, we cast out demons in Your name." But you're going to hear, "Depart from Me, I never knew you, you workers of iniquity." Admiration is not

enough. Saying that you appreciate Christ and you serve Christ is not enough. There are many like that, many, many. Matthew chapter 7 says, "Many will say - " Many on the broad road are those who have admired Jesus, but they didn't come through the narrow gate. They didn't come with a broken and a contrite heart. They didn't come crushed under the weight of the law of God with a penitent attitude, embracing their true condition as desperate, and damning, and crying out for salvation from the only source, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the 13th chapter of Luke, because I want you to see this is often the subject that Jesus addresses, He's passing in verse 22 from one city and village to another, and He's proceeding on His way. "And someone said to Him - " which we noted earlier, " - 'Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?' And He said to them, 'Strive to enter by the narrow door for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, "Lord, open up to us!" then He will answer and say to you, "I do not know where you are from." Then you will begin to say, "We ate and drank in Your presence." ' " Maybe we were there when You fed the 5,000. " ' "You taught in our streets." ' " Maybe they were in Capernaum or some other village. " 'And He will say, "I tell you, I do not know where you're from; depart from Me all you evildoers." ' " Admirers of Jesus, followers of Jesus, yes - yes, they fellowshipped with Him. They were there. They listened to Him teach in the street. He says, "Go away from Me, you evildoers." "There will be weeping - " verse 28 " - gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves being cast out." It's going to be hard for you to take.

So, the Lord says, "If you don't know Me on My terms, I don't know you at all. If you haven't come through the narrow gate of repentance, conviction over your own sin, and abandonment of self, with such desperation that you cry out for salvation, and righteousness, and heaven, whatever the cost, then you didn't come through the narrow gate, and you were virtually ashamed of Jesus and His words, and you'll find Him ashamed of you." And when will that finally be manifest? That time of shame? He says in this verse, and

it's very specific. He says, "When He comes." When He comes.

When a sinner dies today, they end up in hell immediately, immediately, in conscious punishment. You don't have to wait for the return of Jesus Christ for that. But that is almost like being in prison before your sentence, until your trial. Somebody commits a crime, they're caught in the crime, they're put in prison, and they await the final adjudication and sentencing. When will that come? That will come when He comes in His glory. He will come for His church, but His glory will not be manifest in the earth. The church will just disappear in the rapture. Then will come a terrible time of tribulation and great tribulation, and then Jesus will come back in shining glory. He'll come back.

And the description of His coming is given in very, very graphic language in 2 Thessalonians 1:7. When He comes at His Second Coming, He will come in His glory and also accompanied by the glory of the Father, and the glory of the holy angels. It is expressed in 1:7. "When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire." Jesus comes in His glory. The angels come in their glory, and perhaps the flaming fire also speaks of the Father, who was manifest many times in the Old Testament in the flame of fire that led Israel by night, that dwelled in the Holy Place, dwelt over the Holy Place, the fire that Moses saw and the children of Israel saw on Sinai represented God: A shining, magnificent, blazing fire of the presence of God.

Christ comes, the angels come, the glory of God is put on display. Matthew describes that. Matthew chapter 24, Jesus coming in glory. Matthew chapter 25, Jesus coming in glory. Even Matthew chapter 26 toward the end of the chapter, again Jesus coming in glory. And when He comes, verse 8 says, "He will dealing out retribution - " punishment. That's why we called this third point punishment " - dealing out punishment to those who do not know God - " They do not know God. Why do they not know God? " - even those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

If you don't obey the gospel, you can't know God, right? There isn't any other way to be saved. And what's going to happen is He's going to deal out punishment. What is the punishment? Verse 9,

"These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction - " that means they will eternally be undergoing a non-terminal destruction " - away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." They will be sent away from God's presence where there is eternal weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

So when Jesus comes in His glory to earth at the second coming, at the end of human history as we know it, the end of man's day, there will be the destruction of the ungodly. And they will be sent away into eternal destruction. The Lord then sets up His millennial kingdom and at the end of the 1,000 years of the kingdom comes the actual final tribunal. Turn to Revelation chapter 20 and I will just have you take a brief look at that. Revelation chapter 20.

John, looking into that future at the end of the kingdom, this is the final event in the universe as we know it. "I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it." The moment John sees this, it says, "From whose presence earth and heaven fled away." That's the uncreation of the universe. It just disappears. "And no place was found for it." It goes out of existence, the entire universe. God will uncreate it faster than He created it. And then there are "the dead, great, small - " that means significant, insignificant. They all are brought "before the throne, the books were opened - " simply identifying the fact that God has a perfect accounting of everything in all our lives " - and there was another book opened, the book of life - " that's the book in which those who are saved have their names written. "The dead were judged from the things written in the books, according to their deeds." That's tragic because their deeds are evil, all men. "The sea gave up the dead in it, death and Hades gave up the dead in them." The dead literally come with a resurrected body prepared for eternal pain, and they're brought before this great throne, "every one of them judged by their deeds," because that's all they can be judged by, and judged by your deeds you're doomed. "And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

The only way to escape the lake of fire is to have your name in the book of life. The name in the book of life doesn't mean you

didn't have any deeds of sin, it means your deeds were covered and paid for by the sacrifice of Christ. So when Christ comes in His glory, when He comes in the glory of the Father and the holy angels - you can read about that also in Revelation 19, picturing Him riding out of heaven, as it were, on a great white horse coming to conquer and destroy - when He comes to deal with the ungodly to destroy them, to punish them with eternal punishment, to bring them before the final tribunal for their final sentencing, it is at that point that the Lord will manifest that He is ashamed of all those who were ashamed of Him and His gospel.

It's a serious, frighteningly serious reality. And understanding what is at stake, what good is it, what benefit, what profit if you gain the whole world, fulfilling all the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, if you were to get it all, what would it matter when you lose your eternal soul? Far better to come through the narrow gate. And that's why Jesus says, "If you want to be in heaven, if you want to follow Me into the kingdom, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me."

Father, this is the truth as You have presented it on the pages of Holy Scripture. And it calls each of us to examine our destiny. Where are we headed? Are we selfishly hugging life? Hugging the longings and desires of our own fallen hearts? Holding onto our own comforts, riches, opinions, achievements, morality? If we are, we are headed for destruction.

Help us, Lord, to be awakened by Your Holy Spirit, that we may see ourselves as nothing, as the worst of sinners, beggars, destitute, willing even to die knowing that if we see ourselves thus and embrace Christ, we will be a prince with God forever. And remind us only a fool struggles with such a choice. We would not be like those in Jeremiah's day who forsook the fountain of living waters to use broken pots that held no water.

Give us the broken heart of true repentance and then fill us up with Your grace. We thank You for the clarity with which Your Word speaks, that there's no need to misunderstand the gospel. May we be faithful in its proclamation as well. We thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

Whose Ashamed of Who?

John MacArthur

Luke 9:26

12.8.2002

Open your Bible to Luke chapter 9, if you will, and I want to call your attention to verse 26. We have taken a number of weeks to look at a particular paragraph in Luke 9, starting in verse 23 and running down to verse 26. It is at the very heart of the teaching of Jesus. It is at the very heart of the gospel. Verse 23 says, "And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and 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.'"

Before we can leave this passage, I want to address the words of Jesus in verse 26. "For whoever is ashamed of Me and 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."

I want to focus on the term "ashamed." When we speak of the worst kind of human character, or the worst kind of human conduct, we often say that someone is shameless, that they behave as one who knows no shame. There certainly are many people who have no shame when it comes to their own conduct, their own behavior. And they run quite a broad spectrum, frankly. There are shameless people who are very evil, very immoral, very profligate. They live the most wicked kind of lives, apparently having their consciences

seared so that they felt no guilt and no remorse, no matter how many of God's laws they break or how frequently they break them. These are shameless people.

But at the other end of the spectrum there's another kind of shameless person, not an overtly wretched, and wicked, and evil person, but a covertly wicked person who on the surface is religious and self righteous. Convinced in their own minds, these people believe that they are by their own human goodness acceptable to God, that they don't break God's laws and so they are shameless also. They feel no guilt and no remorse because of their success at deceiving themselves about their true condition.

There are then wretched people who know no shame, and there are religious people who know no shame. There are those openly wicked people who feel no guilt because they've trained themselves to deny it. And there are those religious people covertly wicked who feel no guilt because they've trained themselves to trust in their own self righteousness.

As at all places and all times, Israel was filled with those kinds of shameless people. There were the reprobates. There were the prostitutes. There were the petty criminals. There was the flotsam and jetsam of human society. There was the riffraff, the tax collectors, the openly, outwardly wretched people who lived shameless lives. Worse in many ways and harder to reach were the religious elite, the scribes, and the Pharisees, and the chief priests, and those who shaped the religious establishment, who also were shameless because they believed that they held no guilt before God, that they, by their own self righteousness, had erased their culpability. In both cases, these people are proud of things they should be ashamed of. Outwardly wretched people should be ashamed of their wretchedness. Hypocrites should be ashamed of their hypocrisy.

Paul in Philippians 3:19 describes people who are proud about what they should be ashamed of, whether unbridled immorality or bridled hypocrisy. Sinners are very good at self deception, very good at feeling good about themselves, and that's particularly true in our day, when our society works very hard on convincing people that they should feel good about whatever it is that they choose

to be and do because, after all, they have autonomy and a right to choose whatever they want. Sinners will train themselves not to feel shame.

In the 6th chapter of Jeremiah there is a good insight into this, and it describes the sinner in inescapably clear language. Listen to this. Jeremiah 6:15. "Were they ashamed because of the abomination they have done? They were not even ashamed at all. They did not even know how to blush." They didn't even know they were disgraceful. They didn't even know they were shaming themselves. They trained themselves not to feel it.

All sinners, whether they are religious or irreligious, whether they are moral or immoral, have plenty to be ashamed of, plenty. And the Bible makes much of this. The words associated with shame are all through the Scripture: Shame, ashamed, shameful, shameless. They appear in Scripture connected with sin, whether it's the hypocritical sin of self righteousness, or whether it's the sin of open immorality, or anything in between, it's a cause for shame, guilt, embarrassment, disgrace, or even that old word mortification.

My mother used to use that. I remember her saying to me as a kid, "You ought to be mortified to do that. I'm mortified that you would say that." And that was the severest way for her to express upon me shame. I'm glad I was raised by parents who said to me quite often, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself." It served me much better than having parents say to me, "You ought to be proud of yourself, or feel good about yourself." Because we have plenty to be ashamed of. We should teach our children to be ashamed of themselves, not just before people, but more importantly, before God. That will serve them well in leading them to repentance.

In reality, to just make it very simple this morning in the brief time that we have, salvation comes down to the issue of shame. It comes down to the issue of shame. To those who are ashamed of themselves, there is hope of salvation. To those who are not, there is no hope. That's what it comes down to. There is grace, and there is forgiveness, and there is eternal life for people who are ashamed of themselves. There is no grace and no forgiveness and no eternal life for those who are not. And that's the choice.

In fact, Jesus made the choice clear when He said, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory." You see, when the Son of Man comes in His glory, He's going to have to deal with sinners. And the only attitude that a holy God could have toward unforgiven sin is to treat the sinner with consummate permanent shame. For those people who will not be ashamed of themselves, Christ will be ashamed of them.

There are people, obviously, who refuse to be ashamed of themselves, and so they are ashamed of Jesus and His message. They're ashamed of the gospel. They are ashamed to call Jesus Lord and Messiah. That would be a disgrace to them. That would be an admission of their wretchedness, and they refuse to do that. That was characteristic of the religious establishment. Notice Luke 9:22. "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, then to be raised up on the third day."

Jesus was not to be their Messiah. He was not to be their Lord, not to be their Savior. Jesus was not to be their King. They will not have this man to reign over them, they said. They were ashamed of Christ. Everything about Jesus was a stumbling block to them and an offense to them, not just the cross, everything else. They put Him on a cross because they were ashamed of the fact that He claimed to be their Messiah. It offended them that one so humble, one so meek would claim to be the Messiah.

And it wasn't the lack of noble character that offended them. It wasn't divine power that offended them. That didn't offend them. What offended them was His message. What offended them was that He called them sinners, that He called their fasting hypocrisy, and He called their prayers hypocrisy, and He called their giving hypocrisy. And He said, in fact, they were the poor, and the prisoners, and the blind, and the oppressed, that their true spiritual condition was one of absolute poverty, they were spiritually bankrupt. They were imprisoned to their own iniquity and headed for judgment. They were blind to spiritual truth, and they were literally burdened with the weight of guilt, and they would not receive that message.

In fact, when He preached that sermon in His own synagogue in His own town of Nazareth, the first time He ever came back to preach there in the synagogue He was raised in, where He spent 30 years of His life, where everybody knew Him, He preached that one sermon, and it was His neighbors, and His friends, and His extended family that after one sermon took Him to a cliff and tried to throw Him off and kill Him. That's how much they hated His message.

And the bottom line was, it called for them to be ashamed of themselves. They had so convinced their own minds of their righteousness, their self-righteousness that His message infuriated them to the degree that they endeavored to execute Him after one sermon.

And that's really where it all eventually comes, this matter of who goes to heaven. It's whether or not you're ashamed of yourself or ashamed of Jesus and His gospel. That's the issue. And you have, by the way, plenty of things to be ashamed of, plenty. You have a lifelong record of sin, unmitigated, unrestrained, and unmixed with anything that is truly righteous. Every sinner ought to be totally ashamed of himself or herself.

But I'll tell you, there is someone you shouldn't be ashamed of and that's Jesus. What is to be ashamed of? Perfect holiness, perfect righteousness, perfect virtue, perfect goodness, perfect knowledge, wisdom, perfect compassion, perfect love, perfect mercy, perfect grace, perfect power, perfect justice. What is to be ashamed of? To say that you would be ashamed of Jesus is to indict your own wretchedness. It is to say, "I am ashamed of what is holy." I am ashamed of what is right. I'm ashamed of what is good. I'm ashamed of what is honest, and true, and just. I'm ashamed of that. And that makes clear your condition.

That's why the apostle Paul said, "I will boast only in Christ Jesus, my Lord." Christians are people who are not ashamed of Jesus Christ, but they are ashamed of themselves and they come to Him in shame to be forgiven. Should I be ashamed of the one who died on the cross to deliver me from sin? Should I be ashamed of the one who loved me with a perfect love from before the world began? Should I be ashamed of the one who chose to be my friend and my

Redeemer? Should I be ashamed of the one who has gone to heaven to prepare a place for me in the Father's house, and to receive me to Himself, and allow me to dwell in His holy presence forever and ever? What is to be ashamed of?

In Hebrews chapter 2 there is a very, very compelling statement in verse 11. It's a brief one but it's, frankly, a riveting statement. It says of Jesus, speaking of believers, "He - " Hebrews 2:11 " - is not ashamed to call them brothers." He is not ashamed to call them brothers. "He is the author of our salvation - " verse 10 says. "He is bringing many sons to glory." Through His suffering He purchased our salvation and "He is not ashamed to call us brothers."

Sometimes you hear people say, "Well he's my brother, but I don't want anybody to know it. I'm ashamed of him. I'm ashamed to be associated with such a person." Well I would have to say that the Lord Himself, the perfect, sinless Christ has plenty to be ashamed of about me. It's an amazing act of grace that the Lord would say, "I'm not ashamed to call John MacArthur My brother." I'm not ashamed to call Him mine. But I wonder how embarrassing it should be for Him to call me His? But He's not ashamed to call us brothers.

In the 11th chapter of Hebrews, this same reality goes deeper into the trinity, because in verse 16, in the middle of the verse, Hebrews 11, it says, "God is not ashamed to be called their God."

You know, I remember reading an article years ago in *New West Magazine*, and they were writing a critical article on Christianity and the way Christians behave in public, particularly media-type Christians, celebrity-type Christians. And I'll never forget the line. The author of the article said, "It seems to me that Jesus must have a lot more class than most of His agents." What an insight. Why would Jesus ever want to call us brothers? Why would God ever want to rise up before the heavenly host and say, "I am not ashamed to call them Mine. They belong to Me"?

That is marvelous grace because we so readily and easily bring reproach on the name of Christ, and embarrassment on the name of God, and yet Christ and God, the Son and the Father, are not ashamed to identify with us. And yet the world shamed Jesus. But Hebrews 12:2 says He went to the cross. He endured the cross and despised

the shame. The world heaped shame on Him, they still do, they still crucify Him afresh, put Him to open shame. Every sinner that rejects the gospel shames Jesus, disgraces Him, is embarrassed to even relate to Him. But He despised the shame from the world in order to endure the cross that He might be the author and perfecter of our faith.

You know, when the Lord was in heaven before He came down to earth, He anticipated and then experienced what it was to suffer shame, something He had never known in His entire eternal existence. But Jesus despised that, disdained that shame, in order that He might accomplish our redemption. And so, He received shame, treated it as if it was nothing in order that He might not be ashamed to call us brothers, so that God would not be ashamed to say we belong to Him.

What is a Christian then? Someone who is not ashamed of Christ, someone who is not ashamed of God, but someone who is ashamed of himself. Paul gives our testimony for us in Romans 1:16. "For I am not - " what? " - ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Paul says, "I am not ashamed."

And we know that was true. Everywhere he went he proclaimed Christ. He was just like those angels that appeared to the shepherds and sang, "Glory to God in the highest." He was not ashamed of the Son who was born Savior and Redeemer. In fact, in Philippians 1:20 he says, "According to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall now, even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death."

I will live a life devoted to Christ. I will not be ashamed of Christ, and I will never be put to shame by Christ. He will put to shame those who are ashamed of Him. There will never be any shame for those who are unashamed of Him.

That was Paul and that was how he lived his life. In 2 Timothy 1:12 he said, "I suffer." And he did. "But I am not ashamed; because I know whom I have believed and I'm convinced that He's able to guard that which I've entrusted to Him until that day." I will not be ashamed of Christ. I will live my life faithful to Him. I will glorify

Him, and honor Him, and unashamedly proclaim Him. And he reminds Timothy, "Do not ever be ashamed of the Lord." Peter in 1 Peter 4:16. "If any suffer as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed but in that name - " in the name of Christ " - glorify God."

And it comes down to that. Either you're going to be ashamed of Christ, or ashamed of yourself and unashamed of Christ. How could I be ashamed of the One who died for me? How could I be ashamed of the God of heaven who wanted to be my God? How could I be ashamed of the Son, the Son of God who came into the world to die for my sins so that He might take me to my home in heaven and forever call me His brother?

But sinners, impenitent, unbelieving sinners are ashamed of Jesus. They are embarrassed to accept Him, not because He lacks noble character, not because He failed to demonstrate divine power and proof of who He was, but because to be unashamed of Him requires being ashamed of themselves. It requires, if we go back to Luke 9, exactly what our Lord says here. "If you're going to come after Me - " here is what is required " - deny yourself." That essentially means be ashamed of yourself, self humiliation. We've talked about it the last few weeks, self shame, self hate. That's the essence of repentance. Self denying cross-bearing. Take up your cross daily. Be willing to follow Christ, shamed over your own sin, thrilled that the Savior has come and forgiven your sins, and out of the thrill of that, willing to give your life for Him, even if it means death, and certainly it means to follow Him.

Forgiven sinners, then, are the ones with a strong, overpowering sense of shame for self, who call on Christ to save them from their shamefulness. The unforgiven sinner is the one with a strong, overpowering sense of shame for the gospel because he refuses to see himself the way he really is. If you go to hell forever, it's because you were ashamed of Christ. If you go to heaven forever, it's because you were ashamed of yourself.

Now in this text, just looking at it briefly, this is made clear. First you see the sinners who are ashamed of the Son of Man, and then you see the Son of Man being ashamed of sinners. Verse 26 begins, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words."

John 1 says, "He came into the world, the world was made by Him, the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, His own received Him not." And yet He was the manifest glory of God. John 1:14 makes it so clear it cannot be mistaken. "The Word became flesh, dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

The revelation of Jesus was clear. It was manifest that He was God, unmistakably so. His revelation was clear. His message was true. It was against sin. He deserved honor. He deserved glory. He deserves worship. There is nothing in Him to be ashamed of. In fact, you get a glimpse into heaven in Revelation 5, and all of the hosts of heaven angelic and glorified saints, as well, are saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive glory, and honor, and riches, and power, and wisdom, and strength." And all of eternity in heaven will be a time for praising and praising Christ in all the glory of His absolute perfection. There is nothing in Him to be ashamed of.

And as I said earlier, if you're ashamed of Christ, that's a commentary on you, how warped, and depraved, and sinful your mind is. The cross is a stumbling block and an offense to those that are perishing, 1 Corinthians 1 says. Jesus is offensive to those who want to hold on to their sin, whether it's immorality or morality.

Why do they do that? Why are they ashamed of Christ? Love of self, love of sin, love of acceptance. They don't want to live a holy and pure life if they're immoral because they would lose their friends who are immoral. Their friends would belittle them and mock them if they got religion. And on the other hand, the self righteous don't want to admit their sin. They don't want to call them sinners, themselves sinners, or they will be alienated from their hypocrite friends.

The preservation of self, the preservation of whatever mode of sin you found your comfort in, the love of being accepted in your chosen group of sinners is what holds the grip on the sinner that makes the sinner ashamed of Christ, ashamed of the gospel that un-masks them as wretched and doomed to eternal judgment.

Those people are described there in verse 26 as those "ashamed of Me and My words." And that goes right to the issue. You can't separate Jesus from His gospel. Me and My words go together. It

isn't just being enamored with Jesus, it's embracing the gospel that He preached. But wherever the fear of alienation or ostracization from your group, or the love of self, or the love of sin dominates the heart, the sinner will not deny himself, he will not willingly take up a cross, he will not follow, and therefore verse 24 says, "He will lose his life." He'll lose his life in the eternal sense.

Well, it comes down to who you're going to be ashamed of. And nothing ever, ever could come close to the seriousness of being ashamed of Jesus Christ and His gospel. That is eternally disastrous. And the second part of the verse points that out. First you have the sinners who are ashamed of the Son of Man, and then you have the Son of Man being ashamed of sinners.

He says, "Of him - " that is, whoever is ashamed of Me and My words " - will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." That's looking at the second coming. When Jesus comes in full blazing glory, the glory of the Father, His own glory and the attendant glory of the accompanying angels, scenes described in the prophetic portions of the Scripture, in Daniel, in Matthew, later in Luke, in Revelation, when Jesus comes back to sit on the throne of judgment, He is going to have nothing but shame to heap upon those who are ashamed of Him.

The words of Jesus here in verse 26 are tied directly to an Old Testament text that was familiar to the Jews who heard Him say these things. They were very aware that Daniel had prophesied the coming of the Son of Man, the Messiah. And that when He came it would be with the glory of the Father, and with the attendant glory of the angels. And it would be a throne of judgment. And I want you to look at that by turning into the Old Testament to Daniel chapter 7. Daniel chapter 7. This is unmistakably the text that Jesus had in mind.

Although He referred to Himself as "Son of Man" routinely, in this case "Son of Man" directly goes back to Daniel 7. And I want you to look, first of all, at verses 9 and 10. In Daniel's vision he says, "I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took His seat." He sees God enthroned. "His vesture was like white

snow - "symbolizing purity" - the hair of His head like pure wool - "symbolizing wisdom. "His throne was ablaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him," symbolic of judgment fury.

This is like Ezekiel chapter 1. This is the war machine of the throne of God starting up. This is divine destruction, absolute purity. Holiness is offended. Absolute wisdom responds appropriately with absolute judgment, fury of the very war machine of God. And if you want to a further description of it, you'll see it in Ezekiel chapter 1, and there's also a picture of it in the fourth chapter of Revelation. This is judgment time. "Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him." And those are the angels, the holy angels.

We've already seen the glory of God, the Ancient of Days in His white pure flaming glory. And now we see the glory of the angels that are there at that judgment. And verse 10 ends by saying, "The court sat." This is a courtroom. "And the books were opened." What are the books? The books are the record of every person's life and everything ever thought, ever said, and ever done is in those books.

Revelation 20:11-15 gives the same scene in different words. In fact, as you close the Bible there in Revelation 20, getting right to the very end, this scene is depicted, and the books were opened and everybody is judged out of the books. That's the scene that our Lord had in mind when He spoke in Luke 9:26.

There is coming a time when He will return and He will take His place as judge. God will be on the throne at that great white throne judgment, as the writer of Revelation described it. Christ will be the judge. John 5 says, "The Father has committed all judgment to Christ." He will rise to the throne, along with the Father, that's why there's more than one throne there in verse 9. And from that throne He will judge.

Verse 13 describes that. "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days." Here comes the Son of Man, He comes up to the throne where the Ancient of Days

is seated. "He was presented before Him. And to Him - " by God the Father - as John 5 describes it " - was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."

His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. This is the Father giving to the Son the kingdom, as He comes to render judgment. To Him is given dominion, sovereignty, everlasting dominion, glory and the kingdom. That is the scene of judgment.

The Son comes to render judgment and to receive from God the Father His kingdom. That judgment is further described in chapter 12 of Daniel. At the end of verse 1 it talks about another book and everyone who is found written in that book will be rescued, delivered, escaping judgment, so that "many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to shame and everlasting contempt."

There is coming a day when the Son of Man comes to the throne of God to render judgment. All those whose names are written in the book which we know is the lamb's book of life, the list of those that have been forgiven through faith in Christ, will be rescued from that judgment. All the rest will be raised out of the dust, their spirits already with God. There will be bodies coming out of the dust to join them so that they will suffer forever in hell in some kind of body suited for that punishment.

And they will be shamed is the word. This is exactly what Jesus was talking about. In that day He will be ashamed of them, they will be ashamed, they will be a shame to Him and receive everlasting contempt, while the saints - verse 3 - will shine brightly in the glory of eternal life.

Jesus then was saying that. You can go back now to Luke chapter 9. Jesus was describing here in very brief words that very same scene and saying the time is going to come. You who are ashamed of Me and My words, I'm going to be ashamed of you in that glorious judgment.

Why? Why such shame? Because the books are there. The

books are there. And when the books are opened, as Revelation 20 says, as Daniel 7 says, when the books are opened, every thought you ever had, every deed you ever did, every word you ever spoke, every right thing left undone, every impure motive less than glorifying God is all there and all that's in the book is reason for eternal disgrace, eternal shame. And some will protest. And some will say, as in Luke chapter 13, I think it is, "But we were there in the streets with You, and we ate with You, and we were around, and, You know, we heard You, and we were kind to You." And He says, "Go away from me, you evildoers." And others will say, "Well, we went further than that. Lord, Lord, we did wonderful works in Your name and we prophesied." And He'll say, "Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity, I never knew you." There are going to be protests in that day.

There are going to be protests from other people who are going to say, "But we were religious and we were good enough." The record is, however, accurate, and they will be thrown immediately into everlasting disgrace, and contempt, and their response, according to what our Lord said, will be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. That is just horrible to think about, Luke 13:28. When He says, "Depart from Me, you evildoers. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

What is that? I'll put it simply, this. You're ashamed of Jesus now, He will be ashamed of you then. The record of your shame will be displayed at the judgment, and you will spend the rest of eternity with nagging, gnawing torment in full recognition of your shame. Be ashamed of yourself now, be forgiven. Or be ashamed of yourself forever with no relief.

This is the first mention in Luke's gospel of Christ's return, but not the last. And Luke mentions it often as a day of reckoning. You're not going to have it then the way you want it. You're going to get it the way God determines is just. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, the call is simple. If we would come to You and be forgiven we have to be ashamed of ourselves. That's what self denial is. And it is so total that we're willing to take up a cross daily and follow You, whatever that means. How I pray, O God, that sinners will be ashamed of themselves, willing to admit their sin, willing to be

rejected by the world, willing to abandon the deceptions of personal freedom, willing to lose their life in order to find it forever.

How I pray, O God, that sinners would feel shame in exchange for glory, suffering in exchange for blessing, submission in exchange for eternal life. And we remember the words of Romans 9:33. "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame." Ashamed of ourselves now and never ashamed throughout all the joys of eternity, or ashamed of Christ now and ashamed of ourselves forever.

I pray, O God, that Your Spirit would prompt a right response, and forever is the key, a day of reckoning is inevitable. Father, I just pray that You would work in the hearts of those who hear this message to make a right judgment that they should be ashamed of themselves and certainly not of our blessed Redeemer. We pray for His glory and in His name. Amen.

~ 6 ~

Barriers to True Discipleship

John MacArthur

Luke 9:57-62

4.27.2003

We have finally come in our study of the gospel of Luke to the last section of chapter 9. As you know by now, the chapters in the gospel of Luke are long. This one is no exception, having sixty-two verses. The final section flows from verse 57 through 62. I want to read that to you and then open up its marvelous and helpful truth.

Beginning in Luke 9:57, "And as they were going along the road, someone said to Him, 'I will follow You wherever You go.' Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.' And He said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Permit me first to go and bury My father.' But He said to him, 'Allow the dead to bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.' And another also said, 'I will follow You, Lord, but first permit me to say goodbye to those at home.' But Jesus said to him, 'No one after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

Three would-be disciples and the subject is, "Following Jesus." The first man says I will follow. To the second man Jesus says, "Follow Me." The third man says, "I will follow." Follow is the operative word here. It's about following Jesus. That's the subject. It's about the high cost of following Jesus. It's about what hinders people from following Jesus. Right at the core it's about following Jesus.

And though that is a very familiar word in the gospels, Jesus many times called people to follow Him. He called Matthew to fol-

low Him. He called the rich young ruler to follow Him. He called Philip to follow Him. He called Peter to follow Him. He called all of the twelve to follow Him at some point and He called many others to follow Him. And always when He did that He used the same word, *akolouthe*, and He used it in the present imperative, which implied an ongoing command. "Following" in itself implies a future, implies continuity. It implies something beyond the moment. And in the present tense, that implication becomes explicit. Keep on following Me. You might even say, "From now on in your life, follow Me."

That really is not typical of the modern style of calling people to discipleship or evangelism. Modern evangelism would lead us to believe that becoming a Christian is a matter of a moment, not a lifetime. It's a matter of an accepting of Christ. It's a matter of an emotional experience to which you were led by fiery preaching or heart-rending stories or music. Whatever might be used to induce a person to a moment of emotional breakdown where they will pray a prayer, make a decision, accept Christ, that seems to be the direction of modern evangelical evangelism. All they have to do is grab that moment, say that prayer. And if they don't know what it should be, we'll give them a formula to pray. And that's all it takes to become a Christian.

It's obvious that Jesus didn't do that. He never tried to, quote, "Get people saved" by moving them emotionally to a moment of crisis, or a moment of decision, or a moment of acceptance of Himself. He never brought anybody that I know of in the New Testament to a place where they were supposed to pray a prayer. Never did He do that and never did the apostles do that. None of them ever moved toward some crisis event in which supposedly the sinner was redeemed from sin and death and hell. And yet the call to Christ, the call to salvation is typically viewed in our world as an event, as a...a response to an emotional moment. Not so in the words of Jesus. When Jesus invited someone to come into His kingdom, when Jesus invited someone to receive His forgiveness and salvation, He asked that person for the rest of his life. He didn't want a moment. He didn't want the emotion of a moment. He wanted the carefully thought out, understood, commitment of a lifetime. Repentance

from sin, confession of Jesus as Lord, obedience from the heart to the Word and the Spirit was for life. And there was always that emphasis in the ministry of Jesus. He disdained the short-term disciple. He made things so difficult for many would-be disciples that, for example, in the 6th chapter of John it says, "Many of His disciples walked no more with Him." The standard was just too high. What was required was too demanding.

Now in the text before us we have three illustrations of following Christ. The word "follow" appears in each one. Two times would-be disciples come up and declare that they will follow and the middle one, Jesus asks one to follow. Again as always in the present imperative He's asking for the rest of his life, calling for the fullest devotion, for permanent following. It's not an event, it is the rest of your life. And that's consistent with what Jesus said back in verse 23 of this chapter. Do you remember our very important study of chapter 9 verse 23? He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself." Denying yourself and following Christ, that's what Jesus said in His true invitation into the kingdom. When we call people to salvation, we are calling them to self-denial. I love that Greek verb.

I was working on a chapter for the book that I'm finishing that will come out in the fall called *Hard to Believe*, and I was reminded again of the word used here for "deny." It is a word that means to refuse to associate with. And Jesus is saying, "If you want to come after Me, you have to come to the point where you refuse to associate any longer with the person that you are." Luther in the fourth of his Ninety-Five Theses pinned on the church door at Wittenberg called it self-hate, which is essential, he said, to entrance into the kingdom of heaven. And once you've gone through self-denial, or self-hate, or self-loathing because you no longer want to associate with the sinner you are, you're that desperate. At that point when Jesus says to you, "I'm asking for a whole life commitment," you're in the position to make the response because you've just abandoned yourself completely. That's the first half. And now you're ready to embrace the lordship of Christ with unswerving loyalty and unhindered devotion.

We need to be calling sinners to follow Jesus as a way of life. Now last Sunday we had a lot of people come here who show up on Easter and Christmas and maybe come for a concert or two during the year, and I suppose if we asked those people, they would say they believe in Jesus. Many of them might even say they made a decision for Jesus, or they prayed a prayer. But coming on an Easter Sunday or a Christmas Sunday or to a concert doesn't constitute a life following Jesus. And then there are other more regular people, like some of you who are here today, and you get beyond just the concerts and the seasonal events and you come many Sundays to the church, but for you it's just a Sunday experience. The rest of the time you follow your own desires, your own ambitions, your own goals and objectives. True Christians, these people are not. True Christianity is not seasonal. It's not even Sunday, it's a way of life. It is following Jesus all the time in joyous self-denial. It is that willingness to deny yourself, take up your cross, that is deny yourself to the degree it might cost you your life, and follow Me. And you welcome the opportunity to do that because you know how bankrupt you are, you've already past the Rubicon, as it were, in self-denial. Now following Christ brings the only hope and the only joy and the supreme joy available to you. The conditions of salvation are set by our Lord Himself.

In fact, it's always amazed me how many people Jesus had a conversation with and He put a barrier up between them and salvation. It wasn't easy to get saved if you were talking to Jesus. He never led anybody to a superficial response to Him whatsoever, even people who believed in Him. He always raised the barrier of sin and self-denial and taking up a cross and hating family and being willing to give up everything you have. I mean, how important is this to you, is really the issue. It isn't that He'll necessarily ask for all of that, but if Jesus Christ is important enough to you, then you would be happy to receive Jesus Christ under any conditions that He might ask for. I've subtitled that book, *Hard to Believe: The High Cost and Infinite Value of Following Jesus*. And the reason you're willing to pay the high cost is because of the infinite value. Jesus continually set the standard so high and here in the passage I just read to you, which

has a parallel in the 8th chapter of Matthew, chapter 8 verses 19 to 22, Jesus is confronted by these three would-be disciples. And in each of these cases there is a barrier that He puts up. And the end of the story is obviously that the person went away. None of these people are said to have affirmed their commitment. None of them responded positively to what Jesus said. So here you might say that Jesus had three evangelistic prospects and He set conditions that caused each of them to walk away without eternal life.

Now we already know from Luke 9:23 that the standard for coming after Jesus is self-denial, self-sacrifice, and self-submission. You're at the end of yourself, you have a beatitude attitude, you are mourning over your sinfulness, you are meek and humble because you understand the bankruptcy of your heart. You hunger and thirst after righteousness to such a degree that you have no clinging to material things, whether they are material comforts, material possessions, or material relationships. It's that level of desperation that says I have come to the end of myself; I no longer want to associate with myself. It's beating on my breast that I cry out to God to be merciful to me, a sinner, and to give me Christ as my Lord and my Savior, whom I will joyfully follow for the infinite value that comes to me.

Now as we come to this text, just a note about chronology, though the chronology here is not clear, Luke just kind of throws this little account in here. It is clear in Matthew. And it is clear in Matthew that this event actually happened in the ministry in Galilee around the town of Capernaum which is the headquarters for Jesus' ministry. In Luke's flow we are outside Galilee now, we're moving outside Galilee. The Galilean ministry is over. You remember back in verse 51 that Jesus had resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem. So He's on the way now to Jerusalem. There's a number of months, less than a year now until His death. And as He moves toward Jerusalem, He goes to various places, moving about. But the primary goal is the training of the twelve, to prepare them for the ministry that awaits them after He is gone. Matthew tells us this was during the Galilean ministry. Luke includes it here because it's part of the training of the twelve. In chapter 9 verse 46 He gave them a lesson

on humility. In verse 51 and following He gave them a lesson on mercy. And here He gives them a lesson on discipleship. This is all part of how He's preparing them and us for this responsibility.

And there were, of course, many who were following Jesus. When it says in verse 57: "As they were going along the road," that "they" could be very expansive. Obviously it involves Jesus, it involves the twelve, and it involves whoever else was going along as we find out in chapter 10, verse 1. He appoints seventy others and sends them out two by two. So there have to be at least eighty-three of them and then we can assume there are many others as well because Jesus was followed by a large crowd.

Matthew tells us that when this incident happened, Jesus had been doing many powerful miracles. So whenever that happened, there was a swelling of the crowd.

We can assume this is a huge crowd of people. They followed because of His power over demons, His power over disease, His power over death, His power over nature. They followed because of the astonishing character of His teaching, because of the amazing authority that He possessed because of His compassionate, loving character, for all of the...all of the reasons that were inimitable to Jesus Christ as the most attractive person who ever walked upon the earth, the crowd was there. They had ample evidence that He was the Messiah fulfilling the Old Testament promise, that He was the Savior, the Son of God. They had ample evidence for that in what He said and what He did. And yet the crowd was a spectrum all the way from those who were there to find a way to kill Him, to those who were already affirming that He was the Son of God and believing in Him. And everything in the middle and the middle is what we would call the disciples, the *mathetes*, the students, the learners at all levels of commitment.

In fact, in Matthew's account, one of these men is even called a disciple. But don't confuse him with an apostle, and being a disciple didn't mean that you had finally come to saving faith. As I said, in John 6 many of His disciples went away and left Him and walked no more with Him. It simply means they were there as learners. But these three had come to the point where they moved across

the spectrum pretty close to the right end and they were convinced that Jesus was the spokesman for God. They were convinced that there was no one like Him. They obviously were convinced of His miracle powers. He had done literally thousands of miracles. The reputation of Jesus was never even brought into question, nor were any of His miracles questioned even by the people who hated Him most. They knew this was a man from God. They were convinced perhaps that He was even the Son of God, the Messiah. They get all the way up to that point and they affirm they're ready to follow. You might call them the hottest prospects for the kingdom of God. And yet when Jesus is through with them, they turn and go away. Here are three of those most interested, three closest to the right side of that spectrum, to real salvation. And our Lord confronts them with the necessity of absolute self-denial.

The first would-be follower of Jesus was hindered by the desire for personal comfort. Verse 57, "As they were going along the road," and that is non-specific, we don't know what road. As I said, it was in Galilee somewhere near Capernaum. "Someone," Matthew helps us with someone, a scribe. Not just someone, but a certain scribe, said to Jesus, "I will follow You wherever You go." This is a moment of emotion. You know, this is kind of where you want to get everybody, and this is where you want to bring them to some high point of emotion and devotion. And this man is there. He is very, very eager. He has been seeing all the miracles. By the way, if you want to know what they were, they are recorded in Matthew 8 verses 5 to 18 prior to the passage that's parallel to this. He had seen all of that, been a part of the crowd and had firsthand experience, he is astounded. He is attracted to Jesus. He reaches the highest level of devotion that he knows and he says, "I will follow You wherever you go." I'm done with what my past has been. I'm going to leave my career as a scribe.

And by the way, scribes were very esteemed people in Jewish life. Scribes were the experts of the law. They were the lawyers, the religious lawyers who interpreted the law the way lawyers interpret the law of the land today. They interpreted the law of the rabbis and the law of Scripture. They were qualified and authorized by Jewish

authorities, highly educated and loyal to the Jewish system. Scribes were generally hostile to Jesus. They joined with the Pharisees, the chief priests to seek Jesus' death. Though it's a sort of a brand snatched from the burning kind of thing when you think about a scribe affirming that he wants to follow Jesus wherever He goes. In a sense, he was saying something that was very culturally familiar. Rabbis traveled in those days. They walked and they had little flocks of students who followed them. It was very common in the ancient world, not just in Israel but in the Greek world as well, for an esteemed teacher to have a little bevy of disciples who followed him around while he walked them through life and taught them. And here is a scribe, who by some standard might himself be a rabbi and a teacher, saying, "From now on I want to join Your group, You are my Rabbi." For Matthew says he said to Him before he said I'll follow You wherever You go, he said to Him, *didaskalos*, or teacher, or rabbi. He was literally saying I want to join the group, I think You're the teacher, You're the teacher. He was then offering himself as a willing pupil of the miracle worker from Nazareth. What better offer could Jesus have than to pick off a scribe? And then He could have that scribe give testimony to how he had turned from the legalism of his past to the grace that was found in Jesus Christ. What a wonderful testimony that would be. He could headline his meetings, "Hear converted scribe give testimony," you know.

"I will follow You wherever You go," implies some permanence. It implies more than a momentary decision. It implies more than a moment of emotion. Look, there may be emotion, but I'm laying this out, I'll go where You go. Jesus was surely the greatest teacher he had ever heard, most riveting personality he had ever met. And he knew that Jesus stood for the destruction of the narrow legalism that the scribes stood for. But Jesus was still compelling to him, overwhelming. And he thought he was giving Him the fullest commitment when he said, "I'll follow You wherever You go."

But Jesus had seen this before. Jesus knew what was in this man. John chapter 2, verse 23 tells us that Jesus could read minds, which we, of course, know. When He was in Jerusalem at the very beginning of His ministry, "During the feast many believed in His name,

beholding His signs which he was doing but Jesus on His part was not entrusting Himself to them for He knew all men." Boy! They were believing in Him, affirming Him. He didn't make any commitment to them because He knew what was in their heart. He had no faith in their faith. It was not a saving faith. It was not a full enough commitment. Jesus refuses always to cash in on a moment of emotion. He refuses to do that. And He refuses to do it here. He knows human nature. He knows its emotional instability. He knows its fickleness. He knows its self-centeredness. He knows its hankerings and its hungerings, and its longings and its loves. The scribe saw the crowds, he saw the miracles. He heard the teaching. He wanted to be associated with Jesus because there was no one like Him.

This offer was very complete on the part of the scribe, and yet on the part of Jesus it wasn't complete enough. It's really amazing. If anybody came today and said, "I want to follow Jesus wherever He leads," the average evangelical Christian is going to say, "Pray this prayer, sign this card, start into follow-up."

Jesus doesn't do that. He says the most amazing thing to him. You want to follow Me? We're not going to the Ritz Carlton. "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." I just want you to know something. Jesus knew this man's mind because He's omniscient as God. And He knew this man had a desire for comfort, personal comfort, personal ease. And so He went right to the issue. Foxes were everywhere in Israel in those days and in more ancient days. You remember Samson when he tied all their tails together, remember that, and sent them through a field burning. Foxes common to the people and they had their burrows and they had their places to go and rest and eat. And birds, birds were certainly everywhere. At some seasons there are more birds, you know this, in the land of Israel than any place on the planet. At migrating season half a billion birds migrate from Europe down into Africa and they all migrate through Israel. That's a strange phenomenon isn't it? Not so strange when you read the book of Revelation at the end time after the battle of Armageddon. God's going to need all those birds to eat the carrion that's left from the judgment that comes at the return of Christ. Everybody

knew birds had nests. Everybody knew foxes have holes. That's just basic stuff. And as common as that is and normal for animals, I don't even have that. The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. At least eighty times Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man. It's His favorite title for Himself. It marks out not only that He is the Messiah because it's a messianic title taken from Daniel 7:13, but it also emphasizes the fact of His humanness. And in His humiliation as the Son of Man, He says, "I have nowhere to lay My head. All I can promise you, My friend, is that if you follow Me it might mean you're homeless. Don't expect comfort. Don't expect ease."

Why does He make an issue out of this? Because it was an issue with the man in his heart. Self-denial, right? "If any man come after Me let him deny himself." What does it come down to? For some people it comes down to what's in it for me? That's the wrong way to proclaim the gospel. It's not about self-satisfaction, it's about self-denial. It's not about what do I get when I get Jesus; it's about what am I willing to give up. It's about the level of desperation that says, "Look, I don't make any bargains at this point. My condition is so desperate I want forgiveness and I want grace and I want heaven and I put no conditions on it."

The emotion of the moment for this man may not have betrayed his true attitude to the rest who were standing there, but Jesus saw his heart so He knew exactly what he was thinking. And He said, "I just want to let you know that I'm not sure I'm ever going to find a place to lay My head." And connecting with the prior passage, do you remember that? Back in verse 51, He was going down to Jerusalem and sent messengers on ahead of Him and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans. And He sent them into the village of the Samaritans to make arrangements so that He could sleep. And they didn't receive Him. The Samaritans wouldn't even let Him stay in their village. They wouldn't let Him sleep there. James and John were so mad they asked Him if He wanted them to call down fire from heaven and burn them all up. Gadara didn't want Him even though He had cast the demons out of the maniac that terrorized the whole area, cast the demons out of that man, you remember, and they went into the pigs and went off the cliff and the whole coun-

tryside ran Him out. Nazareth didn't want Him; they tried to throw Him off a cliff in His own hometown. Capernaum didn't want Him even after all the works He'd done there. Jerusalem wasn't going to want Him either. They were going to scream for His blood and demand the Romans nail Him to a cross. He's saying, "If you're expecting comfort out of this, if you're jumping into this deal because you think we're going into the kingdom, and you're going to be living in a palace at ease, got it wrong. I can't promise you that. In fact, I can promise you other than that."

And He certainly could at that time. In the 10th chapter of Matthew verse 16, "I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be as shrewd as serpents, innocent as doves, beware of men, they'll deliver you up to the courts, scourge you in their synagogues. You'll even be brought before governors and kings for My sake as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. And when they deliver you up, don't become anxious about how or what you will speak, for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak, for it's not you who speak, it's the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. And brother will deliver up brother to death, the father his child, children will rise up against parents, cause them to be put to death and you'll be hated by all on account of My name. But it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved." It's those people who prove they're genuine believers by following all the way to the end through the persecution, the hatred and the animosity. Jesus said, "I think you need to know that if you follow Me there is a crown at the end, but there's a cross on the way. It's the way of persecution. It's the way of suffering." And this guy was stony ground. You remember the seed went into the stony ground and it grew up for a little while but when tribulation and pressure came, the sun burned it, it scorched and it never had any fruit and it died? That's the sort of would-be short-term, "I'll go anywhere You want me to go" disciple who has no root, no depth. He wanted to add Jesus to his life. He wanted the excitement of following Jesus. But he wanted a life without the sacrifices. And it isn't that necessarily Jesus is going to take everything away from him. It is that Jesus wants to see him at a point where he doesn't hold any of that because if that's still a bar-

rier, then the devotion to Jesus is not complete. It's not saving faith. We do Jesus a grave disservice if we ever lead people to believe that the Christian way is an easy way. It's not.

The second man...and I believe that these happened in the same context at the same time, had probably been listening. Jesus turns to him and He said to another, "Follow Me." Having been disappointed by number one in that sense that I think Jesus dissuaded him easily when He unmasked his desire for personal comfort, He then turns to another and says, "Follow Me." Well he's hearing the conversation, but what he said, "Permit me first to go and bury my father." Now you might think that his father's body is lying at the house. That isn't the case. And it does seem reasonable, it really does, to go bury your father and the Jews had thirty days of mourning, you know, to take a month and go and do that if your father had just died is reasonable. According to Jewish custom, burial took place immediately after death. They didn't embalm, they just wrapped bodies and put them immediately in the grave. And there was a thirty-day time of mourning. It would have been appropriate for the son to be there. It was honorable to give burial to the dead and particularly a son's responsibility to make sure that his father was cared for in death. The only way to avoid that, the only way a son could get out of caring for the funeral of his father was if he was high priest and then, of course, he couldn't touch a dead body, according to Leviticus 21, or according to Numbers 6 if he took a Nazarite vow, temporary Nazarite vow, and couldn't touch a dead body. There's no indication that he had done either, of course. He wanted to go home and bury his father. If you weren't the high priest and you hadn't taken a Nazarite vow, that was the honorable and the right thing to do. The final act of devotion to his father seems pretty reasonable.

On the surface it says some good things about the man, says some necessary things about the man. This man, however, knows that the Lord is moving away from the area. He just said He doesn't have anywhere to lay His head. He's itinerant, He's on the move. He's on the road, as verse 57 says. Where's He going to be in a month? Where's He going to be in two months? Where's He going to be in whatever amount of time is involved here? And to just

make this story very clear, the point here is his father wasn't dead. He's not saying the body is laying at the house waiting to be buried. He wouldn't be there if that were the case because they buried them immediately. He's saying, "Look, I've lived too long to leave now without my inheritance. I'll follow You but I was just listening to the conversation You had with that guy and You said that You don't have anywhere to lay Your head, the resources are meager here, You can't promise us anything, no prosperity gospel here, so I think it would be better for me if I just hung around and I waited till I got what I have been waiting for all these years. I'll pad my own pockets and I'm in a good fall-back position, if, you know, things don't work out."

By the way, "I must bury my father" is a familiar Middle Eastern statement still used. And when they use it and they say, "I must bury my father," they mean I must stay at home until he's gone so that I can bring his estate to its final point and so that I can receive my inheritance. I'll follow You someday, when my father's dead and I've gotten what I need. Ah, he's attracted to Jesus, who wouldn't be? He's amazed at His power, but he loves money. He's like the weedy soil in the parables of the kingdom. You know, it says that the seed went into soil that was full of weeds and the weeds choked it out and Jesus explained that as the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches which choked the seed. So here's another guy with a response. Something pops up, looks like life, but the love of the things of this world, the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches choke out the life. He said I've waited too long not to cash in. I want what my father has and what's coming to me.

And Jesus said to him, it's a rebuke, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." This reveals less than good intentions. This is not honorable. This is not honorable. If you had a decaying body sitting at the house, Jesus wouldn't have said this. His intentions weren't good. Jesus said, "Let the spiritually dead..." What He means by that is: the unconverted people. Let the people in this world who are outside the kingdom of God take care of the dead. Leave temporal things to temporal people. Leave the matters of the temporal kingdom to the people who live in that kingdom. You are called to

come into the kingdom of God and for the rest of your life to go and proclaim the glories of that kingdom. Let go of the kingdom of this world, even its good elements, even its noble responsibilities. I mean, that is clearly again an indication that Jesus knew what was in the man's heart. And it wasn't something He had to read, He heard it out of his mouth. I want to wait till my father dies. And Jesus would be long gone by then. Who knows years maybe? You don't get the picture here. Your priorities are messed up. Secular matters belong to secular people. You're telling Me you want to follow Me, you want to follow Me into the kingdom of God, then forget the secular world and do what relates to the kingdom. What's that? Go and proclaim the kingdom of God. What does that mean? Go and preach the gospel because proclaiming the kingdom of God is simply telling people how they can enter the kingdom of God, and that's the gospel. This man is committed to personal riches. He's like the rich young ruler back in Matthew 19, remember the rich young ruler who said, "How do I receive eternal life?" You know, "What do I do, good Master, to receive eternal life?" And Jesus said, "Well before we talk about eternal life, let's talk about the law, let's talk about the law, let's talk about the Ten Commandments."

"Oh, I've kept the Ten Commandments. I'm not a sinner."

That's a problem. That's a problem.

"And then let's talk about submission and self-denial. Take everything you have. Sell it and give all the proceeds to the poor."

And he went away. That's not what he was willing to do. There was no self-denial there. He wouldn't deny his own self-righteousness and he wouldn't deny his own possessions. And so he went away, tragic figure.

Jesus put the barriers up at the appropriate time to make sure that the devotion was complete and consummate. And here was a man who was asked to follow, said I'll do it sometime in the future after I've been taken care of with my inheritance. Jesus said, "You don't understand. You come into My kingdom, you let go of the kingdom of this world. Friendship with the world is enmity with the God." If you love the world or the things that are in the world, the love of the Father is not in you.

One more brief encounter: "And another also said," and he's probably following up on the prior discussion. "I will follow You, Lord." I'm not going to be like that guy. I'll follow You and I won't wait till my father's dead, I just want to go home and say goodbye. I just want... "Permit me to say goodbye to those at home." I want to follow You.

This guy had long apron strings. I just want to go home. Well that sounds kind of reasonable. I figure he's thinking to himself, and this is speculation, you know, I don't need to wait till my father dies to get all the money, I'll just go home and raise some support for my mission adventure. I'll just go home and have a big farewell party. And, you know, I'll cash in on that and that will give me a little to follow. Jesus is worth following, Jesus is exciting. This is phenomenal stuff. I'll just make a short trip home, be back in a week or so and I'll have collected something from everybody for the journey. Or it may have been that in his heart was this hold with the family that he couldn't let go of and you do remember, don't you, how absolutely adamant Jesus was and said what is so hard to hear, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I didn't come to bring peace but a sword. I came to set a man against his father, or a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law and a man's enemies will be the member of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

Jesus said, "Look, if you're going to follow Me, you have to say goodbye to your family. You have to be willing to cut the cord with your family." He was going to go back to a family who would never understand this, who would prey on him, who would ply him not to do this and dissuade him. In the 25th verse of Luke 14, "Multitudes were coming along. Jesus turned and said, 'If anyone comes to Me and doesn't hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brother, sisters, yea and hate his own life, he can't be My disciple.'" You're back to that whole thing of self-hate. And it doesn't mean that you...you loathe the people in your family, you despise them with some kind of vitriol. It simply means that in a relative sense your love for the kingdom of God is so great that you are really from the spiritual

viewpoint indifferent to the compulsions and the pull and the interests of your family.

By the way, Jesus responds, verse 62, with a proverb that can be traced back to a writer named Hesiod in 800 B.C. "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God." The proverb probably said something like, "You can't plow a furrow looking backwards." Jesus said, look, you...you can't follow Me looking backwards. You can't have a divided heart. You can't be Mr. Facing Both Ways, to borrow the words of John Bunyan. There are people who come all the way up to believing, all the way up and could be pushed to pray the prayer, make the decision, accept Christ, do whatever the moment called to do, but if you confronted them with the fact that the self-denial is so complete that it asks you to be willing to give up all your comfort, all your possessions if that's what the Lord asks, and all your relationships. And the one who is truly being prompted by the Spirit of God and brought into the kingdom is going to say, "Look, Jesus Christ is so infinitely valuable to me that I don't care what the price is, I will gladly sell all for the pearl." This man's heart was divided. And there was no way that he was fit for the kingdom of God because he was holding on to the kingdoms of this world.

The issue here is salvation, people. The issue is coming into the kingdom. And if you've ever wondered what the issue here was, some people think it's sort of second-level discipleship. No. And verse 62 makes it clear. It's about coming into the kingdom. And Jesus is simply saying to these people, "Look, if you're holding back anything, you can't come in. Salvation is for those who have come to complete self-denial." The Lord may not take away all your comfort. He may not take away all your possessions. He may not take away all your relationships. But you're not negotiating. You're simply saying the infinite value of the gospel of Jesus Christ is so great that if He asks, I'll give it all up. I'll give it all up.

So responding properly to Christ is not a matter of emotion. It's not a matter of an event. It's not a matter of a momentary acceptance or a decision. It is not some superficial interest. It is not even a matter of saying, "I will follow." It is a matter of self-denial, total

self-denial, a willingness to give up everything because the value of Christ is so infinite. The sinner has reached that level of desperation by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. He who doesn't take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of Me, Jesus said. He who has found his life shall lose it. He who has lost his life for My sake shall find it. It's about losing your life. It's about hating yourself. It's about holding on to nothing. It's a beatitude attitude.

We aren't told how these three responded to what Jesus said, but pretty obvious. They left Christ to hold on to their earthly loves. What a sad decision. The pearl of great price is available for those who sell all. The treasure hidden in the field is available for those who sell all. That's how it is with true disciples. They've entered into a life of following Jesus, following Jesus.

Father, we thank You this morning for the words of our precious Savior. If we ever wanted to learn how to evangelize, couldn't have a better teacher. Sometimes we so deeply desire people to come to Christ that we alter and adapt the message to gain a momentary desired response and all we do is plant tares instead of wheat. I'm sure that all over the world there are people who made a decision for Christ but are not following Jesus. People who were told that they could follow Jesus and hold on to the world, they could have it their way and they may think they're saved but they're not. I just ask, Lord, that You would bring clarity to the gospel, clarity to the invitations to sinners. Protect us from altering the truth and therefore putting people unwittingly on the broad road that leads to destruction. Help us to evangelize the way Jesus did, call for total commitment. We know that that's hard. It's a hard message and it's hard to believe. In fact, it's impossible apart from the mighty work of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit sets out to do His work to convict of sin and righteousness and judgment and to break the sinner's self-love and self-esteem and personal ambition, when the Holy Spirit does His work, part of His work is the grace and the mercy of self-denial. For those on whom the Spirit works, we need to be faithful to bring the true message, that the genuinely penitent and self-denying sinner who sees the infinite value of Christ may understand the truth of saving faith. Use us that way, we pray for Your glory. Amen.

~ 7 ~

The Extreme Nature of True Discipleship

Part 1

John MacArthur

Luke 14:26-33

10.16.2005

Well, we turn to the Word of God now, Luke 14, Luke 14. We come to the last section in this great 14th chapter. And we've been moving through it rather rapidly and this last section is for some of us who have been in our study of Luke for a long time, really a summary kind of section. You'll find elements of things that we've learned in the past and we'll treat it as such this morning. Luke, chapter 14, verses 25 through 35. Luke 14, starting in verse 25. Let me read it for you so you have it in mind.

"Now, great multitudes were going along with Him and He turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you when he wants to build a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him saying this man began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with 10,000 men to encounter the one coming against him with 20,000? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. So, therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give

up all his own possessions. Therefore, salt is good, but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless, either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Now, the key to this passage is to notice three times the simple designation "My disciple." You see it in verse 26, you see it in verse 27 and you see it again in verse 33. "You cannot be My disciple," "you cannot be My disciple" and then "can be My disciple." This is about being a disciple of Jesus, not a peripheral disciple, but being one who truly belongs to Him. That is the intent of the personal pronoun "My." This is not about a disciple or a would-be disciple or a potential disciple; this is about one who is "My disciple," that is one who truly belongs to Me. That is what Jesus is calling for in this text. Verse 26, "If anyone comes to Me..." coming in the sense of coming to be a true disciple of Jesus. At the end of verse 27 He says, "Come after Me."

So the idea here is to become a disciple of Jesus by coming to Him initially and following Him, which is to say coming after Him; that is, sustaining that initial coming. This is an evangelistic text. This is Jesus calling people to come to Him and to follow after Him, thereby becoming His own disciples. That's the thrust. It is an invitation for people to come to salvation.

Frankly, it's pretty easy to see that. There is no other way to interpret the text, particularly when you notice that the audience being addressed is a great multitude. He is saying this to the masses who are following Him and hearing Him and seeing His miracles and being attracted to Him and in process of deciding what to do with Him. This is an invitation to become true disciples who are in every sense His own.

We know from the past studies of the gospels that the word "disciple" can have a broad meaning. In fact, typically, rabbis in general had disciples. The word is *mathetes*. It means a learner or a student. And typically, rabbis in Jewish culture moved around with a little bevy of following learners or students or disciples. In fact, I think the reason Jesus was called rabbi...and it was not because He had an official designation. He couldn't have qualified for the designation

officially because He was rejected by the religious establishment. But I think Jesus drew the term "rabbi" because He functioned the way rabbis function and that is, He had this group of followers. In fact, He had a larger following than any rabbi ever had or anybody else ever had in Jewish culture. And so it was pretty obvious that He functioned as a rabbi and probably was called one because of that. But this was very familiar stuff to them, a teacher moving about with people following Him. And in the beginning as you study the unfolding of Jesus' ministry, these disciples are all over the map in terms of their commitment.

Some are nominally committed, some are truly committed, some are barely committed at all and some are not even committed; they're just there out of curiosity. And as Jesus, through His ministry, raises the bar, raises the standard, makes the demands more absolute, more exclusive and more extreme, the superficial disciples begin to drop off. And so now, He's talking not just to disciples...or not about disciples...but He's talking about My disciples.

And as He comes to the end of His ministry, he becomes more definitive as to what it really means to belong to Him. The word "disciple," now, is taking on a truer, purer meaning so that when you get into the book of Acts, also written by Luke, every time you see the word "disciple" in the book of Acts it is a synonym for a Christian. So that you find in the book of Acts it says that the disciples were called Christians. That occurred, you remember, for the first time in Antioch. So, this word disciple is going through some kind of a metamorphosis. Or better yet, it's going through some kind of an elevation so that it becomes the staple word to define a true believer in Jesus Christ who can be called a Christian. In Acts, chapter 6, you remember, it describes the believers as the disciples.

The disciples were needing some leadership, they were needing some help from the leaders because some of the widows were not getting their fair share of what should have been available in the distribution of food. As you move through the book of Acts, in chapter 11, chapter 14, chapter 15, verse 10, you find disciples and Christians becoming synonymous. That's what this is about. This is a call to true discipleship. This is a call to really following Christ,

not just initially coming to, but coming after in the sense of sustaining that initial commitment, being a true follower of Jesus Christ. This, then, is an evangelistic message. He had had many who were superficial followers and disciples who didn't stay around very long. They were like the...the stony ground. They had a little bit of apparent life and under persecution and tribulation they disappeared. Or they were like those who couldn't let go of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, the cares of this age, and they sprouted for a little while without bearing any fruit and also disappeared. They were like those in John 6:66 to whom Jesus raised the bar so high that it says many of His disciples walked no more with Him.

But by now we're toward the end of Jesus' ministry. By now, of course, we're months away from the cross and it's become pretty apparent what the national attitude toward Jesus is and it's complete rejection. That's why chapter 13 ends with Jesus Himself saying, verse 35, to Israel, "Your house is left to you." I'm through with you. It's over. This is a kind of judgment on them that speaks of their desolation and future punishment. The die is cast in terms of the nation and the leaders have already affirmed where they stand. They have accused Jesus of being demonic. And so Jesus, here, is seen giving an invitation to become a true disciple. It's still invitation time even though desolation has been pronounced upon the people of Israel. Even though the leaders have fixed their attitude toward Jesus in unbelief and resentment and hatred that will eventually come together with the attitude of the people to bring about His execution, Jesus is still giving the invitation. He is still offering salvation. It is still the day of grace.

And so, really, this section here is about how one becomes a true disciple, how one comes to Christ, follows after Christ and is known as one of His own disciples. In a sense: It's how one is to be saved. And it's put at a strategic point because if anything has been learned in the prior section of this 14th chapter, it is that the religious leaders of Israel don't know how. They think they're going to be in the kingdom. They think they're going to be the blessed sitting at the banquet of God in heaven some day, but they are wrong. They are too proud. They are too confident in their law-keeping and

their tradition and their ceremony and ritual observance. They're so proud about their religious achievements and their moral achievements that they cannot humble themselves and so they will be shut out of the kingdom. In fact, in verse 24 Jesus' final words at the lunch with the Pharisees and the lawyers is: "I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of My dinner." And the men who were invited: basically Israel and the leaders of Israel. They were pre-invited by the Old Testament to come to the banquet of God, to come to the kingdom, to come to salvation, but when the Messiah came and said everything's ready, come now, they refused. And so they miss it. They are never going to be invited again and never will taste of the great dinner of salvation, the great, glorious banquet celebration of heaven.

The people don't know how to be saved because the leaders don't know how to be saved and so it's the blind leading the blind. And that raises the question, of course, in Luke's mind, and he carefully answers it by placing in here the right teaching about how one becomes saved. How does one enter the kingdom of God? How does one come to forgiveness? How does one come to heaven? How does one become a disciple of Jesus Christ? We can't turn to the leaders of Israel for that information, but we can turn to the true leader of Israel, the Messiah, the Lord, Jesus Christ, who will teach us.

So whether it is come to Me, come after Me, be My disciple, it all refers to an invitation to salvation. Jesus invited people to salvation. In chapter 18, verse 24 He talked about entering God's kingdom. In chapter 18, verse 18 He talked about having eternal life. In chapter 14 we saw back in verse 15 there was a reference to eating bread in the kingdom of God. In chapter 12 there was a reference to acknowledging Christ and, therefore, being acknowledged by God before the holy angels. All of these refer to the same thing. They're just ways to speak of salvation. All refer to the gift of eternal life, the gift of forgiveness and righteousness that comes to one who puts his trust in Christ. And so here is another one. He could say: This is how you enter the kingdom. He could say: This is how you come to the banquet of God, this is how you come to heaven, this is how you receive eternal life. He could say any and all of those things.

But in the marvelous and rich blend of Scriptures, it is here, if you come to Me, come after Me, be My disciple. That all invites us to salvation. Jesus was an evangelist. And there are some people who are very confused about this and they have left a huge trail of confusion through evangelical Christianity. The idea that somehow there is a possibility of being saved without ever really following Christ. There is the possibility of acknowledging Jesus as Savior, without acknowledging Him as Lord. There is the possibility of praying a prayer and being given a gift of salvation with absolutely no commitment, even without repentance.

This views Jesus as something other than evangelist. The people who believe that say, here He is inviting people who already believe in Him as Savior to move up to a higher level, to stop being carnal Christians, to borrow Paul's language, and becoming spiritual Christians, to come to the higher level. But that turns Jesus into some kind of deeper life teacher rather than an evangelist. And He came to seek and to save that which was lost and His message was a message of salvation.

Becoming a disciple of Christ is not an invitation to add something to your life. It's not an invitation to embellish your life by finally becoming obedient. It's not some kind of an enrichment of your otherwise rather insipid and carnal Christian life. We're not asking for some emotional makeover when we call people to become disciples of Christ. We're not saying you need to move up a little higher on the ladder of spiritual life. This is a call to salvation. This is a rescue from hell to heaven.

There is no intermediary, sort of soft one step that gets you in the kingdom and you hang around until you finally move up. And what Jesus asks for here is so amazingly extreme. I mean, the language in what we just read is very extreme: hating your family, carrying your cross, hating your own life, giving up all your own possessions. I mean, this is very extreme stuff. And Jesus is not calling for some addition or some embellishment or some enrichment or some emotional change or just offering fire insurance.

To borrow the, sort of, contemporary language, Jesus is not calling for a makeover; He's calling for a takeover. He is calling to

become sovereign Lord, divine dictator, ruler, controller and king of your life. Never did Jesus call for a short, easy prayer to receive eternal life. Never did He call on people to make an emotional decision induced by some pleadings by someone or some music or some environment. Never did Jesus offer an easy forgiveness and an easy way to heaven. The door was always narrow, hard to find, and there were always distractions to lead people away. And there are those people in chapter 13 who try to get in and they can't. They can't. In fact, if you look at the evangelism of Jesus it's amazingly contrary to what we are used to.

The Lord did everything He could, said everything He could to stop would-be, shallow, superficial followers, to literally stop them dead in their tracks. He put up barrier after barrier after barrier. He kept articulating these extreme standards for coming to Him to receive salvation. And this is just completely contrary to what we are used to in our environment and getting even more used to because it's more and more common. Evangelists today and pastors and people in church ministry seek mass responses. I mean, the idea is to reach as many people as you possibly can and so you've got to figure out what is the attraction for the masses and then you've got to decide what are the barriers that prevent people from confessing Christ, praying a prayer, seeking salvation.

And you get all those barriers clarified and eliminate them all. You want to make this decision as easy as possible for the most people possible. So you remove anything you think would stand in the way, anything that would prevent people from praying this prayer or acknowledging this simple faith and responding to the message. Jesus did absolutely the opposite of that. He did everything He could to put up barriers constantly by making statements that were absolute and exclusive and extreme. He sought no superficial followers whatsoever. I mean, He understood that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. He understood that the enemy was going to sow the tares among the wheat and He didn't want to do anything to contribute to that. He did everything He could to keep the tares out, to sift the chaff from the wheat. Never would He give anyone an easy way to secure a false sense of salvation. If only we would go

back to understanding how Jesus did evangelism, extreme demands that were not ambiguous, that were crystal clear, and would deter the superficial and would thwart the fickle.

Now, I want you to remember something as we read through that. Not everything necessary to salvation is in this passage. It doesn't tell us anything about who Christ is in this passage. It doesn't say anything about who God is here. It doesn't talk about salvation being by faith. It doesn't speak about repentance. It doesn't talk about putting trust in Jesus Christ. It doesn't...doesn't say anything about that. But that doesn't do anything but remind us that no one passage necessarily has every component of the gospel. This emphasizes, not the objective facts of the gospel, but the subjective attitude that must exist in the heart of the one who comes to those objective facts in a true and saving faith.

Jesus obviously talked about sin and about righteousness and about God and about judgment and about Himself being the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Savior, and putting trust in Him. He talked about His coming death. He talked about His coming resurrection. He talked about all of those things, but He also talked very, very often, and so it is recorded in the gospels, about the attitude of the person who comes.

There are people who can know the facts and even affirm the truthfulness of those facts but never enter the kingdom because they are stopped by the required attitude. And when it comes to the attitude that God is looking for in the heart, it is...it is an attitude of extreme commitment, nothing superficial about it at all. So when you have told the story of the gospel and you've talked about Christ and who He is and why He came and His sinless life and His death and His resurrection — and that is the gospel, clearly, that is the gospel as to its content and the truth that must be believed — you then must talk about what is the true attitude of the one who can trust Christ in a saving way.

There is a kind of faith that does not save. And Jesus talked so much about this. It isn't that we can alter the gospel. Most people who talk about the gospel, most who evangelize and evangelize about the gospel understand that Jesus was virgin-born, He was

God in flesh, He lived a sinless life, died a substitutionary death, rose again, ascended to heaven, intercedes, will return. We get the facts right. We have to believe in that to be saved. The real issue is what is the nature of that believing? What is the substance of that attitude? And that is where much of the New Testament spends its time, and much of the teaching of Jesus.

And just to show you that what you read is not in any sense unusual — and this is familiar turf, I'm sure, for all of you — let me tell you some of the other things that Jesus said. Matthew 10:34, "Do not think that I am come to bring peace on the earth. I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword." Here's where the sword will come down. "I came to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law and a man's enemies will be the members of his household." It's exactly what we just read in Luke 14.

Then He goes on to say, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it. He who has lost his life for My sake will find it." In chapter 13 of Matthew in two little parables, verses 44 to 46, concise, unforgettable parables. First one, "The kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and hid and from joy over it, goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant, seeking fine pearls. Upon finding one pearl of great price went and sold all that he had and bought it." Simple principle. In both cases a man found something so valuable that he gave up everything for it. That's the point. Jesus is saying it'll cost you everything. That is the extremity of true discipleship.

Extreme discipleship is what we're talking about here. You give up everything, including father, mother, sister, brother, as we read in Matthew, chapter 10. This is unmistakably an emphasis in the language of Jesus in the 10th chapter of Mark as well where our Lord says, essentially, very similar things. "No one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms for My sake and the gospel's but he shall receive a hundred times

as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecution, and in the age to come, eternal life." Again, Jesus says you're going to have to give up everything here, all your possessions and all your relationships. You're going to get them back in the church, in the redeemed church, in the fellowship you enjoy here and even more importantly, in the eternal life to come. This kind of attitude finds itself expressed in John's gospel also in chapter 12 and verse 25. "He who loves his life loses it. He who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal." And then, of course, we remember, don't we, Luke, chapter 9. We have gone back to that text so many times. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." Verse 23, "Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it. Whoever loses his life for My sake is the one who will save it. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"

All this says the same thing. You give up everything in terms of relationships and possessions. You sell all. This is why people fall short. This is why it's a narrow door. This is narrow-door evangelism. This is why it's a narrow door. You give up everything. A lot of people don't get it. They're the people in Matthew 7. Lord, Lord, we did this; we did that in Your Name. "Depart from Me. I never knew you." I don't know who you are. We have no relationship. You'll find that even in the 13th chapter of Luke. You certainly do remember verses 24 and following. "Strive to enter by the narrow door. I tell you many will seek to enter and not be able. And once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door" then you're going to be on the outside. And what are the people on the outside going to say? "Lord, open to us." And He will answer and say to you, "I don't know where you're from." And they'll say, "Well, we ate and drank in Your presence. You taught in our streets." And He'll say, "I tell you, I don't know where you are from. Depart from Me, all you evildoers." And then comes weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This is the consistent message, the consistent message. And Jesus, in John 6, when the people departed — it says many of His disciples left — said to the ones that stayed, "Do you want to leave

also?" And Peter summed it up and he said, "To whom shall we go? You and you alone have the words of eternal life." We're here and we'll give up everything because we want eternal life at any price. This is the message that Jesus preached. It is not a call to a superficial kind of response. It is sell all, hate everyone around you, hate your own life, abandon all your own possessions. The treasure is that valuable, the pearl is that valuable. Sell everything. This is that beatitude attitude. You really have nothing to hold onto anyway. Paul says everything I had I considered manure. Look at yourself and realize your spiritual bankruptcy, your spiritual poverty. That's the beatitude attitude. That's what made the Jews react so violently to Jesus. They didn't want to give up their manure. They wanted to hang onto their Pharisaism and their Judaism. They wanted to hang onto their ancestry to Abraham and their ceremonies and traditions and law keeping and they wanted to earn their way in. As we learned at lunch in chapter 14 in the prior passages, Jesus spoke to them about humbling themselves and considering themselves as outcasts and that was to be the only way they'd ever get into God's kingdom. They were not willing to do that.

God will have a glorious banquet in Heaven. Some believers are enjoying it even now as you know, the saints triumphant. There is an eternal life, bliss in the glories of the heaven that God has created for those who belong to Him. But His holy presence in the glories of heaven await those who give up everything, who hold to nothing, who come so desperate and so desirous of salvation that the price is immaterial to them. Salvation is free, but only to the empty hand does it come. It is a gift, but can only be received by empty hands.

Now, we come back to our text. And in this setting, Jesus is going to say more about this whole idea of self-denial. It's the same message as back in chapter 9, verse 23. Coming to Christ is a radical thing. It is not a superficial makeover; it is a total takeover. It is not just a status change before God; it is a real transformation as we're going to talk about a little bit in our message tonight.

I want you to see three things in this text, one, this morning and two, next time, three great truths. One, being Christ's disciple demands abandonment of past priorities. It demands abandonment

of past priorities. It also demands, secondly, assessment of present powers. And, thirdly, it demands allegiance to future potential. You take a completely different worldview, past, present and future. And it all begins with an abandonment of past priorities. Listen, the gospel says everything in your life is about to change. Your priority has been yourself and your next priority has been your family. Let's assume relationships. And the next priority has been your possessions. And you have to abandon all of that, hate your family, hate yourself, verses 26 and 27, and verse 33, give up all your possessions. I mean, if you look at life for the unregenerate person, that's about it. It's me, my people and my stuff. Right? It's life, very comprehensive. And Jesus says, if you want to be My disciple, you abandon it all.

Let's look at the text. "Now, great multitudes were going along with Him and He turned and said to them." Great multitudes, massive crowds in the tens of thousands if not twenties of thousands as we saw in chapter 12, huge, huge crowds. And Jesus is on His journey and He is moving inexorably, really, toward Jerusalem. Not in a direct line, rather indirect. Took a little foray in His Judean ministry up into Galilee and a little time over the Jordan River into Perea to the east, but He's headed toward the final stop in Jericho and then on into Jerusalem for the last time to die. As always, He's got a huge crowd. Some suggest this incident could have happened in Perea... can't be sure about that...which is east of the Jordan. But whenever it was, on this particular occasion, as surely on many other occasions, He said these words: "He turned and said to them," addressing the whole crowd. Now, keep in mind, this isn't the only teaching Jesus did. These crowds would have heard Him day in and day out and probably for a good portion of the day. So you have a very small snippet of what Jesus said.

If you go back to chapter 12 for just a second I'll give you kind of a bigger picture. In chapter 12 you have sort of a collective message from Jesus. It's a great discourse interrupted by a couple of questions asked, but it really flows from chapter 12, verse 1 to 13:9. That whole thing, if you have a red-letter Bible you will see, is Jesus speaking with a few questions and comments. And if you wanted to see a sort of composite, evangelistic sermon of Jesus, here's one.

And He starts out in verse 1 by saying, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Here's what Jesus says there. Get out of false religion. Get as far away from it as you can. It is leaven. Leaven is influence. Leaven permeates. Leaven corrupts. First thing He says: Get away from phony religion, very blunt, very straight-forward.

Second thing He says, better realize "there is nothing covered up that won't be revealed and hidden that won't be known...what you've said in the dark will be heard in the light, what you've whispered in the inner rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops." Know this: God knows what's inside of you. He knows every thought and every word and every action. Understand you're under divine scrutiny.

Then He says in verse 4, "Don't be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more they can do. I warn you, fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast you into hell. Fear Him." One: Run from false religion. Two: Understand your life is an open book to God and that leads to the fact that you better fear God because God is holy and God will judge your sin. And nothing escapes God. He knows all the birds that hop and He knows how many hairs are on someone's head.

In verse 8 He says you have to confess Me before men to be confessed before the angels of God. If you deny Me before men, you'll be denied before God. So what's He saying? Run from false religion, understand your sin is exposed to God, have a fear of the judgment of God, confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He goes on into verses 10-12 and says listen to the Spirit of God. Don't ever blaspheme the Spirit of God. What the Spirit does and says, you must respond to. Down in verse 13 He says...A question is asked about an inheritance and He launches into a whole section that says abandon materialism. Don't be like a man who built bigger barns and bigger barns and lost his soul. And down in verse 22 to 34 He says seek the kingdom, forget everything else. Verse 31, seek for His kingdom. "These things shall be added to you."

This is sort of a sampler of all of His teaching. Run from false religion, understand your sin is exposed to God, fear the judgment

of God, confess Christ, believe the Spirit, abandon materialism, seek the kingdom of God. In verse 40 He says, "Be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you don't expect." Recognize that the Second Coming could come at any time. That runs down all the way to verse 48. In verse 49 He talks about self-denial again and denying your relationships. Verse 53, father against son, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and so forth and so on. Christ brings this sword. Understand there's going to be a price to pay, division in the family. This is self-denial.

Verses 54-59 tells the story about a man who needed to go to the judge and settle accounts before he ended up being sentenced. And He says settle your accounts with God before it's too late. In chapter 13 He says you're going to die and you don't know when. And in verse 6-9 He says you're living on borrowed time. All of those would be components of Jesus' routine evangelistic preaching. Get out of the phony religion, understand your life is an open book to a holy God and you, therefore, are under His judgment. Fear Him, confess Christ, believe the Spirit, abandon materialism, seek the kingdom, expect Christ to come in judgment, deny yourself, settle with God before it's too late, realize death is near and you can't control it and you're living on borrowed time. All of these are components of Jesus' evangelism.

And so we come now to chapter 14 back to our text. This is only part of that big picture of what Jesus taught regularly and routinely. And the first thing He has to say to them is this: Look, if you're going to enter My kingdom, if you're going to be saved, you must abandon your personal past priorities. Verse 26: "If anyone comes to Me and doesn't hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yea, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." In verse 33, "So, therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who doesn't give up all his own possessions." It's going to cost you your family, yourself and all you have; you, your people and your stuff.

Notice, anyone...universally true...comes to Me. This is an initial act of faith. This is the commencement of true saving faith. You must

understand, we're talking about extreme discipleship here. And the point is made strongly by using the negative. If anyone, anyone, comes to Me and does not hate his family, his own life and give up his possessions, he can't be My disciple. "His own" adds a little bit of a sort of sympathy to it. "His own" stresses the natural priority and moral affection...natural affection I should say, that you have for your family. This is very strong. This is very extreme.

You hear typical evangelism today, you know, you just come to Christ and, you know, it's not going to have any impact on any relationship, might make your family like you better, etc., etc., etc. And we don't live in the same kind of hostile environment they did then, but it's still unfair to tell people that this is somehow going to be a way to induce peace into your home when the fact of the matter is it might introduce a kind of turmoil the likes of which you've never experienced when you, as a believer, try to co-exist with non-believers.

But we're told here it's necessary to hate. Immediately when you read that, you say, wait a minute. That seems contrary to what the Bible teaches because we're commanded to love everybody. Right? We're commanded to — for example, Exodus 20:12 — honor our parents. Certainly that implies loving them. We're told in Ephesians 5:25 to love our wives. And we're taught to love our children. I mean, to not have normal family love, according to the writing of the apostle Paul, is some kind of aberration, some kind of perversion that characterizes the worst in society. And doesn't the Bible tell us that we're to love our enemies. What are we talking about here? What does this mean? Does this mean all of a sudden we're to have some kind of emotional venom toward the people in our family? Is that what it's talking about? Is some kind of psychological resentment? Aren't we supposed to love people as part of our evangelistic effort? Aren't people supposed to be able to tell that we're the disciples of Christ...John 13...because we love? Yes to all of those things.

So what are we talking about? We're talking about a Hebraism. We're talking about a unique way in which the Jewish people used the terms love and hate. It expresses preference. In Malachi 1 and 2...and it's repeated in Romans 9:13...God says, "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I" what? "Have I hated." It's not talking about the fact that

God had some emotional loathing for Esau. It simply means that God gave His promise through Jacob and not through Esau. It is simply a way to define preference.

It can also be a Semitic expression for loving someone less. For example, maybe the best illustration of this is in the 29th chapter of Genesis. You know, polygamy was always a sin and it was always unwise and it always brought grief and certainly you see that with Jacob and his two wives, Leah and Rachel. Verse 31 of Genesis 29, it says...In the NAS it says, "Now, the Lord saw that Leah was unloved" and the translators have taken a liberty there. The word is "hate" in the Hebrew. But they understand the interpretation because it's a preference here, not some kind of emotional animosity. It simply means Leah was unloved or hated and Rachel was loved. That is to say, he had two wives and he liked one better than the other one. Not too abstract. "Leah conceived, bore a son, named him Reuben, for she said, 'Because the Lord has seen my affliction, surely now my husband will love me.' She conceived again, bore a son, said, 'Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, He has therefore given me this son.'" This is to say, not that her husband despised her and hated her. Her husband had a relationship with her, even a physical relationship with her. He gave children to her. It is a way of expressing the fact that she was loved less and Rachel was loved more.

And Deuteronomy 21, by the way, talks about that. If a man has two wives, he'll love one more and he'll love the other less. And didn't Jesus even talk about that? No man can serve two masters. Right? He'll love one and hate the other. It doesn't mean that he has a psychological hatred toward the one; it simply means that in effect, *de facto*, if you have two that you love and they come into conflict, somebody is going to be treated one way and somebody is going to be treated another way. It is a *de facto* hatred in the sense that if God says this is what I expect of you, this is what I want from you, and your family says we don't want that, we want this, you do what God says, you, therefore, have expressed love to God and you have treated your family as if you hated them because you have no regard for what they ask when it comes into conflict with what God demands. It is nothing more than that.

It is not counter-commanding us to hate the people that Scripture commands us to love. And the best way, maybe, to clear that up is in Matthew 10:37, which I read earlier, which spins it on a positive note. "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." It's about loving more and loving less. That's essentially what that love-hate concept is conveying.

This is a call, then, to unshared love with Christ, to love no one the way you love Him. And I'll tell you that's a claim to deity because in Matthew 10...in Luke 10, rather, we are instructed, verse 27, to love the Lord, our God, with all our heart and soul and strength and mind. And if you're to love God exclusively in that fashion, and Christ says you're to love Me exclusively in that fashion, then this is a claim to deity unquestioning. What He is saying is that when you come to Me and you want to be My disciple, you will love Me to the degree that it makes all other loves and all other loyalties subordinate.

And whenever our family comes into conflict with the Lord, our love for the Lord dictates what we do. We cannot serve two masters. It is not that we hate them in actuality. It is that we hate them pragmatically in the sense that we don't respond and we treat them as if they had no place in our hearts. We have no choice. I

in the context of the first century, of course, this was pretty clear to them because when a Jewish person made a commitment to Jesus Christ, he would immediately alienate his family. It's still true in orthodox families today and also in Muslim families. Nothing is more severe than for a Moslem to become a Christian, a true believer in Jesus Christ. Alienation of the worst kind, if not execution, can occur in that situation.

In our more benign Western culture we sometimes struggle to understand what this means, but it is still true that when you come to Christ, even though it may not be as you were in a Jewish Orthodox home or a Muslim home, it is still going to be true that your unconverted family is going to find that when they give you some direction and you get direction that you must follow from the Lord, they're going to be as if they have no role to play in your life. And that's how it has to be. Unless your family would feel sort of

uniquely bad, you can remind them that in verse 26 it also says, not only do I hate my father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters but even my own life. It really doesn't matter anymore what you want. It doesn't matter anymore what I want. It doesn't matter what your desires, your ambitions, your goals, your objectives are for me. Frankly, it doesn't matter what mine have been. It's the end for you being the reigning authority in my life and frankly, it's the end for me being the reigning authority in my life.

And, again, this is back to what Jesus has said numerous times. Deny yourself, deny yourself, deny yourself, hate yourself. And if you don't, you cannot be My disciple. And how far does this hate go? How extreme is this? Verse 27, "Whoever doesn't carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Here is the sustained following even to the cross and the cross is simply a symbol of death, martyrdom. This is absolute stuff. He cannot be My disciple. He cannot be My disciple. And unless he gives up all his possessions, he cannot be...absolute.

There's no wiggle room there. Your own desires, your own ambitions, your own objectives, your own goal, all warped, all reflective of your fallenness, are gone. And the degree of this selflessness is all the way to death. The word "carry," *bastazo*, metaphorically means to bear a burden, to bear pain or to bear suffering. You're willing to put your life on the line, take whatever comes, even if it's death. Because why? This is so valuable. The pearl is so precious, the treasure is so rich that you will sell all and you will gladly give up even your temporal life if the Lord so desires to gain the eternal life.

And anybody, by the way, who was crucified, would carry their cross to execution as someone who was being deemed as an outcast. Somebody who was bearing a cross would be somebody who really had no right to life. They were the lowest of the low. Only the scum could be crucified. And you're saying, look, I don't hold onto anything. This is Paul, again, saying everything's manure. I don't want any of it. Until you're ready to say my past priority of caring that I did what my family wanted, my past priority of doing what I wanted, is gone, you're not going to be able to be a disciple of Jesus, self-abandonment at the supreme level. Discipleship has the highest cost.

Our Lord made it clear. He never held it back. It's one thing to tell people the gospel. It's one thing to give the facts, but when you call people to come to Christ, this is where you have to take them. Are you willing to set aside all your past priorities relationally?

I remember when I used to discuss this lordship issue and this kind of commitment for salvation with other theologians in the time when I was writing the material on *The Gospel According to Jesus*, they would pose a question. One of the main guys posed this question to me. If you have a couple that you know and they're living in adultery, they're not married and they're living together and you're going to give them the gospel, do you say to them you must stop sinning and then come to Christ? Or do you say nothing about that, just come to Christ and worry about that later? Well, the answer to the question would be, what would Jesus say. What would Jesus say? Jesus would say this. You have a quote "love" going on here. Whether it's love or not, I don't know, but you have an affair going on, you have a relationship going on. How important is it for you to receive the forgiveness of sin and eternal life? Because if you're not willing to put a sword in that relationship or any other relationship and to deny the thing your heart craves, then you're not worthy to be My disciple.

That really became the nexus of that whole debate. And then when you say that, they're accusing you of, well, you're asking people to do something on their own before they're saved and I'm saying, absolutely not, because the Bible says that only God can grant them the repentance to do that. But it, nonetheless, is not apart from their will. You have to say to the sinner, look, if you have to give up your family and all your own desires, that would be all those desires which could be contrary to God's will for you and the ones you know are contrary to God's will for you are absolutely at the top of the list. Don't come to Christ and say, you know, I want to be saved but I'm not giving up my homosexuality. I'm not giving up my adultery. I'm not giving up my fornication. I'm not giving up this. I'm not giving up that. It's the end of you. That's the bottom line.

The Lord may not take everything. He won't take, necessarily, those things that are good and those things that are virtuous. He

wants to take the things that are blatantly wicked and evil. But He just wants you to put it all down there. He may take it; He may not. He may take your possessions; He may not. But the point is it doesn't matter to you because you understand the value of what you're receiving and you are confessing Him as Lord. Anything less than that, Jesus said, you can't be My disciple. Now, that just takes care of you and your...and your relationships. Next week we're going to look at you and your stuff. And then we're going to get to the good part which is those two fascinating stories about building a tower and fighting a war. OK? Let's pray.

Our Father, we come to You again this morning with grateful hearts that Your Word is so clear. We understand that we cannot perfectly yield up everything. We understand that we still feel natural draws toward family and even sometimes Christian families that want to pull us away from what You want. And we understand that we battle with our own desires and our failures and our stumblings. We know you cover. If any man sin, we have an Advocate, Jesus Christ the Righteous, who intercedes for us. We know we don't perfectly abandon our past priorities. It's a battle. It's a struggle. The flesh longs to hold onto those things. But we affirm, in coming to You, the desire to do that and we seek the power to do that. That's our heart cry. Obedience to You is all we ask and we're willing to give up everything for the pearl and the treasure. And may it be true in our lives. May Your Spirit work that mighty work that causes us to let go of everything and see in Christ the supreme value. We pray in His name. Amen.

~ 8 ~

The Extreme Nature of True Discipleship Part 2

John MacArthur
Luke 14:26-33
10.23.2005

We're coming now to the teaching of the Word of God and this is the high point of our worship as we bow before the very utterance that comes from the heavenly throne. Take your Bible, or there should be one in the pew if you didn't bring yours, and look at Luke, chapter 14; Luke, chapter 14.

For those who are visiting with us, we're so glad to have you. And when we meet together, we look into the Word of God to understand it. Our objective is to determine the meaning of Scripture and its application for our lives. We have now for many years been working our way through the gospel of Luke and telling the story of Jesus and His teaching. We have been so profoundly enriched by it. And we find ourselves in the 14th chapter of Luke at a time in the life of our Lord when He is moving from town to town and village to village and He is preaching to the people, doing miracles, healing. Always, He is calling people to follow Him, to become His disciples, to come after Him. And in paragraph after paragraph we hear the words of Jesus. In this particular one we have a very strong call to discipleship. And it is an example of how Jesus always called people to follow Him. In fact, the words that He gives here are found in many other places in the four gospels, very similar words or almost exactly the same words, so we know this to be a constant pattern in His teaching. And His calls are extreme by any measure. You'll understand that when you hear what He said. Let me read it to you.

Luke 14, verse 25 introduces this message from our Lord. "Now, great multitudes were going along with Him and He turned and said to them," and here are His words, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you when he wants to build a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, this man began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with 10,000 men to encounter the one coming against him with 20,000? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. So, therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. Therefore, salt is good, but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

The extreme character of discipleship: The language is unmistakably absolute, definitive, severe, you might say. But this is not anyone speaking other than God Himself, God incarnate, the Lord, Jesus Christ. He establishes the standards of discipleship. He determines the character of true repentance and saving faith. And it seems, when you study the words of Jesus, that instead of making it easy, He always seemed to make it hard. In fact, by most human assessments He makes it virtually impossible. We're good in our culture at making things easy. Simplify, simplify we're told. Make it as easy as possible. And this even finds its way into the church where we want to devise a gospel or a message that is easy to receive and easy to accept and easy to believe. This is not what Jesus did.

I came back yesterday from Mexico City where I had the opportunity to minister to what turned out to be about 4,400 pastors and church leaders. It was a great, great time. Luis Contreras of...who is from our church and graduated from the college and the seminary

was down there, he was my translator. He is a great preacher. I know because I hear him preach while I'm preaching. That's how we do it. He is my interpreter. And the best way to do it...I don't like to say something and then stop and say it and stop and say it and stop and, you know, like, I speak, he speaks, I speak, he speaks. I can't do that. I need to keep going. And he's the same. He needs to keep going. So he's adept enough. I get up in front and I just preach and they turn my mike down very low so you can kind of hear me in the distance. He's behind me preaching with all his heart, booming out over the whole place simultaneously with me, just a second or so behind. The only challenge...the challenge for him...is to stay up with me. The challenge for me is to keep my train of thought while somebody else is preaching in another language over top of me. After it was over, Steve Green, the well-known singer, came up and he was scratching his head and he says, "How do you guys do that?"

But it was a great, great time. I was sort of bombarded by many of the precious Mexican people who have known about our ministry, listened to our radio and read the books and translate it into Spanish and have the study Bible and things like that. And many of them came to me with a little book, *Hard to Believe*, in Spanish, which features this kind of teaching that we read about. And I was so blessed to know that it's in Spanish and many of them had it. They wanted me to sign it and we talked about it and it was a great encouragement. And I was thinking about that book and I thought, you know, the way I began that book is a great way to begin to look at this passage again. And so if you don't mind, I would like to quote myself. Now, I don't know if you have to put quotation marks around yourself when you're quoting yourself but here goes. Some of you will remember the book *Hard to Believe* and you might remember that this is how it began.

"The first role of successful merchandising is to give consumers what they want. If they want bigger burgers, make their burgers bigger. Designer bottled water in six fruit flavors? Done. Mini-vans with ten cup-holders? Give 'em 20. You've got to keep the customer satisfied. You've got to modify your product and your message to meet their needs if you want to build a market and get

ahead of the competition. Today, this same consumer mindset has invaded Christianity. The church service is too long you say. We'll shorten it. One pastor guarantees his sermons will never last more than seven minutes." That's sick. "Too formal? Wear your sweat suit. Too boring? Wait till you hear our band. If the message is too confrontational or too judgmental or too exclusive, scary, unbelievable, hard to understand or too much anything else for your tastes, churches everywhere are eager to adjust the message to make you more comfortable.

This new version of Christianity makes you a partner on the team, a design consultant on church life and does away with old-fashioned authority, guilt trips, accountability, and moral absolutes. One suburban church sent out a mailer recently promising an informal, relaxed, casual atmosphere. Great music from our band and believe it or not, you'll even have fun. That's all great if you're a coffeehouse. It's Christianity for consumers, Christianity light, the redirection, watering down, and misinterpretation of the Biblical gospel in an attempt to make it more palatable and popular. It tastes great going down. It settles light. It seems to salve your feelings and scratch your itch. It's custom-tailored to your preferences. But that lightness will never fill you up with the true saving gospel of Jesus Christ because it's designed by men not God and it's hollow and worthless. In fact, it's worse than worthless because people who hear the message of Christianity light think they're hearing the gospel, think they're being rescued from eternal judgment when, in fact, they're being tragically misled."

Well, that's how I began the book and that really takes us to where we are in this text. The true gospel, the true call to follow Jesus, is a call to self-denial. It's not a call to self-fulfillment. It is not Christianity light. It is not a man-centered, self-loving, psychologically defined message. The gospel is a call to sinners to submit everything to Jesus Christ. Simply, it is a call to find your life in death. It is a call to find your life by losing it, to gain it by abandoning it, to live it to the fullest by emptying it. There is no Christianity light in the Bible. There is no Christianity light in the teaching of Jesus. Our Lord's words, frankly, weren't very friendly; they were frighten-

ing. They weren't even comforting; they were threatening. They certainly weren't easy; they were hard. And His invitations to salvation, while motivated by love and motivated by compassion, filled with grace and mercy, offering forgiveness, peace and joy now and forever, were still demanding at what anybody would say is a very extreme level. There is no other way to define what we just read than extreme.

This is clearly narrow gate evangelism. It calls for a severe alteration in life, which basically is a kind of death. It reverses and redefines everything that matters: how you view your closest relationships, how you view yourself and how you view everything you possess, all the people in your life, your own life, and all your stuff. And Jesus says, if you don't hate the people who are closest to you and even your own life, and you're not willing to give up all your own possessions, you cannot be My disciple. This is an invitation to follow Christ. He says, in verse 26, "If anyone comes to Me." He says in verse 27, "Come after Me." If you want to come to Christ, then come after Christ, follow Him and be one of His own disciples, that is "My disciple, one that really belongs to Me, it'll cost you everything." It'll cost you everything. Jesus is not offering a makeover. He's calling for a takeover, very different from the easy kind of Christianity light that we're so familiar with. Seems like people want to do whatever makes it easy. Jesus wanted to do whatever makes it...made it impossible.

No one could ever accuse Jesus of giving anyone an easy way and, therefore, contributing to a false confidence, a false sense of salvation. He made extreme demands. They were not unwarranted. After all, He is God. He is the Sovereign of the universe and He has a right to be adored and worshipped and loved and served and obeyed. In fact, the Old Testament tells us that the commandments are all summed up in one great commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." And that's what Jesus is calling for, a dominating love, a surpassing love, a love beyond all other loves, a supreme love. And He is thwarting superficiality. Here we have, in this text, a sample of His call to salvation. For those of us who've been going through Luke for

a long time, we've heard this before. This is not new. This is what Jesus preached from town to town and village to village and house to house. He's calling people to salvation.

Now, admittedly, the content of the gospel is not here. In this text, we don't read about Him claiming to be God, being God in human flesh, being the Messiah, the Redeemer. He doesn't talk about His coming cross and resurrection. All of those are components of the gospel. All of those are the historical realities of the gospel that must be believed. Here He's not talking about the objective content of the gospel; He's talking about the subjective attitude of the one who comes to the gospel. What is the kind of commitment that one must make to the Christ of the gospel? That's the issue here. And the extremity of it is obvious.

Now, last time, I told you we're going to give you three points. We looked at one. We'll pick it up by way of review and then take the final two points. The first thing is this. Jesus says that becoming His disciple demands the abandonment of past priorities. Becoming His disciple demands the abandonment of past priorities. Our lives are basically summed up in three dimensions: the people in our lives, ourselves and our stuff. That makes up our life: who we relate to, our own personal desires, goals, ambitions, and the possessions that we have. And Jesus, as you remember, is saying you have to completely reverse your attitude toward those things. Verse 26, He says to this great multitude that was going along with Him as He was journeying, eventually headed for His death in Jerusalem, "If anyone comes to Me and doesn't hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters..." We'll stop right there for a moment and say this is such severe language. Is He talking about emotional hate, psychological hate? Is He talking about a bitter, angry, hostile attitude? That would be contrary to everything we know about the fact that Jesus said we're to love one another. No. You have to understand that this is a kind of Hebraistic expression. You remember, Jesus also said this: "No man can serve two masters. He will love the one and hate the other." It's a way to indicate preference or loving one more and loving one less. And that's precisely what Jesus said in Matthew 10:37 when He said almost the

same thing, only He said there if anyone loves father, mother more than Me or wife or husband more than Me or brother, sister more than Me, he cannot be My disciple.

So when you compare that passage, this is simply a way to speak of preference, loving one more and another less. It's what He said as well in the Old Testament repeated in the New, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated." It does not mean that God literally, emotionally hated and despised Esau. It meant that His priority, His covenant, His promise, His love in that sense with all of the implications was given to Jacob and not to Esau; Jacob, then being the preferred one. The Old Testament also says if a man has two wives, he'll love one and hate the other and all it means is not that he will actually love one and despise the other emotionally but rather one will be preferred over the other.

And that is what Jesus is saying here. You have to understand this, that while your priority may have been in time past the relationships around you and you did what those around you wanted you to do, your family, those that were intimately in your lives...in your life, they were the ones who basically charted your course, because those relationships meant so much to you, those are all sublimated...those are all subordinated. From now on, you love Me with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. What honors Me, what pleases Me, what I desire, what I will, what I command as the Lord of your life takes precedent over all other demands and relationships.

He also said at the end of verse 26, this is not just true of the people around you; this is true of your own self view. You have to hate your own life. What does that mean? That you have some kind of morbid, suicidal attitude? That you're somewhat masochistic or self-destructive? No. What it means is that you consider yourself and your will and your ambition and your desire and your purposes as minor, miniscule, unimportant compared to your desire to do what honors your Lord. When you come to Me, Jesus says, you're not just adding Me to your life. I'm not just decoration. I'm not just the topping. I'm going to take over. You will receive eternal life. You will receive a place in heaven. You will receive blessing in time and unlimited and inexplicable blessing throughout eternity.

Your sins will all be forgiven. Grace, peace, joy, fulfillment forever will be yours.

But for that gift I want to take control of your life so that I may truly fulfill it, truly satisfy it and truly use it for My glory and your good. That's why Romans 8:28 says, "All things work together for good to those that love God." Why? Because God is working what is best for time and eternity in and through those who are His own. You're willing then to subordinate all relationships to the lordship of Christ. You're willing to subordinate your own life. Literally, it's a kind of death. It's a kind of death. You lose your life to find it. You die to live. And that's exactly what He says in verse 27. "Whoever doesn't carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." The price for following Jesus in those days and in history in many places and even today in parts of the world, you name the name of Jesus Christ, it could cost you your life.

The cross here is simply a symbol of death. It was a torture instrument used to execute people. It's not a mystical idea. It's a very concrete way to express martyrdom. Are you willing to give your life? Are you willing, not only to give up your desires, your ambitions, your dreams, your hopes, all the things that you think are your well-crafted purposes and plans, abandoning them to My sovereign authority, subordinating them to My will, but even to the point where it could cost you your life? Are you willing to say with the apostle Paul, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain"? Are you willing to say that? Are you so eager to have your sins forgiven and the hope of eternal life that if it cost you even your life in this world, that's a small price to pay? Nah, there are many people who would come to Christ if it didn't cost them their relationships, if it didn't cost them their dreams. You hear people today say, oh, you know, come to Jesus and He'll fix up all your relationships. He'll make your life happy. Come to Jesus and He'll...He'll fulfill everything you want, whatever you can dream, whatever you can scheme, whatever you think your plan and your purpose and your *raison d'être* is in the world, Jesus will make sure you fulfill all of those dreams.

Those are all deceptive lies. It's not about Jesus giving you what you want. You come to Jesus, He says, if it costs you all your rela-

tionships? Would you come to Me, He says, if it costs you all your plans? Would you come to Me even if it costs you your very breath in this world? That's how you can determine how desperate a person is to be forgiven, how important heaven is. The Christian gospel is not offering heaven on earth; we're offering heaven in heaven. In fact, you can become a Christian in this life and it might cost you your family and it might cost you all your own dreams and desires. The Lord has something better. And it might cost you your life. But a far greater weight of glory is offered to you, eternal life. And even in this life, with the sacrifices, complete fulfillment, satisfaction, settled joy and peace in knowing that everything is in the hands of your Lord who is working it together for your good.

Well, then He talks about our stuff, doesn't He, over in verse 33. You can skip down to verse 33 because it kind of fits in this first point. "So, therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who doesn't give up all own possessions." That's all that's left. Now, we've been stripped of relationships in terms of priority. We've been stripped of our own self-interests in terms of priority. And now we're basically dealing with everything we have. This is so definitive. No one...so, therefore, no one of you... That's absolute. That is without any caveat. "No one of you can be My disciple who will or does not give up all his own possessions." In what sense do you give them up? Well, how do you become a Christian? By selling everything you have and giving it away and becoming a beggar? Is that what He's talking about? Maybe there's some help with the Greek here. The original language in verse 33, "give up," *apotasso*, say good-bye to.

That's exactly what it means, to say good-bye to. In what sense? Well, it's not calling for socialism. It's not calling for you to sell your house, sell your car, sell all your possessions in your house and go out on the street and beg. That's not what it's saying. What it's calling for is this. You become a steward of everything and an owner of nothing. What you're saying is: I don't have any relationships that aren't subordinated to your lordship. I don't have any self-interests that aren't subordinated to your lordship. It doesn't mean that I ignore my family, cease loving my family. I want to love my family and maybe love my family more. It doesn't mean that I stop my edu-

cation; that I stop moving down a path to do whatever I can do and to be the best I can be in whatever field I choose to the honor of the Lord. It doesn't mean that I unload everything I have. It just means that all of that is subordinated to what God wants for me. I hold to nothing in this world, not the relationships, not my self-interests and not the stuff, not my money and my possessions. I am a steward of all of it and I want to discharge that stewardship before God. I want to take care of my relationships. I want to take care of my family. I want to love them. I want to take care of my life. I want to be disciplined. I want to be healthy. I want to be useful to the Lord in a physical sense. I want to make my mind and my body all that it can be to serve Him. And I...and I want to use whatever He's given me, a house and a car and a bank account for the glory of His kingdom.

But all of it is subject to His sovereign design. That's all He's saying. He's saying: What would you be willing to give up. If I asked you for your family and they were going to become your enemies and hate you because you came to Christ, like happens in Jewish families and Muslim families, would you come? And if you had plans and ambitions in certain things and I asked you to do other than that and My Spirit directed you to give your life in some service over here, would you be willing to do that? And even if I asked you to die in the cause, would you do that? And if I asked you to take everything you have like He asked the rich young ruler in Luke 18, if I asked you to take everything you have, sell it all and give it to the poor, would you be willing to do that? It isn't that you're going to have to do that. I don't know what God's purposes are. God hasn't stripped me of everything and He hasn't stripped all of us of everything. But I do understand unequivocally that I am a steward of everything and an owner of nothing.

And my priority is this: to love the Lord my God, to love my Christ with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength beyond any love I have for my family, for myself, or for anything in this world. This is what Jesus is asking. He's not asking you to sort of tack Him onto all your stuff and all your self-interests and all your relationships. And so that's the first point. Becoming Christ's disciple demands an abandonment of past priorities. Everything changes. It is a whole

new life view. The apostle Paul, Philippians 3:8, says, I looked at it all. When I saw Christ, I looked at everything in my past and, boy, there were some wonderful things. And I counted it manure...that's what he said...compared to Christ. And he said I ran to Christ to receive a righteousness not my own. And now all I want, he said in Philippians 3, is to know Him.

The second and critical component in being Christ's disciple is this. Being His disciple demands not just the abandonment of past priorities, but the appraisal of present powers. You want to come to Christ, you say. You want to be a Christian. You want eternal life. As the rich young ruler came and said, "What do I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said, "Let's talk about your sin." He said, "I have none." He said, "Let's talk about who's in charge." He said, "Not you." That was the end of the discussion. Do you have it in you to make the commitment? Verse 28, Jesus illustrates this. "Which one of you when he wants to build a tower doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"

Now, you've got to understand, the ancient Near East is an honor-shame culture. You just don't do things that bring shame on yourself. It's very important to protect your honor. And the point is, when you're going to do something as formidable as build a tower...this isn't the little shack, this isn't something alongside the house or an addition. We're talking about a tower. It might have been a watchtower, because in ancient days, enemies attacked by burning fields, sowing tares in the fields and so towers were often built in these great estates from which the people could protect their land. They were used sometimes as great grain storage places like we have silos today. This would be a rather large enterprise, not just a minimal kind of enterprise, but this man is going to build a big tower and everybody in the community is going to know it. And nobody would do that if he was going to wind up with nothing but a foundation and everybody laughing at him. In fact, in verse 30, the expression "this man" in the original Greek is derogatory. It could

be translated "this fellow," a kind of a scorn or ridiculing approach. Began to build and wasn't able to finish...That is a huge element of dishonor in the thinking of the ancient Near East. When you're going to build a tower, he says in verse 28, you're going to sit down and you're going to calculate the cost to see if you have enough to complete it. Otherwise you're left with a half-finished building and a permanent monument to your stupidity.

That's a big issue in an honor-shame environment. You want to make sure...here's the operative word...that you can finish, that you can complete it. And then in verse 29, that you're able to finish it. And verse 30, you don't want people to say you were not able to finish. The two times the word "finish" is used, verses 29 and 30, it uses the word *ekteleo*. *Teleo* is to finish. *Teleo*...Jesus said *tetelestai*, which is a form of that, on the cross: "It is finished." It's a pretty...pretty final word. But when you add an *ek* to it, you compound its intensity, to really finish, to finish to the very last component. You don't want your life exposed to ridicule.

So what's Jesus saying? He's saying, look don't come to Me on some emotional level. Don't come to Me because you're feeling some disappointment, you're feeling some confusion in your life, you have been left in the lurch in some relationship and you're looking for a skyhook. Don't come to Me to pacify you over some temporary matter. Don't come to Me with any kind of superficiality. I'm telling you, you must, first of all, be willing to abandon all the priorities of the past that have dominated your life so that it is a kind of dying in order to live. And you've got to assess the legitimacy and the integrity of the expression that you're making at this point to be sure you really have what it takes to finish this. Are you...Are you just responding to a moment's emotion?

That's why, people, it's so dangerous to manipulate people to make superficial commitments to Christ. You don't ever want to do that. You don't want to do that with language. You don't want to do that with music. You don't want to do anything that manipulates people's emotion. You want people to commit to Jesus Christ who have carefully evaluated what is the true condition of their heart. What powers are really being activated? Is it emotional power? Is

it temporary or are we talking about a passion that will run through every barricade to come to Christ? John Stott writes in *Basic Christianity*, "The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half-built towers, the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. For thousands of people," he said, "still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow His...to follow Him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. This is the great scandal of Christendom, so-called nominal Christianity. In countries to which the Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin veneer of Christianity. They've allowed themselves to become somewhat involved, enough to be respectable, but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion," he says, "is a great, soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism," end quote. I'm not talking about that. Jesus is saying assess whether you have what it takes to really take this action.

And He gives a second story in verse 31 with a little bit of a different twist. The first one is a voluntary act. The guy sets out to build a tower. Here is an involuntary one, a man who goes to war. Obviously, his enemy is on the way to attack him. "What king," He says, "when he sets out to meet another king in battle will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with 10,000 men to encounter the one coming against him with 20,000?" This is a dilemma over which he has really no control. He realizes his enemy's coming with 20,000. What man, what king, what leader is going to put his 10,000 in danger, in harm's way, before he sits down and assesses whether or not there is a strategy or whether or not he is better armed, better equipped or has better knowledge of the terrain or whatever in order to win the battle so that he doesn't expose himself and everybody who's followed him to death? Anybody's going to do that. And if he comes up with the conclusion that he can't win, verse 32 says, while the other is still far away, he's going to send a delegation and ask terms of peace. He's going to send a delegation and say: "Look, we know you can defeat us so what do you want?"

There's no sense in spilling all this blood to get to the same end that we could get to by negotiating. So we lose a little of our freedom. So we have an occupation. At least we're alive." No king would go to battle and put himself and all those who were following him in danger if there was a way to negotiate a peace.

And Jesus isn't giving allegories here and He's not giving complex stories. He is simply saying this. There are issues in life that are big enough to be carefully evaluated. You know, when you think about evangelism in the church today, it doesn't seem to be that that's one of them. It just seems that the preaching of the gospel is some kind of minor deal in your life where you pray a little prayer and that's it. Jesus is saying, all right, step back from this thing. You're looking at the reality that it's going to cost you your relationships as a priority, your self-interests as a priority and all your stuff as a priority. Now, back up and honestly assess whether you're operating on an emotional moment or whether you're operating because there's something gone wrong in your life right now, whether you're just kind of grabbing a skyhook, whether you're reacting to some kind of felt need or some perceived issue in your life or whether this is a momentary trauma or whether you are really able, whether you are at a point in your life where the power of your repentance and the power of your faith is enough to finish this commitment. Isn't that amazing? I mean, it really is amazing.

Jesus doesn't say, hey, just pray the prayer, don't worry about it — which would be a typical way to approach it. He says don't even think of this until you know that what is going on in your heart will carry you to its completion. Step back. So when you evangelize somebody and you give them the gospel, you say, now that you understand the gospel, you understand the objective facts of the gospel, Jesus, God in human flesh, lives a sinless life, virgin-born, lives a sinless life, dies a substitutionary death for sinners, raised...is raised from the dead, ascends to the Father, intercedes for us, comes again, you give them the whole layout of the gospel, salvation by grace alone, faith alone and Christ alone, now you know all that? Yes, yes, I know that. Do you believe that? I think I believe that. Oh, good, pray this prayer. No. Let's back up a little bit.

Now, do you understand that He's saying you're going to need to love Him as Lord and He's going to take the priority over your family, over yourself, and over all your stuff? You become an owner of nothing, even relationships, even your own life, everything you possess. You become a steward of everything. At the discretion that God prompts, it is used for His glory and it may even cost you your life. Step back. Don't be in a hurry here. And assess whether you really have what it takes to build this tower, whether you've really assessed what this is going to cost you.

That's all these little stories are intended to say, that when you come against something that is formidable and has massive implications for you or for all the people around you; for you, in the case of the tower, for everybody that is around you, in the case of the king; this has massive implications. You better back up and make sure you have assessed your present powers. And is this faith the real deal? Is this repentance the real repentance? Jesus is halting people. He's putting the brakes on.

You say, but you know, is this a...is this a human work? Is this something I've just got to figure out whether I can muster it up? The bottom line is it's not apart from your will. It's not apart from your assessment of your own commitment. But the spiritual side of it is this. If the Spirit of God is at work in your life, nothing will stop you from making this commitment. You have nothing to fear in telling someone that. You have nothing to fear in saying to someone, "I want you to think about this, I want you to consider the cost carefully." You have nothing to fear. What you're doing is stopping people from superficial, non-saving delusion. You're backing them off and saying, let's find out whether this is really the work of the Spirit of God and what is happening in your life is not a momentary, emotional thing, but what is happening in your life is the true, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit producing an unrelenting repentance and an undying faith that will go through every barrier. You do all the important things in life by calculating carefully.

This is the most important thing you'll ever do. This is more important than any tower you'll ever build, more important than any enemy you'll ever meet. And so the Lord says, you want to be My

disciple, do you? Well, you have to abandon your past priorities and you have to assess your present powers.

Third point: Being Christ's disciple demands allegiance to future privileges...future possibilities, maybe, if you like that better, future potential. Lot of P's you could use there. Being Christ's disciple demands not just a look back and a look into the present to see if the real power is there to make this commitment, but it also involves a look into the future. And this is tucked into two verses at the end of the section, verses 34 and 35. And some people wonder how this connects. I hope I can help you with that. "Therefore" first of all tells us that it connects. The "therefore" is there for the purpose of connecting is.

Verse 34, "Therefore, salt is good, but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown out." And we'll stop at that point for now. Jesus says you need to look back if you want to be my disciple at the past. You need to consider the present and the powers, the true powers of your commitment. And you need to look to the future. And it's illustrated here by this salt. He says, "Salt is good." Let's talk about salt in the sense that salt is an illustration. Salt serves a function. Salt has value. Salt is useful. We all understand that. And salt is synonymous with preservation, is it not? I mean, in the ancient world, salt was used to preserve things before there was refrigeration. We still have meat being preserved in jerky and things like that. For years and years all the ships at sea carried salt in order to preserve the meat. Salt is a preservative. It has a function. It has value. It's useful.

By the way, in Old Testament covenants salt was associated. You can read about it. Leviticus, chapter 2:13, in all the... All the offerings in that chapter in Leviticus 2: Where offerings were brought salt was included. And salt was the symbol of a permanent loyalty to the covenant. Salt was the symbol of loyalty, preserving something. Leviticus chapter 2 there associates salt with the Mosaic Covenant. Numbers 18 associates salt with the priestly covenant. Ezekiel 43 even associates salt with the New Covenant, symbolic sacrifices to come in the future. In Jewish history salt was associated with prom-

ises and covenants as a symbol of loyalty. Generally speaking, salt stays salt. Some people have said, well, this is a kind of strange statement, if salt has become tasteless, because salt doesn't. That's why it can preserve other things because its own nature is undiminished. Salt stays salt. If it didn't...If it didn't stay salt, then it wouldn't be any good to preserve something else.

But the interesting fact is, while there were different sources of salt, there was at least one source of salt in Israel in ancient times that came out of the Dead Sea and it was the salt that was rather severely compromised with gypsum. It had another name then, but it was gypsum, basically. And if it wasn't processed right, the salt that came from the Dead Sea that had that chemical sort of compound of gypsum with it, if it wasn't processed right, it could begin to diminish in its effectiveness as salt. And it would literally become tasteless. And then it couldn't do its job. It would cease being what it was. It would cease to be able to preserve. It would lose its potential. It would use its...lose its usefulness. And once it did, in verse 35, then what do you do with it? What do you do with old salt?

Well, I'll tell you one thing, you don't throw it in the garden. It'll just kill everything there. They wouldn't even throw it in a manure pile. That's a compost heap. That salt is a problem because once it's useless it's really useless. If it can't do what it can do...and what it can do is very limited...but if it can't do what it can do, then it can't do anything. What's He talking about? He's saying, look...Jesus had already said this probably on a lot of occasions. You are the salt of the earth, right? And He even said if salt loses its taste, then what's... what's its goodness? It has none.

So what He's saying is this. What I'm asking of you is this: Put the past aside, assess the present power and commit to Me for long-term loyalty in the future and I'll use you for good. I'll make you a preserving influence for righteousness. You will be the salt of the earth. That's what He's asking. Basically, He's going to change the role you play in society. He's going to change the role you play in this world. All of a sudden you're going to be for preservation, for seasoning. Jesus is saying don't...don't start in letting Me use you unless you intend to be faithful. I'm asking for long-term saltiness.

I'm asking for long-term loyalty. And if you are at all corrupted by some spiritual gypsum and you're going to have a very short span, I'm not interested in those kinds of disciples. Like the ones in John 66, you know, who followed awhile and then it says they didn't like what He said so they walked no more with Him. I'm asking that you abandon your old loyalties, that you assess your present powers and that you make allegiance to future usefulness to Me.

I'm asking for lifelong loyalty, a commitment to continue being what I want you to be in this world. Because if you don't, then you're useless to Me. There's nowhere to put you. You're no good here; you're no good there. You just get...here's the key, verse 35...thrown out. That language is absolute. That language is final. Any temporary follower will be cast into judgment. Jesus talks about weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, fire, brimstone, all language that speaks of eternal judgment. Don't start following Me until you're ready to let go of the past, affirm that the repentance and faith of your heart will see this thing through to the full commitment and issue in a long-term life of loyal service, committing yourself to future, privileged service to be salt in a decaying, rotting world. You're placing everything in the Lord's hands: past, present and future.

Do we keep all these promises? Oh, look, our lives are filled with moments of failure aren't they? Moments when family dominates over the Lord's will. Moments when self dominates over the Lord's will. Moments when stuff dominates over the Lord's will. There are times when we wonder whether our faith is all that it should be and whether we do have what it takes to finish. There are times when we begin, even as salt, to lose our influence because of sin in our lives. Moments of failure do not, however, invalidate the direction of the heart. And we grieve over those moments. We know they're going to be there as long as we're still in our human flesh but they don't invalidate the heart's desires. If this is what you desire, if eternal life in Jesus Christ is what you long for to the point where it's a total takeover of past, present and future, then Jesus says you can be My disciple.

He closes with an invitation in verse 35. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." This is an expression, kind of a colloquial expres-

sion used all over the place. Matthew uses it several times. Mark, it's recorded there. It's in Luke. All it simply means is: Listen to this message. If you understood it, embrace it. If you understood it, embrace it. Don't be like those who, when they heard it and understood it, rejected it and then judgment came upon them and seeing they could not see and hearing they could not hear, Luke 8:10. God is speaking. Jesus is speaking. This is His call to discipleship. If you have ears to hear it, if you can still understand it, then you better embrace it because the day may come when hearing you will not hear.

Prayer

Father, we come to you at the end of this great section of Scripture grateful for the truth that it conveys to us with such clarity and power. We know that this comes from You because this is a holy standard. It is above us and beyond us. It is impossible. The only way we could ever abandon the past, the only way we could ever experience the power to see this through, the only way we could ever be sustained in faithful, privileged service, loyal for a lifetime, is by Your power. It is in the day of Your power that we become willing and able. Help us to know that only when the Spirit of God, through the Word of God, works in us the resolve and the will and the conviction and the repentance and the faith to follow the Lord Jesus Christ in this way can it ever happen. It is not according to us but it's according to Your power. Lord, we have experienced the power of the Spirit of God working in us, causing us to rejoice in an abandonment, in an assessment, in a...in an allegiance to the future, causing us to rejoice that You have done a work in us which is beyond our ability.

We thank You for that work that You've done in us. We pray, oh God, that You would work this work in the lives of others, that You would produce a true repentance and a true faith and a true devotion to Christ that will powerfully surge across all barriers, that will consider everything as loss, waste, manure, as Paul called it, compared to knowing Christ and receiving eternal life. We know You're not asking us to crank this up in our human flesh, but we know we must

be willing, as Your Spirit overpowers us in the direction of Christ. We pray, God, that You would do that in the hearts of those who are here today who have not come to Christ and maybe some who think they have come because they made some superficial commitment. May there be a true work, mighty work of Your Holy Spirit so that people are born of the Spirit. And we thank You in Your Son's name. Amen.

Losing Your Life to Save It

John MacArthur
Mark 8:34-38
9.19.2010

Let's open the Word of God to the eighth chapter of the gospel of Mark, Mark chapter 8. We are working our way through the gospel of Mark, been at it about a year and we're about half-way. We are studying the history of the life and ministry and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, as recorded for us under the direction of the Holy Spirit, by Mark. It is the fast-pace approach to the gospel, the shortest of all the gospels. It has less teaching sessions and sections than any other gospel. It is called, therefore, "The Action Gospel." And that's why we're moving at the rate we are moving.

When we come to chapter 8 verses 34 to 38, we really come to the diamond for which the rest of the gospel is the setting. This is the jewel of the gospel of Mark. If you could only hear one message in the gospel of Mark, this would, perhaps, be the most important one that you could ever hear because it is the pinnacle of our Lord's teaching with regard to inviting sinners to come to Him.

Here in the text before us are the words of our Lord to sinners, inviting them to come to Him for forgiveness and blessing and peace and joy and eternal life. This is our Lord's own invitation.

Those of us who have been in the church for any length of time are used to invitations. They have been a part of the church, at least in America, for many, many years. Perhaps today there will be thousands of invitations given across America in churches to sinners to come to Christ. However, I think I'm safe in saying that few of them will follow the pattern of our Lord's own invitation. Here is the standard. Here is the archetypal invitation. Here is the model for all invitations and one that is not always followed.

Not only do preachers need to understand this invitation, but all believers do because we are all held responsible, aren't we, to be witnesses to Christ, to be evangelists, to declare the gospel, to proclaim it to sinners and to invite them to salvation. You need to know this as well as I do. And so it's such an important portion of Scripture for us. Here is the way to life. Here is the way to forgiveness. Here is the way to heaven. Here is the way to joy and peace. Listen to our Lord's words starting in verse 34.

"And He summoned the crowd with His disciples and said to them, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'"

Now you who have been with us through the years know that this same account is given to us in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew. This same account is given to us in the ninth chapter of Luke. And very similar words are expressed at many different intervals in many different texts in the gospels through the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. To say that is to say this is consistently the Lord's invitation. It doesn't sound perhaps like any invitation you ever heard in a church. This invitation deals a death blow to man-centered, self-centered invitations. This is not an invitation to health, or wealth, or fulfillment, or prosperity, or healing, or a boosted self-image, or trouble-free living. This is an invitation to self-denial, cross bearing, and obedience. But this is the Lord's invitation and this is the one that we must give if we would be faithful.

Just in case you think this might be a little bit isolated, I would remind you of some other portions of our Lord's teaching. For example, in Matthew 10 verse 32, He put it this way. "Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." And then He said

this, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword. What do you mean? I came to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. When somebody becomes a believer, they immediately are alienated from the people in their own household who reject Christ." And so He goes on to say, "Who loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who doesn't take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it. He who loses his life for My sake will find it."

Jesus said the very same thing in Matthew repeatedly, Matthew 10, Matthew 16 and alluded to it elsewhere. He said it in Luke, Luke chapter 9. Verses 23 to 27 is a direct repeat of what we read in Mark. And then at the end of Luke 9, verses 57 to 62, Jesus basically says, "If you say you want to follow Me, but you have any other agenda that is more important immediately than Me, then you can't be My disciple."

Remember a man said, "Oh I want to follow You but I need to go home and get my inheritance." "Oh, I want to follow You but I've got to go bury my father." "I want to follow You but I've got to go negotiate some things of my family so I make sure I have some money while I'm following You."

Jesus said, "Don't do that, don't start to follow and turn back or you're not worthy." He's always talking about the price of following Him. In the twelfth chapter of Luke, and Luke is particularly strong in emphasizing these teaching passages of our Lord with regard to invitations, he says in verse 51 of 12, "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you no, rather division. From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two, and two against three. Two become a believer and the other three don't. Three become believers, and the other two don't. They'll be divided, father against son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." Again it is this emphasis that you pay a

price relationally when you come to Christ.

In the thirteenth chapter, His disciples pose a question, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" Because they can't see the multitudes following Him. And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." This is not easy. Why? You have to say no to self, you have to say no to family, have to say no the things of the world, no to the love of sin. People want the Kingdom, it's attractive. They want forgiveness. They want eternal life. But the price is everything.

That's why later in chapter 14, another time, He said, "Anyone comes to Me and doesn't hate his own father and mother and wife and children, and brothers and sisters and even his own life, he can't be My disciple." He doesn't mean hatred in the sense that despise the people that you love. He simply means that you treat them as if they aren't nearly as significant as coming to Christ, so you're willing to say, "I'll go to Christ, I'll follow Christ, even if it costs me my family." And it might even cost you your life, He said.

And in the twelfth chapter of John, He said the same thing in verse 25, "You better be willing to hate your own life." So coming to Jesus was not easy. Coming to Jesus was not something that you could simply do because you wanted the pluses that Jesus offered. It demanded much more than that. Jesus' invitation was not easy, it was even severe because He threatened those who rejected it. It was hard because the cost was so high... so high.

Well let's go back to Mark and look at this passage which emphasizes this invitation and we'll break it down. The principle is winning by losing, it's a paradoxical principle. So we'll look at the principle and the paradox and then there's a final word about the punishment of those who reject our Lord. This passage is also recorded in Matthew 16:18 to 28, Luke 9:23 to 27. It's so important that it's repeated in all those three gospels.

All right, let's look at the text and the principle is in verse 34. "He summoned the crowd with His disciples and said to them, 'If any one wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.'"

Now you have to understand the moment in which this happens.

Context is so very, very important. The previous passage has been the critical passage to which we have been moving in the gospel of Mark since the very beginning. It is in verse 29 that Peter speaks on behalf of all of the disciples and says, "You are the Messiah, You are the Christ." In fact, the full statement was, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Matthew gives us that full statement. So they have all come to understand Jesus is God in human flesh, He is the promised Messiah. This is the high point. This is euphoria. Their doubts regarding His person have disappeared. The result of two years plus of seeing all His miracles, hearing all His teaching, living with Him 24/7, they now are convinced that He is God in human flesh and is in fact the Messiah. This is the great euphoric moment of divine revelation and clarity.

Now their view of Him as Messiah is that the Messiah is going to come and establish a Kingdom and He's going to save all Israel and He's going to make Israel the crowning nation of the world, the most powerful nation in the world. All the nations will come to Israel. All the nations will be beneath Israel. The Messiah will reign in Jerusalem over Israel and extend that reign over the world. They believe that all the promises to Abraham, all the promises to David, all the promises of the prophets, all of the descriptions of the glorious messianic kingdom given in the prophecies of the Old Testament are now going to come to pass. This is the euphoria for which they have been waiting for two years. And then Jesus says this, "The Son of Man will suffer many things, be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes," that's the Jewish Sanhedrin, "and be killed, and after three days rise again." And verse 32 says He said it plainly. But it was so contrary to everything that they believed and everything they hoped for and everything they expected that Peter speaking on behalf of them said, "No, no, no, Lord, You've got it wrong. That's not the way it's going to be, not that way." And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. Jesus said to him, "Get behind, Me, Satan. You have man's interest in your heart, not God's."

Man is interested only in the glory. Man is interested only in the Kingdom. Man is interested only in the blessing. But God requires the cross, right? God requires the cross. There will be no Kingdom,

there will be no blessing if there is not a sacrifice for sin

So they have gone from the highest high to the lowest low. It was a low when Peter said, "No, no, no, Lord." It was a lower low when Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan." Their view of the messianic kingdom, are you ready for this?, was a satanic one. They were so wrong. There had to be a cross before there would be a crown, there had to be pain before there would be gain, there had to be suffering before there would be glory. They felt the...they could feel, they could smell and taste the nearness of the Kingdom in the euphoric moment when they declared He was the Messiah and they had no room in their little theology for the cross. And so, Jesus says, "I'm going to die." And then He says this, "By the way, if you follow Me, there's a cross for you too...there's a cross for you too. There's no glory without suffering. There's no crown without a cross. And here comes the invitation. "If anyone wishes to come after Me," it's an open invitation, isn't it? If anyone wishes to come after Me? If anyone.

He is saying this to affirm the disciples who already believe in Him, and to affirm the nature of their true faith, and He is saying this is an open invitation to the crowd that's surrounding them. It's a reaffirmation of the original commitment of the disciples to follow Jesus, only to follow Him realizing that it's going to require self-denial and a cross. And for the crowd, this is just a clear invitation of those who have not yet made any commitment of what that commitment requires.

Three responses. Number one, let's look at it, self-denial. You want to come after Me, you do...then if that's the case, you must deny yourself. If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself. What does that mean, what do you mean deny yourself?

Very strong expression in the original Greek in which this was written. This is where it all starts. This is where coming to Christ all begins, okay? For anybody and everyone who comes to Christ, you start here.

What it means is, to disown, to refuse to associate with, or to companion with someone. That's what the verb means. What you are saying is, "I no longer want to associate with the person that I

am. I realize my sinfulness. I realize I cannot earn this. I abandon myself effort. I abandon the works/righteousness system that dominated Judaism and dominates all religion in the world, you can be good enough for God to accept you. I abandon all self-effort. I abandon all self-confidence. But it's more than that. I abandon all self-will. I abandon my own ambitions, my own agenda, my own plans."

Later Peter denied Jesus by saying, "I don't know the man," and that's exactly what the sinner says, I disown myself. I don't want anything to do with that man anymore. The natural, depraved, sinful, fallen, selfish soul in whom dwells no really good thing is abandoned. When you come to Christ, you deny yourself. John even says you hate yourself. You reject all that you are. You see that all of your desires, lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, the pride of life, all your ambitions were all wrapped up in yourself. This is true conversion. This is the foundation of new life, the heart sees in itself only sin, only ugliness and realizes it must abandon itself if there's to be any hope of a relationship to God. Giving up your independence, giving up your trust in self, your confidence in what you are by nature, you depend on Christ alone. You can say with Paul, "For to me to live is Christ." You can say, "I'm crucified with Christ." I no longer live and Christ lives in me," Galatians 2:20.

You not only, when you come to Christ, are embracing the resources that He provides, the gifts that He provides, but you are bringing yourself under His sovereign lordship and saying, "You are the Lord of my life. You're in charge of my life, Your will, Your desires, Your plans, Your purposes, that's what I want in my life." And no one can come on any other basis.

You know, in Philippians chapter 3, Paul gives his testimony... it's recorded there. And he says in that letter, "Look, if you want credentials, religious credentials, I can roll my credentials out like few others." You remember these words? "I was circumcised the eighth day of the nation Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, the noblest...one of the noble tribes, a Hebrew of Hebrews." That means he was a traditional Jew in every sense. "As to the Law, a Pharisee, the most passionate observer of the Law. As to zeal for Judaism, a persecutor of the church, as for righteousness which is in the Law, blameless, I

even toed the line on the Law." But he says, "I thought it was all gain. It all went in the gain column, and then when I saw Christ, I realized it was all loss, it was all nothing and I counted it to be loss in view of the surpassing knowledge of knowing Christ. So I suffered the loss of it all and counted it rubbish."

That's self-denial. Nothing I've achieved is worthy of salvation. Nothing I could do or have done is worthy of forgiveness. I abandon all self-effort and with that I acknowledge Christ as Lord and I turn my life over to Him. His ambition becomes mine. His will becomes mine. His purpose becomes mine."

This is a hard-hitting message that we find at the beginning of our Lord's ministry when He preached that great sermon we call The Sermon on the Mount, starts in Matthew 5. And He opens it by talking to the people in Galilee, and He says to them, "Look, here are the people who go in the Kingdom, the poor in spirit." What does that mean? The people who are bankrupt spiritually. Not the people who think they're good. Not the people who think they're righteous. Not the people who think they're religious. Not the people who think they can achieve salvation by their goodness, their religiosity, their morality, but the people who are bankrupt spiritually. This is the foundation of all salvation. There's a sense of wretchedness.

This is like Luke 18, isn't it? The Publican who comes into the temple to pray, and you have a Pharisee in there who is saying, "O God, I thank You that I'm not like other men. I do this, I tithe, I give, I..." parading his morality and his righteousness before God. And then there's a tax collector who was the outcast in Israel, they were the wretched of the wretched because they bought tax franchises from the Romans who were the occupiers of Israel. And he won't lift his eyes. He's in the same place, he's got his head down, he's pounding his chest saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Claims nothing. I need mercy.

The Pharisee is saying, "All I need is justice, look what I've done." And Jesus said it was the Publican who went home forgiven and justified, not the Pharisee. You have to abandon all of that.

Psalm 34:18 in the Old Testament says, "The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and He saves those who are crushed in spirit." Psalm

51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." It's the spiritually bankrupt people, it's the crushed people, it's the people who had nowhere to turn. It's the people who have reached the end of themselves. The word "poor in spirit" is the word for abject total poverty. Even the Law in the Old Testament was given to demonstrate the wretchedness of our own hearts so that we would, like the Publican, pound on our chests and say, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner, I have no good thing in my flesh to offer. I cannot earn my salvation, nor do I want to control my life. I want to disassociate with the person that I am and I want to become the person that You can make me to be."

You see, you take Christ on His terms, not yours. The proud sinner wants Christ and his pleasure, Christ and his purposes, Christ and his possessions, Christ and his sin. The person who is crushed and bankrupt is so desperate, he wants Christ and will give up everything. Jesus told two little parables in Matthew 13, one about a man who found a pearl of great price, and in order to get it, he sold everything. Another about a man who found a treasure hidden in a field and in order to get the treasure, he sold everything cause the treasure was worth more than everything he had. That's the picture of coming to Christ.

And this becomes a way of life, by the way, for a Christian. It is a way of life. You're not just crushed and broken and humbled at the beginning, you remain that way. In fact, you grow that way. You might look at it like this, as you grow upward like a tree, let's say, in knowledge, you grow up in your knowledge at the same time your roots go down deeper and deeper and deeper into humility. And so the more you know, the deeper you go, the more your knowledge increases, the more correspondingly your humility increases. Growth is downward.

True spiritual growth is downward. The roots of our lives go down. We have a continually lower estimate of ourselves, deepening realization of our unworthiness as we learn more and more about God's glory and holiness and grace.

So, you want to come to Christ, do you? You start with self-denial. The second cross-bearing, verse 34, "If anyone wishes to come

after Me, must deny himself and take up his cross." Luke 14:27 is another occasion where Jesus said this similarly, "Whoever does not come after Me and carry his cross, cannot be My disciple."

What do You mean take up your cross? Bear your cross? Well keep in mind, Jesus had not yet told the disciples He would be crucified. So they don't have that yet in their minds. That comes later. Oh, He told them He's going to suffer and die, but He hasn't told them about His crucifixion yet. So when He talked about a cross, what would they think? When He says to them, "Take up your cross," what would they think?

They would only think of one thing...death by crucifixion. Thirty thousand Jews were crucified by the Romans and others in that land around that period of our Lord's life. They were very, very used to seeing crucified victims and the Romans always put them along the highways for everybody to see. It was a very familiar sight.

There were occasions going back, even before the life of Christ, where the enemies of Israel crucified, for example, eight hundred at one time, on another occasion two thousand Jews at one time were crucified. They knew exactly what it meant when Jesus said you have to take up your cross, because the victims who were going to be crucified had to drag the cross to the place of their own execution. This is suffering beyond all description, suffering beyond all human compassion.

What was Jesus saying? Well, if you want to follow Me, you're going to have to follow My reproach. I'm headed toward death. And frankly, so are you. And don't we know that? All but one really, of the Twelve, were martyred because they wouldn't deny the faith, Peter himself being crucified upside down. John died in exile on an island in the Mediterranean.

What He's saying to them is, "Look, just how valuable is this gift I'm offering you of salvation? Is it valuable enough that you would give up everything even to death? This is a willingness to endure persecution. The cross here is kind of a metaphor for suffering. Not every believer who comes to Christ will die, but they're suffering along the way, rejection by family, by relatives, by the people we work with, and people we know, people we care about.

There is a serious hostility toward those who are faithful Christians, godly Christians living in the world because they are a rebuke to the world. If you come to Me, He is saying, you will endure persecution and certainly they did. You will endure rejection, reproach and shame. And in Matthew's account, he even adds that it would occur daily...daily. Paul said that, 1 Corinthians 15:31, "I die daily. Every day in my life I face death for the cause of the gospel." Yeah, they were very familiar with crucifixion, they knew exactly what they were saying. This is going to cost you everything. This is not yet going to be glory. This is not yet going to be the Kingdom. This is not going to be wealth and prosperity which will come one day in the glorious Kingdom of Christ when He returns. But for now, this is about suffering. We're going to be in a hostile world and it's still going on, folks, isn't it? Because Christ has not yet come back to establish the Kingdom and the glory.

So they're being told to say no to self, first, and then no to safety, second, willing to pay any price because salvation is so valuable. Is it a pearl of great price? Would you sell everything to buy it? Is it the treasure hidden in the field? Would you sell everything to purchase it? Is it so valuable that you would give up everything, even your comfort, even perhaps your relationships in many cases temporarily because you would be the instrument that would lead someone else to Christ, and then harmony and peace comes back into those relationships? But just exactly how valuable is this?

See, the gospel is never offered to people on the basis that why don't you take this because you get everything you want? It is offered to people on this basis, does this offer have enough value to you that you would give up everything for it? And if it doesn't? Then you don't understand it. You're caught up in the temporal passing world and have no sense of that which is everlasting. That's what He's saying. True conversion views Christ and the gospel and salvation and heaven so precious that no personal sacrifice is too much. People lay down their lives all the time for country, don't they? People lay down their lives for causes, is this a worthy one? Is this not the most worthy one? And should it come to that, would you not rejoice in what you would receive like Stephen? Would you not rejoice to fall

into the crushing stones one day as your own life was taken to see Jesus standing on the right hand of God and to be welcomed into the glories of eternal heaven? How valuable is this?

This is not about what you get or don't get in this world. We're talking here about the kind of love for Christ, the kind of desire for a gift from Him that literally overpowers the instincts of self-preservation. One who is only content with what he wants now, here and now, sells eternity and buys time. And your life is a vapor that appears for a little time, the Bible says, and vanishes away. It's like steam off a hot cup of coffee.

And by the way, when you face that moment, 1 Peter 4:12 to 14 says He'll give you grace. You'll receive grace for that moment. The greatest testimonies of Christians through the centuries have been recorded when they face death. Have you read Foxes Book of Martyrs? That great litany of profound testimonies of those who have died giving glory to Christ and feeling the grace that comes to the one who stands in the place of the martyr. It goes on today. People are dying today for the cause of Christ around the world, more today than perhaps at any time in the past, in countries where they pay with their lives. But theirs is a grace that is kept for that hour and like Stephen, they probably say, "Lord, don't hold this against the killers as they look to the fellowship of Christ that awaits them."

So, Christ bearing His cross leads all His followers bearing their crosses through suffering, a great procession through suffering, out the other side into eternal glory. This is a way of life for us. We will be faithful to the truth of Christ no matter what the cost. Look, we're living in the best of all circumstances when it comes to persecution, aren't we? Nobody is trying to kill us because of our faith in Christ. That is a very...a very great blessing. But I think we all understand what it means to be alienated and persecuted among the people that don't understand why we've committed ourselves to Christ. I haven't yet suffered unto blood, to borrow the words of Hebrews, but should it come, I would know the grace of Christ just like Stephen did and so would you. But whatever, life or death, whether I live or whether I die, Paul said, I'm the Lord's. Come life, come death, come more work, eternal rest, whatever God wants. I

will tell you, I will rest in whatever He gives, whatever He requires because eternal life is worth any price, right? That's the message Jesus is giving. It's not about what you get in this world, it's about what you get in the next world.

So, self-denial, cross-bearing, loyal obedience would be the third one, and follow Me...follow Me. *Akoloutheo* is the Greek verb used here in the original text, it means let him be following Me, it's continual. So you deny yourself, take up your cross and you continue following Me. What does it mean?

Well the word actually means to imitate...to imitate. You imitate Christ. If you say you abide in Christ, 1 John 2:6 says, you ought to walk the way He walked. You want to be like Christ. Christ went to the cross because He saw the glory beyond the cross. In fact, He even called the cross a kind of joy path, He said, "The joy that is set before Me goes through the cross." Obedience then becomes the *sine qua non* of discipleship. Our lives are marked by obedience. We obey the Word of God. We obey it with joy. We obey it with love. We obey it with gratitude. We obey it gladly. If you continue in My Word, John 8 says, you're My real disciple, meaning to obey. You are My friends, Jesus said in John 15, if you do whatever I command you. We're not just hearers of the Word, we're...what?...James 1...doers of the Word. We don't build our house on shifting sand like those who hear and nothing more. We build our houses on a rock because we hear and obey the words of Jesus in Matthew 7. Our life pattern is denial of self, willingness to suffer whatever it is and loyal obedience.

Kind of simple really. If you're going to go on a trip, the first thing you do is say good bye. The second thing you do is carry your baggage. Third thing you do is proceed on your journey. That's all He's saying. Say goodbye to self, pick up your cross, let's go. Very simple.

Well that's the principle, now here's the paradox. Verse 35, the paradox, "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it." If you want to hang on to it, keep control of it, live it your way, hold your sin, cherish your sin, you can do that. You can save your life temporarily and you will lose it eternally. That's hell. "But whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's," we're not talking here about philanthropy, folks. We're not talking about giving up your life for

the poor. We're not talking about giving up your life for some noble cause. And there are a lot of noble causes for which people give up their lives. We're not talking about that. We're not talking about dying as a soldier. We're not talking about dying as a hero, trying to rescue people, we're not talking about any of those kinds of noble, human things. But when you will give up your life, lose your life, here it comes, "For My sake and the gospel's," that's what we're talking about. In the cause of Christ, no other cause is in view here. You can die rescuing people out of the towers on 9-11 and that will not talk you to heaven. It's a noble act. You can die feeding the masses of starving people in India, but it will not take you to heaven. You can die working with AIDS patients by contracting AIDS yourself and die in a noble effort to help folks. That will not take you to heaven. It is only when you lose your life, give it up, yield it up for Christ and the gospel that you save it. Such willingness, such humble self-sacrificing willingness comes because you understand the desperation of your condition and you understand the massive glory of the gift of salvation.

So, verse 36, a question is posed. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? Did he make a good deal? Was that a good bargain? Was that a really astute decision? I'll tell you what I'm going to do, I'm going to live life any way I want here so I can spend forever in hell and forfeit heaven. Does that make sense? What good did it do?

Remember the man about whom Jesus spoke, the man who kept building bigger barns and bigger barns and bigger barns because he had more stuff, and more stuff? And he said, "Okay, soul, take your ease. Eat, drink and...what?...be merry and boom comes the divine voice, "Tonight you die." Then what? Then what? What are you going to profit if you gain the whole world? That's hyperbole, nobody can gain the whole world...nobody. But even if you could gain the whole thing, actually who would want it? But even if you could gain the whole thing, what would it matter if you lost your eternal soul? It is the common belief of man that he is the happiest when he has the most stuff? The most that the world has to offer and what a delusion that is, if he forfeits his soul? Because, verse 37, what are you

going to give in exchange for your soul? How you going to buy back your soul? You think you can...if you owned the whole world, could you pay that price for your soul? If you had the whole world, all the money in the world, all the resources in the world, all the power in the world, with it could you buy your soul? No. What are you going to give in exchange for your soul? What is of equivalent value to your soul?

You want to look at this the other way? Your soul is worth more than everything in this world because this world will burn up. You will live forever. You say, "I don't need...I even rent my house, I don't own any of it. I lease my car, I don't own anything." You, my dear friend, are more valuable than everything material in this world. There is no price for your soul except the provision of Jesus Christ on the cross. He paid an infinite price because of an infinite value attached to you. That's the gift of salvation.

So the principle, we saw that, take up your cross, having denied yourself, follow Me. The paradox, it's winning by losing. The parousia, or the punishment, is the last point in verse 38. "Whoever... this is the warning part...whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

First of all, there is a coming judgment, right? That's pretty clear. There's a coming judgment. In 2 Thessalonians 1 it says that Christ will come from heaven with His holy angels in flaming fire to take retribution on those who do not obey the gospel. That's what this is talking about. This is a warning. This is the invitation. The invitation...I'm talking, this is a strong invitation, isn't it? This is a severe invitation because judgment is attached to it. This is a hard invitation because it requires total abandonment. Self-denial, cross bearing, loyal obedience, giving up your life to save it, and if you choose not to do it because you want to hang on to your own life and you're ashamed of Christ, and ashamed to identify with His words, His teaching, and you want to fully embrace your place in the middle of this adulterous and sinful generation, if that's where you want to be, the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when He

comes at His Second Coming in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. You take your place with the perishing world, with the doomed rejecters to whom the gospel is a shameful thing, to whom Christ is a shameful person, you will face divine judgment. When Christ comes, He comes to judge the world. That's what it says.

This is a powerful verse. I'm not sure that those guys that day were really ready to hear this cause He's not really talking about what they want to hear. They don't want to hear that He's going to die. They don't want to hear they're going to die. They don't want to hear that there's going to be judgment. They wanted salvation, glory, the Kingdom, blessing. But for those who will not embrace Christ and will not embrace the gospel, who hold on to this adulterous and sinful generation, there will only be judgment in the day when the Son of Man comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. And by the way, He'll say a lot more about that later when He gets to Jerusalem in the final week of His life and He preaches that great sermon on His Second Coming, He fills in the details. And Matthew adds that He will repay every man. There's a judgment day coming.

Well the question is a simple one, how valuable do you think your soul is? It was valuable to God so that He sent His Son to provide the purchase price, namely His own death, to buy your eternal soul. He was able to purchase souls that couldn't be purchased if you owned the whole planet and everything in it.

What's your soul worth? It will live forever, you consciously will live forever, you're going to live in hell forever in punishment, or in heaven forever in joy. How do you redeem your soul? By coming to Christ, denying yourself, taking up your cross, suffering as He requires for the glory that will be revealed in the future.

Father, we thank You for the wonderful time we've had this morning. We are greatly, profoundly, overwhelmingly blessed to live every day in Your presence for You live in us. Scripture says when we are believers, Your Holy Spirit takes up residence inside of us and You produce in us love, peace, joy, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility, self-discipline. You make us worshipers, You make us witnesses, You make us servants. Life is rich and blessed and full and this is only a foretaste, just a preview of the coming attractions of heaven.

Thank You, thank You for Your kindness to us, Your mercy to us as unworthy sinners. That's why we're here. That's why we've sung with all our hearts and our voices to You because this is a way for us to express our love. And so is our obedience and so is our faithfulness. Sustain us in those things for Your glory, we pray. Amen.

~ 10 ~

Christlikeness: The Goal of Discipleship

John MacArthur
Matthew 10:24-25
7.5.1981

Take your Bible, if you will, and look with me at the tenth chapter of Matthew. It is our unique and long awaited privilege to enter into an examination of Matthew chapter 10 verses 24 to 42. And I think it would be fitting if I read that section to you, although this morning I'm going to do nothing more than introduce it, I think it would be well to have it in mind.

Beginning at verse 24 of Matthew 10, our Lord instructing the disciples says:

The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hidden that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that proclaim upon the housetops. And fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Fear not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men,

him will I confess also before My Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father who is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth, I am not come to send peace but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it. He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no way lose his reward.

I believe that this section of Scripture is the most crucial and the most definitive and the most monumental passage ever uttered by our Lord on the subject of discipleship. This, in fact, is the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ on the matter of discipleship. What its cost is, and what it involves. And consequently it demands our great attention.

Now the matter of discipleship is of major emphasis here at Grace Church. We are absolutely and totally convinced that the church has a single simplified task as stated by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 28 when He said, "Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age." Go into all the world and make disciples. In Matthew chapter 10 our Lord is making disciples.

He is building up disciples. The word disciple is *mathetes*. it means

learner. He has the group of twelve and He is building them to maturity to send them out to reproduce and advance the Kingdom.

And that is the same process He has called us to be engaged in...the process of making disciples. This means more than leading people to Jesus Christ. That is not the end of our commission, that is the beginning. I never ever ascend the steps to speak in this pulpit with any other thought in my mind than build up the saints of God. To put it in the terms of Ephesians, "To perfect the saints for the work of the ministry." I believe that is the perspective of the teacher. We are to reproduce mature disciples who in turn can reproduce themselves. We are not interested in short circuiting that, we are not interested in short cutting that, we are not interested in minimizing that, we are interested only in the fulfillment of the goal of producing mature and reproductive disciples.

All of the teaching and preaching, all of the personal counseling, all of the extensive ministry that goes on here and through our tapes and radio and books and everything else we do, is to take people to the point of maturity in the faith. Now that's what our Lord was after. He wanted people who would come and learn of Him. He even said that. "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me." Be discipled by Me. And I really believe that that is the essence of what conversion is. Conversion is identifying yourself as one willing to learn from Jesus Christ all things whatsoever He has commanded.

And the implication of such learning is obedience. When you become a Christian, in effect, you are saying I choose to be a learner of the Lord Jesus Christ and to submit to such as He instructs. That's the stuff of genuine conversion. It isn't just meeting Jesus and ending it there. It is affirming His Lordship, and His role as teacher, and your role as pupil....to be brought to maturity.

Now that was the Lord's task with the twelve. That was precisely the task of the twelve with the generation they were to reach. You see it, I think, most clearly in the Apostle Paul whose great desire was to bring the saints to maturity. Now that's my task...the task of every Christian preacher, teacher, pastor, leader. We all have the responsibility to teach, to disciple....as you do as well in the sphere of your own ministry.

But let me see if I can't talk about that for just a moment in a context that will help us as we approach this passage. I know what my commitment is. I know what my calling is. I know God has called me to teach the Word...the preach the Word...to build the saints to maturity. I know that. I know that's the mandate that I have from God and I am held accountable to Him to fulfill that as much as is in me possible in the power of the Spirit of God. I know my commitment. And my commitment is to do that although I sometimes struggle with my weakness and ignorance and the flesh, and other things, to get through to the accomplishing of that end, I know what the task is and I know that I'm committed to that task. But what I don't know is whether you're committed to the task of learning and that's the issue. The Lord faced that same thing. He knew what His task was... He knew what the truth was....and He knew how to communicate the truth but what He was looking for was open hearts to receive it... the ready mind, the ready heart.

Now I know some of you enough to know that you are that ready mind. You are that ready heart. You want to receive the truth of God and you want having received it to implement it.

And you want your life to be being transformed. Others of you, I know, and I'm...maybe I don't know you well enough to know that because I'm not sure where you are. Some of you I don't know at all, so I don't know where you are. But the real issue in the church is that the leadership is committed to doing what the Bible says to do and what we have to feel is that you're committed to receiving it when we give it. It's like a radio program, it's one thing to broadcast, it's something else to tune in and listen. It doesn't do us a bit of good to preach the message unless somebody is on our channel.

You know, when the radio goes out it goes out all over Los Angeles and I think 175 other cities in America now, and whether they know it or not my voice is all over the place but only a few people tune in. And that's how it is, I think, in a sense, with the church. There's a lot of broadcasting going on but maybe not enough receiving. And I believe that that may be because we've never really understood the stuff of which discipleship is made and going into the Christian faith we never really understood it.

When Jesus called disciples to Himself, He really carefully instructed them in the matters of what they would be facing. And consequently it kept out those half hearted people who weren't willing to make the commitment. Jesus did the same thing when He talked about a narrow gate and a narrow way. He kept out the people that weren't willing to make the commitment, to pay the price. And the challenge of the Lord and the challenge of the Apostles, and the challenge of the ministers of today is to find a willing hearted people...to find an open hearted people...to find a responsive group who will say We will obey all things whatsoever the Lord has commanded us. We are willing and eager and anxious no matter what the price.

Now that is the stuff of true discipleship. That is how it is to be when you sign up to be a follower of Jesus Christ. And I think, more than any passage we have studied, this passage is going to force you to face that reality. The Lord really draws discipleship down to very clear issues. And you and I as we go through this section, and we're not going to rush through it, we'll cover a little today and some more next time and then finish it out later. But I want us to go patiently because this is such critical truth. If you've ever wondered about dedication and...and we've all gone to churches, you know, where somebody gave an altar call and people went down and they dedicated and rededicated their lives, and we've all gone to camps, or most of us have, and we've seen dedication services and we've read about people who were consecrated and committed and recommitted and reconsecrated, and we've even gone through some of that catharsis of the cleansing work o. the Spirit through the Word, and we've made new resolutions and some of them we followed up on and some of them we would find even difficult to remember. And if you've ever wondered what the real stuff of commitment is, and where the bottom line of consecration comes, and what it really means to be set apart or sanctified, I think you'll find the answer right here. In fact, this text is so filled with rich truth regarding discipleship that it has been the focus of Christians through the centuries and becomes the key point in learning Jesus' perspective on dedication to Himself. If you're just kind of floating along, if you

haven't really made the commitment the way it ought to be made, you're going to be forced against the wall in this passage.

I heard on the news this week about a lady whose claimed to be a Christian for several years, and gone around and given her testimony for the Lord, has just done a spread for playboy magazine.

If that kind of Christianity is what you're used to you're really going to get it in the neck in Matthew chapter 10. Because what our Lord calls us to here is infinitely something apart from that.

Now the truths in this passage, and I'm going to keep giving you some thoughts on it before we hit it, but the truths in this passage, now listen carefully to what I say here because I think it's important, are so essential because they are among the favorite teachings of Jesus. You say Well, how do you know that? Because I know a little bit about what it is to be a teacher, and let me tell you how it is. As one who teaches the Word of God I have found that there are certain key truths that you must deal with, basic to salvation and basic to discipleship, basic to spiritual growth. And what happens to a teacher is as he studies the Word of God for preparing to teach he finds certain concise and effective ways to communicate those basic essentials. Like, if you point me in the middle of the night and ask me how to be saved, I'll pop out of bed and basically give you number 4gc in my mental catalog. And I'll fire out salvation as I perceive it, spoken as clearly as I can speak it to make it understandable. And I have found certain ways to express that. And so as many times as I might travel in different places, and speak to that issue, I will find myself using some of the same terminology because as a teacher I have learned how to express that in a way that is clear, hopefully, and I've maintained that expression.

Now when it comes to basics of spiritual life, I'll go around this country and I'll be asked to speak on a certain theme and invariably when that theme intersects with principles of spiritual life, principles of discipleship, I find myself going back to the same passages, back to the same phrases, the same concepts, and often the same illustrations because they so firmly in my mind make the point and so clearly elucidate in various circumstances what people need to understand. In other words, there is a deposit of basic information that

can be communicated effectively in a simple way. And any teacher learns how to do that effectively and goes back to that in all different circumstances.

Now that is precisely what our Lord does in this passage. Now listen carefully, there have been critics who have approached Matthew 10 and they have said Matthew didn't really record what Jesus said. Matthew picked stuff from all over the place and put it together as if Jesus said it. He took a little of what He said over here, and a little of what He said over here, and a little over here and a little over here...and they call this redaction criticism. That Matthew is not a writer recording what Jesus actually said to His disciples, he's an editor and he's pulling it from all over everywhere and sticking it together and stuffing it in this chapter as if it were one speech by our Lord.

Now the basic error of that view is that it gives no place to repetition in the life of the teacher. The other answer to this passage is of course what Jesus says appears here and there all through the gospels. You'll find almost all of these principles somewhere else but that does not mean that Jesus only said things one time in one place to one people for one purpose. What it shows us is that like any other teacher He had truth which He drew out in all different places, all different circumstances for all different unique place and time situations and with nuances of variation, communicated the same basic stuff.

Now if you accept the redaction critic's view, first of all you've destroyed the integrity of Matthew, then you've played with the integrity of Jesus and you've, thirdly, denied the fact that a teacher has the right to repeat himself and that you can never do for the Bible itself says we learn line upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, and precept upon precept. The Lord here is giving us, as He gave the twelve, a body of His favorite teaching on the matter of discipleship. And since discipleship is a matter that followed Him all through His life and which He had to deal with multiples of people in different situations, He repeats these truths over and over, sometimes changing the terms, the phrases and the point that He's making but yet using some of the same concepts and the same

words to express it... So you will find, and this is the point you need to get, that from Matthew 10 on, if you get this chapter, you are going to intersect with these same thoughts again and again as you read the rest of Matthew into Mark, into Luke, and although the terms are somewhat different you'll find the same principles in John also. Don't deny the Lord that privilege. This is some of His very favorite truth.

I'll even go a step further. I think if the Lord was in panorama City today and I said to Him "Would You preach this morning?" And I told Him that you all were already saved, for the most part, and that I had spent some time trying to communicate to you and so had many other teachers, and that you'd been brought along and were really pretty ready to go out and change the world, I wouldn't be a bit surprised to hear Him tell you to open to Matthew 10. Because, I think this instruction is so near and dear to His heart. And that's why it's repeated so many times. And that's why you must learn it and not just hear it but respond to it.

When you became a Christian, beloved, you did not just buy fire insurance, you did not just jump down the escape hatch from hell, you affirmed the Lordship of Christ and that means that you affirmed a response of obedience. You said "You are the teacher, I am the learner. And you will learn all things whatsoever He has commanded you. And if you came in on any other terms, it's questionable whether you're in at all.

Now, the people who have responded to the truths of Matthew 10:24 to 42 have been the kind of people who change the world. We're talking about total dedication, total commitment, the real stuff, nothing held back. And those are the kinds of people who in deep self examination came to a consecration and a dedication level that set them a cut above everybody else....and made them the kind that God could use to change the course of history.

We think of Florence Nightengale, at 30 years of age she wrote this in her diary: "I am thirty years of age, the age at which Christ began His mission. Now, no more childish things, no more vain things." She wrote that on her thirtieth birthday. Years later, near the end of her illustrious and heroic life, she was asked for the secret of

her life. And this is what she said: I can only give one explanation, that is this I have kept nothing back from God." Kept nothing back, that's what the Lord is talking about here.

One night Dr. Howard A. Kelly graduated from medical college. You might know him for his great work at John's Hopkins as a world famed surgeon and gynecologist. The night that he graduated from medical college he wrote this in his diary: "Today I dedicate myself, my time, my capabilities, my ambition, everything to Him. Blessed Lord, sanctify me to Thy uses, give me no worldly success which may not lead me nearer to my Saviour." That remarkable man could tell many stories of what it means to be dedicated. I remember reading one. He was traveling in the midwest and through some circumstances needed a drink of water and stopped at a house. Knocked at the door and asked if they could provide him a drink. That drink was provided for him. He remembered the name of the young girl who had given him the drink, though she didn't know who he was. Years later that same young girl grew up and was stricken with a very serious disease and had to come to John's Hopkins for a series of surgeries. As it turned out, Dr. Kelly was her surgeon. After all of the care that had to be given to her, the bill was in excess of 750 thousand dollars. There was no insurance to cover it. She was fearful until she received a bill that said, paid in full, by a glass of water. Remarkable man.

Jim Elliot, the Auca Indian martyr wrote in his diary this: "God, I pray Thee, light these idle sticks of my life that I may burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life but a full one like You Lord Jesus." That's exactly what he got. In the very flower of his youth a native threw a spear right through him.

It's this kind of dedication that we're talking about. This is to put it in a contemporary mode so you don't think it's just something way back when. If you know anything about revival and the history of revival in our own country, you've heard the name Jonathan Edwards....great preacher. God used him mightily. There was a reason. The reason was he was willing to pay the price. The reason was he counted the cost. The reason was he gave everything.

He became that full fledged disciple. He was the one with the

open heart who wanted nothing other than what God was wanting to give him. And he wrote this, and this was the changing point in his life: "I claim no right to myself. no right to this understanding, this will, these affections that are in me. Neither do I have any right to this body or its members, no right to this tongue, to these hands, feet, ears or eyes. I have given myself clear away and not retained anything of my own. I have been to God this morning and told Him I have given myself wholly to Him, I have given every power so that for the future I claim no right to myself in any respect. I've expressly promised Him, for by His grace I will not fail. I take Him as my whole portion and felicity looking upon nothing else as any part of my happiness. His law is the constant rule of my obedience. I will fight with all my might against the world, the flesh and the devil to the end of my life.

I will adhere to the faith of the gospel however hazardous and difficult the profession and practice of it may be. I pray, God, for the sake of others to look on this as self dedication. Henceforth, I am not to act in any respect as my own, I shall act as my own if I ever make use of any of my powers to do anything that is not to the glory of God. Or, to fail to make the glorifying of Him my whole and entire business. If I murmur in the least at affliction, if I am in any way uncharitable, if I revenge my own case. if I do anything purely to please myself or omit anything because it's a great denial, if I trust to myself. if I take any praise for any good which Christ does by me, or if I am in any way proud, I shall act as my own and not God's. But I purpose to be absolutely His."

Now that's consecration. And God used that man beyond his imagination. Now, we're called to that kind of commitment in this chapter. And I am just kind of forewarning you that that's what you're going to face in this chapter. And as we go through it every time you're going to be sort of put to the wall to evaluate and self examine your commitment level.

Now, let's look at the passage. And we'll examine the first two verses this morning. Jesus has named the twelve. Going through the gospel of Matthew now, we have seen that Matthew is presenting the King. He's presented the ancestry of the King. He's presented

the arrival of the King, the anticipation of the King and the prophecies...the announcer of the King, John the Baptist, His herald.

He's presented the axioms of the King, or His principles in the Sermon on the Mount. The acts of the King, if you will, His miracles and so forth, and now we're meeting the agents of the King, His ambassadors, the twelve, the ones He sends out. And in verse i through 4 of chapter 10 we met the twelve.

Then in verses 5 through 15 He gave them instruction for their ministry. And then in verse 18 to 25 He told them how the world would react. So, He names them, instructs them, and then lets them know what it's going to be like when they get out there. Now remember this because it's so very important to rightly interpret the section, the priority focus initially in the chapter is on the twelve. That's where the basic focus comes, on the twelve. But as you go through the chapter you can see clearly that it extends beyond them. In fact, in verse 25 it talks about the people who minister till the son of man returns, the second coming. So, you start out with the twelve, and the Lord telescopes what He teaches to encompass all who ever follow Him.

You also will note that it begins with a priority focus on a short term, several week ministry that the twelve are going to be engaged in as they go out to get experience for their ultimate sending after the resurrection. But though it initially focuses on that brief several week ministry it also telescopes to encompass every mission throughout all time that anyone who represents Christ will ever take. So, that the principles begin with a very limited focus and they telescope to a large and wide horizon.

We see first the twelve and then we see all those who follow Christ. First, their initial mission, and then we see their later mission after the Spirit empowers them. And then we see the mission of all who ever serve Christ as we flow through this marvelous chapter.

And so we see the reaching to the broadest possible limit of all servants in all times on all missions, there are principles of importance.

Now, as we've approached verse 23 we have covered everything till the second coming, till the son of man comes. So, we've picked

up all those who serve the Lord through all periods on all mission-fields until the Lord comes. Now having given us that wide scope in verse 28, watch carefully. the Lord maintains that widest possible scope for the instruction of verses 24 and following. So that now He has taken us to that wide level, encompassing all of time until Jesus comes and in that context He talks about every disciple He'll ever have throughout all of that period and gives the definition of their discipleship from verse 24 to 42. The scope is broad now and the principles are for all time. The Lord then closes this discourse with general teaching, referring to all disciples in all missions through all times. And therefore, I've entitled this section *The Hallmarks of Discipleship*. And it is as much for us as it was for the twelve, as it was for Paul, as it was for the people they disciplined, as it was for the Florence Nightengales and the Jonathan Edwards and whoever else responded to these truths.

Now just to let you know that this is indeed a general statement, notice verse 24 the term "The disciple," and really what He is saying is any disciple. The twelve have been named as such. The twelve have been called Apostles since verse 2. They're trained and ready to be sent. But now He uses the word disciple. He backs off from Apostle and He emphasizes the learning process and He broadens to encompass any disciple. Then He also uses in verse 1 and 2, the word servant, and again a very general word. The servant...whatever servant...anyone who serves Me.

Further, you'll notice there is a word, *whosoever*, in verse 22. *Whosoever* therefore, and verse 35, *whosoever* is used again. And it's also used one other time. Three times it says *whosoever*. Nine times it says, *He that*..and that can be anybody. *He that* does this, or *be that* does that, so the terms fit the general character of this particular portion. We are at the widest possible horizon, encompassing all of those who name the name of Jesus Christ who are disciples and servants, and *whosoever*s, and *he that*'s. I just want you to see the wide focus because it's important for your understanding.

Now our Lord is going to say this for those people who truly want to come and be My disciple, here's what I ask. That's it. This is what I require. This is the stuff of real discipleship.

And by the way, again we must note how honest Jesus is...right up front. He doesn't hold back anything. He tells them the cost. You don't do anyone a favor by trying to get them to accept Christ without letting them know what is really involved in such acceptance.

That's how we get so many false believers. If they knew the truth they wouldn't come. We know that because in John 8 it says, "Many disciples were following Him," and then He started saying, "You have to eat My flesh and drink My blood. In other words, you've got to be involved in My dying and My death and at that point it says, "And many of His disciples walked no more with Him." I mean, that was more than they were ready to handle. And then you have the fellow that comes to Him and says, "I'll follow You wherever You go." And He says, "Well, note this, will you? Foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but I don't even have a place to lay My head." And the guy split. No, that isn't what I'm after. I want a little comfort with my ministry.

And the fellow who came and said, "I'll follow You wherever You go but first I want to go bury my father." And what he meant was my father's not even dead, I want to wait until he dies and get my inheritance. And Jesus said "You'd better let the dead bury their dead. And the implication of the text again is the guy turned around and walked away. He wasn't interested.

And the other fellow came and said, "Well, I'd like to follow You but I want to go say goodbye to my mommy, and my daddy. Too tied to the family. Jesus turned His back on him too.

You see, He was very up front, it will cost you your family, fella, it will cost you your inheritance and it will cost you your comfort and those are the terms. And they didn't want them. We don't do anybody any favors by introducing them to Christ and to His Lordship and introducing Him as the teacher, and then saying, "There's no price to pay," because there is. The way is narrow and the gate is narrow as well. And that's the way the Lord always presents it.

Now, the honesty of Jesus in verses 18 to 28 demands the section in verses 24 to 42. It's very important to note that.

You know, Jesus' messages are so clear and logical, I guess that's why I get so upset at the redaction critics who say, "Well, this doesn't

make sense, it's all hodge podged together, therefore Matthew must be an editor who picked it out of the air everywhere."

They do the same thing on the Sermon on the Mount. They take the Sermon on the Mount and they say, "Well, Matthew took a little of this and a little of that and a little of that, like he was some kind of a cook, you know, making hash. And he just threw it all and stirred it up and it all came out." And, "Yeah, Jesus said it somewhere or sometime," and they miss the flow of the whole thing which is the genius of it. Listen, He tells them in 5 to 15 here's how to minister. He tells them in 10 to 28, here's what will happen. And having told them here's what will happen, He says to them in 24 to 42, are you willing to pay the price? That's it. It's absolutely logical. I think the reason most redaction critics don't know that is because they don't know God so their eyes are blinded, because the flow is so obvious.

Now the whole thing begins in verse 24, let's look at it. Now here's His general teaching on discipleship, and as I said, it's among His favorite truths to teach. The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the servant above his lord. Now, stop there for a minute.

That's the basic premise. The disciples are going to be saying to themselves Man, we're going to be sheep among wolves, verse 18.

Verse 17, we're going to go and get scourged in the synagogue.

Verse 18, we're going to be dragged before pagan courts. Verse 21, Jesus says our own family is going to put us to death. Verse 22, we're going to be hated by all kinds of people for His sake. We're going to have to endure. Verse 22, we're going to be persecuted all over the country so we have to keep running from city to city. And they're going to be saying, "Well, what is this kind of an offer?"

And the Lord comes back and says, "The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the servant above his lord. Why should you expect to get any different treatment than I received?" Did you hear that?

Now it's going to get very direct as He goes through this, very straight forward. The statement is axiomatic. And Jesus uses it again in other places. The disciple is not above his teacher. I mean, that's axiomatic, you don't have to prove that. If I'm your teacher, and you sit under Me then you're only going to learn what I tell you. And you've taken the role under Me. So the disciple is not above

his teacher. He by very definition and affirmation and acquiescence takes the place underneath his teacher by his own volition. But even where his volition is not involved He uses another metaphor, the servant is above his lord?

No. The lord is above the servant. The first case we assume the disciple chooses his teacher, the second case the lord buys the servant.

But in either case, there is the role of subservience, we are under Him. The disciple is a learner. The teacher is the one who knows. The learner doesn't know. The one who doesn't know isn't above the one who knows. The lord is the master, the slave is the slave, *doulos*. And by very definition he is the one who does what the master tells him. So, the Lord is simply saying this The first basic principle of discipleship is that you submit yourselves to Me. Your volition can be seen in the disciple-teacher motif. My sovereignty is manifest in the Lord and servant motif. And there you have the duality of the salvation doctrine.

We choose to be a disciple to learn at the feet of Jesus but He chooses us as His servant, sovereignly. But in either case it is axiomatic that we are submissive.

Now that's how it is going in. When you become a Christian and you affirm that you will follow Jesus Christ. It is axiomatic that you are saying, "I submit to Your instruction. I submit to Your commands. I submit to the truth You will teach me, the wisdom. I submit to those orders You will give me to carry them out." That's basic.

Now, there is both a positive and a negative in this. Let me talk about the positive for a minute. The disciple is not above his teacher. Jesus also uses that phrase in Luke 9:40 and it was a favorite phrase of His and He says it this way, listen now, "A disciple is not above his teacher," then He says this, "but everyone after he has been fully trained will be like his teacher."

Did you get that? So what is the first perspective that a pupil has toward his teacher? That ultimately some day he will be...what?...like his teacher. What does it mean to be a disciple then? It means to pursue being like...whom? Christ, very basic, that is the very basic element of discipleship. From the positive side in Luke 8:40 the Lord

is simply saying, when you're fully trained you're going to be like your teacher. And that's true discipleship, you are a learner learning to be like Christ. You are a learner growing toward Christ likeness. First John 2:8 sums it up: "He that saith he abides in Him ought so to walk even as He walked." If you go around saying you abide in Christ and Christ is your master, and you are His student, He is your teacher and you are His pupil. then you ought to manifest His life.

Now this is the goal of all discipleship as stated clearly in the great commission, "Go into all the world and make disciples."

What does that involve? Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. In other words, a disciple is one who knows the Word and obeys the Word.

You have the same thing in Colossians 3:12: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you...what?...richly."richly. We are to be dominated by the word of Christ so that we become like Him. He is the teacher who teaches and teaches and feeds and feeds. In fact, you can get a hint at it if you look at verse 27. He says: "What I tell you in darkness speak in light." And that little phrase is beautiful. What He says effectively is what I've been whispering in your ears is what you're going to proclaim. In other words, you have no message but what I give you. You have no truth but what I tell you.

Now, we are to learn then that a disciple is to be like his teacher in the positive sense. Now stay with me, one more thought on this one. The goal of the Christian life then is an ascending toward Christ-likeness. We know that's the goal because what happens, according to 1 John 3, the moment we are glorified in heaven? It says we shall be like Him for we shall...what?...see Him as He is.

That's the goal. And although it isn't fully consummated until then we know that must be the goal because that's what happens when we go there. So all the way along in life we are going toward Christ's likeness.

Now, what is going to be the very obvious result of that?

If you and I move to be more like Christ then the world will treat us the way it treated Him. Right? That's what He's saying. So, look at the negative side and the negative side is really the strength of the context here. I drew the positive from another passage. The nega-

tive is in the context. He's simply saying the disciple is not above his teacher, and the servant is not above his lord in the sense of persecution. In other words, you don't expect to have it any different than I do, do you? I mean, if they've treated Me the way they've treated Me, why should they treat you any different? Now listen to me, and the more like Me you are the more they'll treat you like they've treated Me.

You can kind of gauge your own Christian life that way, can't you? The more like Christ you are the more the world will treat you like they treated Christ. Maybe you don't get much persecution because there's not much similarity.

The context is persecution, hostility and death. And we have to be ready to accept that. Now this is an amazing call to discipleship. I want you to come and be My disciples and be like Me and get ready to pay the supreme price. That's what He is saying. And if you aren't willing to come on those terms then you're not going to come.

Now, go to verse 25 and look how He repeats the same thing and throws in a very insightful phrase "It is enough,"it is enough..."for the disciple that he be like his teacher and the servant like his lord." You know what one thing about a true disciple he is content to be like his teacher. He doesn't have to be greater than his teacher, he doesn't have to go beyond, it's not an ego trip, a true disciple is content to be like his teacher. A true servant is content not to go above his lord, but to be like his lord and faithful to his lord. It is enough.

Now, what is He saying? True disciples seek nothing more.

They're not in it for what they can get out of it, they're not on an ego trip. And they seek nothing less they're not going to try to escape what the Lord couldn't escape. They're willing to take it all. Nothing more nothing less. Oh, this is a beautiful statement "It is enough" literally translated means It is sufficient, or it must be sufficient. It is sufficient for me to be like my Lord and to be treated like my Lord. That is sufficient for me.

Paul was like that. Paul said. his great prayer That I may know Him and the fellowship of His...what?...sufferings. It is enough?...it is enough. I don't ask anymore than that. I don't ask to be loved by the world, I don't ask to be famous, I don't ask to be accepted, I don't

ask to miss the persecution. I don't ask to be everybody's friend. I ask only to be like my Lord and to pursue to be like Him means to be treated like He was treated.

That's all. Now that's where you start. You assume that.

And you want to know how they were treated. In verse 25, the Lord gives an illustration. "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" And here He uses the word, master. The master of the house, the one who rules the house. And it's the idea of the Lord of the house. I mean, and if they call Him the devil and you're under Him what do you expect they'll call you? That's the point.

And, by the way, that's a real condition. You say, Jesus is saying that they called Him the devil. Did people call Jesus the devil? That's right. They called Him Satan. That's what He's saying. Because Beelzebub is a reference to Satan. It had become and we don't really know the history or the etymology of how it became so but in the time of the Lord Beelzebub or Beelzebul sometimes ends with a b sometimes with an l, had become the designation, in some people's vocabulary, for the devil himself. But just to show you that this is not unrealistic, go back to chapter 9 verse 34. Already this is apparent to the disciples that it's coming because when Jesus had healed the blind men, and healed the one with the demon, in verse 34 the Pharisees said, "He cast out demons through the prince of demons." In other words, He is working for the devil, the prince of demons.

Now they were, you know, believing in themselves as the religiously erudite and astute and they knew God, and they were so far from the truth, they saw the lovely spotless holy, absolutely pure Son of God, living God in human flesh in the world, and they watched Him and they heard Him and they said He's demon possessed. That shows you how bright they were. I mean, they were so far away from the truth, they couldn't have been anymore distant. He's demon possessed He's working for the prince of devils.

Now, go over to chapter 12 verse 24. "And when the Pharisees heard it," and here again Jesus is healing, and casting out demons, "they said, This man does not cast out demons but by Beelzebub, the prince of demons." There again they said He's demon possessed.

Now go back to chapter 10 verse 25. Most interesting...here they even go beyond that. The Lord says, "They will call Me Beelzebub," period. They'll not say He works for Beelzebub, or He casts out demons by the power of Beelzebub, they'll say He is Beelzebub. He is Satan. The ultimate blasphemy. And if they say that about Me what do you think they're going to say about you?

Now, that is a critical statement and I want to take you into the word Beelzebub for just a minute so you'll understand it. Turn to II Kings chapter 1. And listen carefully cause this is the root of that word and we don't really know what goes on between II Kings much and the New Testament, it's hard to trace the meaning of the word, but in II Kings 1:1: "Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab." The death of Ahab, frankly, was no big loss. But once Ahab was dead the Moabites felt they could move in because the nation was in somewhat a disarray. And then comes Ahaziah who was no gain either. "And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber."

I don't know whether he was drunk or uncoordinated, but he fell out of a window and got himself all messed up....it says he was sick, he was ill, he was somehow incapacitated.

And so, here...what's he going to do? Now, the man is tragically ill and so he decides to send messengers. You would think he'd send them to God, but he doesn't. He said, "Go inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron."

Now Ekron was one of the towns in the country of the Philistines. Ekron comes up later in this same book, but it was a town and this was the god of Ekron, Baalzebub. And that's really all we know about it. Of course, the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Arise, go up and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and say to them, Is it because there is not a God in Israel that you have to go ask Baalzebub the god of Ekron?"

What are you doing, doing that? That shows you something of the apostasy of Israel at that time.

But this Baalzebub basically, as far as we can tell in the Hebrew, means "lord of the flies." You've probably heard that term as a title for a book or a film or something. But it basically means, lord of the

flies....lord of the carrion flies. Apparently this deity was somehow associated with the flies, I can't imagine but that's the way it is. And Baal means lord and we know in the Old Testament they worshipped Baal, that means lord. That's just...that's like Allah to a Moslem, just means lord. And they would attach other names on the back of it to identify it. But this was the Baal of the flies, the lord of the flies.

Now when you come to the New Testament you'll notice in Matthew 10, that the *Baal* becomes *Beel* and for some reason there's a variant in the spelling and sometimes it ends *zebub* and sometimes *zebul*, sometimes with a *b* and sometimes with an *l*. Now when it ends with an *l* the best sources indicate that it means lord of the dwelling. And it may have been that this lord of the flies grew to great prominence and they just changed his name to *zebul* from *zebub* and meant lord of the dwelling. In other words, he was the master of all of the dwelling place of all of the demons.

So, somehow in the progress of this word, this local Ekronite god becomes the lord of all the dwelling. That's a possibility. It's a possibility. We really can't fill in all the details.

Then also there is one other form that appears. Instead of *zebul*, there's a *zebel* and *zebel* means in Hebrew dung.

And we say, Well, how did he get to be the lord of the dung? Well, the best answer to that is that that is a title of derision given by the people who scorned this pagan god....lord of the dwelling nothing, lord of the dung is what he is. It would be an epithet of derision.

But, lord of the dung, or dwelling, or whatever, he isn't anybody anyway, so what's the difference. He can't be offended, only the true God can. Nonetheless, in the time of the Lord it became common to designate Satan in these terms; Beelzebub and Beelzebul.

And so the Lord is simply saying if they're going to call Me Satan, if they're going to go so far as to name Me the devil himself, what do you think they're going to do to you?

Now what is the point? You have to be willing to pay the price. The more you move to be like Christ, which is the goal of all discipleship, the more the world is going to treat you the way they treated Him and when they treat you the way they treated Him

they're going to treat you evil because that's the way they perceived Him. Now with that in mind you can understand the instruction of the gospel of John where in the thirteenth chapter of John's gospel, and I'll just read a couple of verses, you don't need to turn to it.

John 13:16, it says: "Verily, verily I say unto you, The servant,' and here's the same thought, our Lord teaching again, "The servant is not greater than his lord." There's that phrase He likes to use. "Neither He that is sent greater than He that sent Him."

In other words, why would you expect anything different than what the Lord received? Now, go to chapter 15 for a moment of John's gospel, verse 18. "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world," that is if you're identified with the world, and you appear with them and you go along with what they do, "the world would love its own. But, because you're not of the world, I've chosen you out of the world therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you," and here He comes with the same phrase again, "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they've kept My saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for My namesake because they know not Him that sent Me."

Then in chapter 18, He says: "The day will come when they think they're doing God a favor when they kill you."

So, the point is this, the way they treated Christ was bad...that's the way they're going to treat you. The more you become like Christ the more you're going to get it. And yet that is the goal. It's almost a trap, you come into the discipleship thing, you're committed to being like Christ, and you know from the very beginning that the more like Christ you become the more the system will resent you.

Now let me add a footnote. In spite of this God is moving in the hearts of people in the world to redeem them. Right? And those people will be attracted by your testimony. You know, I would venture to say that it's pretty safe to assume that most of us became Christians because we saw something in the life of someone else that we wanted. That's usually it. There's something attractive; a joy, a peace, a freedom from guilt, a sense of forgiveness, the hope of

eternal life, peace in the heart, and so while we're becoming more like Christ we will become more attractive. We will become more attractive to those whom God is calling to Himself.

But we will become more distasteful to the system that hated Christ.

You see? So there's no way around it, people. That is the price of discipleship...more attractive and more malignant in terms of the world's revulsion. It goes together.

The whole thing begins at that point. And that's just the introduction. We'll find out next time the beginning, the five marks of true disciples. Let's pray.

Prayer

Lord, we all desire to respond to the call of discipleship as we should. Help us to make that commitment now, to be willing to be like You, to pursue that no matter what it costs. To know we become more distasteful to the world and yet more attractive to those You're calling to Yourself.

With your heads bowed for just a moment listen to what one person said, and maybe this can be a point of commitment for us.

One day I looked at myself at the self that Christ can see.
And I saw the person I am today, and the one I ought to be.
I saw how little I really pray, how little I really do.
I saw the influence of my life, how little of it was true.
I saw the bundle of faults and fears I ought to lay on the shelf.
I had given a little bit to God but I had never given myself.
I came back from seeing myself with the mind made up to be
The sort of person that Christ can use...with a heart He longs
to see.

Father, we would be that kind of person with a heart You long to see. Truly committed to walk in obedience to Your will. Father, bring into the prayer room those You would have to come and may these truths reach deep into all our hearts. prepare us for what is ahead as we study this great chapter, in Christ's name. Amen.

~ 10 ~

The Hallmarks of Discipleship

Part 1

John MacArthur
Matthew 10:26-31
7.12.1981

In Matthew's gospel he has one purpose, and that is to affirm to man that Christ is King. His desire is that there be no question in the heart and the soul of a man or a woman but that Jesus Christ is the King. And from beginning of Matthew to the end of the gospel of Matthew, that is his thrust. He knows that men raise up other monarchs, that they are unwilling, basically, to submit to the Kingship of Christ, to the sovereignty of Christ, that they are unwilling to submit themselves to His total and sovereign Lordship, and that there's always this battle. And he is calling, as it were, on the Abners of the world to abandon their petty monarchs and establish themselves as subjects to Jesus Christ. That's his message. And as we've seen in studying Matthew, over and over and over again, he affirms the Kingship of Christ. And implied in all of those affirmations is a call for people to submit to that Kingship.

Now, when you come to chapter 10 it really takes a form that is easy to perceive. Here you meet twelve men who had said Christ is our King. Here you meet the twelve disciples, the twelve apostles, and they have committed themselves to being the followers of Christ. They have given everything. They have sacrificed their ideals, and their careers, and their families, and their lifestyle, and their homes and their jobs, their self determination, their self will, and they have said We submit ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus

Christ. They then become in a real sense, the epitome of realization of Matthew's goal. And so as we're looking at chapter 10, we're really seeing people responding to the message of Matthew.

Christ is the King, and here are some men who have responded to that Kingship, and who have said we will follow Christ, we will be His subjects. He will be our King. We will be His servants. He will be our Master. We will be His students. He will be our Teacher.

Now, having said that, the Lord then takes them, trains them, and sends them into the world. And pretty much directs them as to the nature of their ministry through verse 25 of this chapter.

But then in chapter 10 of Matthew, verse 24, we find general teaching on this whole matter of discipleship. The generalized teaching of our Lord, dealing with what it means to be a subject to the King.

Listen, beloved, when you became a Christian, if you said nothing else you said this, I accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Master and King and I submit myself to His sovereignty. That's what you said, or you weren't saved. That's what you said. And when you said that you took yourself right into Matthew chapter 10.

And here the Lord instructs those committed to His sovereignty. And He gives them, I believe, the greatest teaching on the stuff of which discipleship is made, in verses 24 to 42. That's where we're looking.

Thomas Huxley once said, and I think it's such a good statement: "It doesn't take much of a man to become a Christian, but it does take all of him."

That is really what Christ is asking. That is what the King is asking. And in this marvelous chapter, the twelve have been called and they have responded and they are following, and they are being trained as they will be sent to reach the world. And off of that very special sending that He gives them, He moves into verse 24 and begins to teach general principles that apply to all of us who name the name of Christ...all of us who are His disciples.

We can see the general nature of the text, as we noted last week, by the word disciple that's a very general word in verse 24.

And also in verse 24 is the word servant, a very general word.

Three times in this text it says, *Whosoever*. And nine times it says, *He that*. In other words, whoever comes to Me, whoever follows Me, whoever identifies with Me here are the principles he commits himself to obey. Now it all begins in verse 24, let's remind ourselves of what it says: "The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his lord."

Now just stop there for a moment. And I told you last week that basically is the bottom line in all discipleship...that we are to be like Him. We are to be like our Teacher. We are to be like our Master and our Lord and our King...that is our commitment. We are called to be like Him. That's what it means, to have His values, to have His commitments, to have His priorities, to be given utterly over to His will, and His purposes, and His kingdom. We are to be like Him.

Now, we said last time that if we are like Him, we will be also treated like Him. Right? Verse 25: "If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub," and that was their name for Satan, "if they call Him the devil, how much more shall they call them of His household?" In other words, if we are like Him we will be treated like Him.

That's part of it. That's the bottom line of discipleship. The whole goal of being a subject of Christ, of being a disciple which is *mathetes*. it means learner, the whole objective of learning, the whole objective of following, of being a subject is to become like the King. And the more we're like Him the more we'll be treated like He was treated. And the world treated Him this way. They called Him the devil.

Now if they were not hesitant to call Him that, they won't be hesitant to call us that. And He uses the analogy of a master of a house. Now the master of the house has dignity. He's the guy whose in charge. He has status. He has reputation. He's a man of honor in the community. He's got money. And He's simply saying If they will take that, the highest level guy, and call him Satan, what do you think they'll do with his slaves? If they're willing to speak evil against a man of dignity, honor, and respect, they certainly won't hesitate to speak evil against people who don't have any dignity to start with. So, the bottom line then comes out like this Discipleship

is a process by which you become like Christ, the more you become like Him, and the more the world treats you like Him, and you can expect it because if they treated Him that way, and didn't pull any punches with the very Christ of God, what makes you think they'll treat you any better?

Now you say Well, that's not a very inviting prospect in calling people to discipleship. But that's the fact. The goal is to be like Christ, and there's a price to pay for that.

So, He lays that bottom foundation, as we saw last week, in verses 24 and 25. Now, having assumed that as the beginning assumption Being like Me means being treated like Me. He then gives them five hallmarks of true discipleship. And, folks, they are just thrilling. Five hallmarks of true discipleship through this chapter. This morning we're going to look at one. It's such an important one we have to spend the whole time doing that.

The first mark of a true disciple, one who really is a subject of the King. one who has eliminated the *Ish bosheth* of his life and affirmed his allegiance to Christ, the first principle HE FEARS NOT THE WORLD. Did you get that? He fears not the world. That is the mark of a true disciple.

Verse 26: "Fear them not."

Verse 28: "Fear not them."

Verse 31: "Fear not therefore."

And from verse 28 to 31 He says don't be afraid of the world. Because naturally, having heard verses 16 to 28, the response is going to be that they're going to be afraid.

Verse 16, He says, "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves."

Verse 17, He says, "Beware of men, they'll deliver you to the councils, and scourge you in the synagogues."

Verse 18, He says, "You'll be brought before kings and governors."

Verse 19, "They'll deliver you up." That is the idea of a prisoner brought before trial.

Verse 21, "Your own family will put you to death."

Verse 22, "You'll be hated by everybody."

In verse 28, "You'll be persecuted."

Now with all of that, don't be afraid...don't be afraid. Even the Old Testament says, "The fear of man bringeth a...what?... a snare." I think the fear of man strangles effective witnessing. It strangles evangelism. We don't want to get into something we fear might become psychologically difficult for us. We don't want to create a problem. We don't want to be thought little of.

We don't want to be persecuted. Last of all, we certainly don't want to be killed for our faith. We want to preserve ourselves.

And in this overemphasis on self preservation we tend to bail out of a confrontive ministry. But the Lord is saying here they're going to do it to you, but don't be afraid. Face it. Be bold. Don't be afraid.

Now, if you're afraid and you bail out, and you're not interested in witnessing for Christ, you're not going to pay the price, no matter what you say you're probably not a Christian. Because if you love the world, and you're of the world, then you're not of God. First John says, "If you love the world and the things that are in the world, you're not of the Father." And if you bail out, "They went out from us because they were not of us, and it was made manifest they were not of us when they left." But the folks who stay, and they're willing to follow through and be courageous are the ones who give evidence of being truly the disciples of Christ.

So, first of all, we're going to be like Christ. And being like Christ means we're going to be treated like Christ and as we're treated like Christ there's going to be a temptation to be afraid and pull back your testimony, and shut your mouth, and not be confrontive, and not say what ought to be said. And so He says Don't be afraid. Fear has absolutely strangled testimony. people are afraid to say the truth, they're afraid to be confrontive. And all of us have had illustrations of that times when we just couldn't get it out for fear we'd be thought to be silly or rude or obtrusive, or uneducated, or stupid, or whatever. Or we didn't want to get into a fight with somebody. So He says, Don't be afraid.

Now this is something the Lord said all the time to the disciples, by the way. Because it was so tough for them. "Fear not, little flock," He said. "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." And even after the resurrection He appeared to them a couple of times and He said "Don't be afraid." Basically, we're afraid. That's right. That's why we are constantly needing to be sort of enjoined to get out and get at it. We're not afraid to talk to a group of Christians in a Bible study, that's why, I think, Christians just love Bible studies. Us four, no more, shut the door.

This is glory. We all agree. We sit there and affirm each other.

But send them out into the world and they get paralyzed with fear. Somebody said "Most Christians are like the Arctic River; frozen over at the mouth." You know...when...there's a coldness, and a... a sort of a deadness, a fearfulness that makes us just clam up.

But we don't need to be afraid. And that's what He's saying.

But, you know, it's amazing how the Lord never says anything in a vacuum. He doesn't just stand up and say "Don't be afraid....don't be afraid...don't be afraid. He says, Here's why.... and He gives them three fear nots, and three reasons not to be afraid.

Number one, and I'll use the word vindication.

Verse 28: "Fear them not, therefore: for, or because, there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; and hidden, that shall not be known." That's an interesting statement. And by the way, a very common statement. Our Lord uses it several times. I told you this is some of His favorite teaching because the little parts of this whole passage here that He gave, are all over the place in the gospels. He used these principles again and again in different context. So He says "Look, don't be afraid because what is covered will be revealed and what is hidden will be made known.

Now, just a couple of notes in the grammar. The word *therefore* looks back. The word *for* looks forward. Don't be afraid therefore, looks back to the statement in verse 25. "If they treated the Lord this way, they're going to treat you this way, so you're not going to get any treatment that's any different or any more than your Master received. Therefore, don't be afraid." He endured it...He went through it....so don't be afraid.

The *for* then looks forward. Don't be afraid either because there's nothing covered that shall not be revealed and there's nothing hidden that shall not be known.

Now you say, What in the world does that phrase mean? It's a kind of a proverbial, obscure statement at first, what does it mean? It simply means this. that someday God is going to take the lid off everything and all things will be made right...just. That's not the way it is now. Christians are looked on as anti-intellectual, we're looked on as the outcast, paul called the off scouring of the world. The world is successful. The wicked prosper. Christians are persecuted. Christians are put down. The more you stand for the right, the more the system hates you...and the less you're rewarded.

But someday it's all going to change. "And the truth will be made known." That's what that statement means. God is going to show who the real heroes are. God is going to cover...uncover the real heroes.

God's going to reward and vindicate His own. And when the lid comes off the evil people are going to find out that all they have left for them is vengeance. Your enemies cannot prevent your vindication.

That's what He's saying.

Look, people, look, you've got to live with an eternal perspective. You see? That's what He's saying. If you're stuck on worrying about what the world is going to say, you're looking at the wrong thing. What you want to be looking at is what God's going to say in the end. Right? Why do you think the Bible over and over talks about rewards? "Behold, I come quickly, My reward is with Me to give to every man according to as his work shall be." Why do you think the Apostle paul wrote about the fact that someday we'd face Christ at the bema seat? And He would reward us for the things done in the body. Why do you think it says in I Corinthians 4 that in that time when God reveals the secrets of the heart, then shall every man have praise of God? Why does He promise a crown of life and a crown of righteousness, and an incorruptible crown...and a crown of rejoicing?

Why does He promise us these things? To give us the eternal

perspective so that we're not looking at being popular, or looking at being vindicated in this life as...as the wise and the noble, and the heroes of society, but rather we're willing to confront an evil society and let God reward us in eternity. It's hard to get that perspective... isn't it? But that's it. You've got to live, not for the moment when all the values are backwards, but for the future when God unveils the reality and reveals the hypocrites and shows who the real heroes were, and rewards them forever.

And a lot of Christians will trade in, get this one, a little momentary popularity for an eternal reward. Right? That's what it comes down to.

Look with me for a minute at Luke 12. and I think by the couple of other passages where Jesus used this same little statement you can see the significance of it...Luke 12 verse 1:

"In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they stepped on one another."

Now that's a crowd. "Jesus began to say to His disciples, first of all, Beware of the leaven of the pharisees," and what is the evil influence in the Pharisees? "It is hypocrisy." They are phonies. You know what that means? The truth is covered. They're wearing masks. They're fake. Then He uses the same statement, verse 2: "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed, neither hidden that shall not be known." And there is that same little phrase. And what it means is, some day the truth is going to be told. The hypocrites will be unmasked and the truly righteous ones will be rewarded.

Back to chapter 8 of Luke, and the same phrase is used again. Verse 16: "No man, when he has lighted a lamp, covers it with a vessel." That would be stupid to light a lamp and then stick a pot on top of it so nobody could see the light. They set it on a lampstand so that people can come in and see the light.

And that is exactly what God is going to do. Luke 8 verse 17, "Nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hidden that shall not be known and come to light." God is going to bring everything to light in the future, people, and it's going to be told then what the real value of your life was.

Now, you can save your reputation here and lose your reward there. That's your choice. But someday the values are going to be reversed. You don't need to be afraid of the world, is what our Lord is saying. You can turn back now....Matthew 10. You don't need to be afraid of the world. This is so temporary.

Whatever they may say about you, whatever they may do to react to you someday God is going to vindicate you.

Oh, I love that statement of our Lord in Revelation 22, "Behold, I come quickly and My reward is with Me to give to every man according as his work shall be." Paul says, For some it will be wood, hay, stubble. For others it will be...what?...gold, silver, precious stones. Even human wisdom tells you to have that perspective. The preacher writing in Ecclesiastes perceived this. He says: "Rejoice, O young man," in Ecclesiastes 11:9, "in thy youth; let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine own eyes."

He says, Live it up. Do your thing, man, you're young do it.

Then he says this: "But know this, for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

In other words, if you decide to sow your wild oats now, just realize that someday you're going to pay.

And in the next chapter, chapter 12 verse 18, he says, the whole conclusion of the deal is this; "Fear God, keep His commandments, this is the whole duty of man." Why? "For God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing."

God's going to open it all up. Everything covered will be uncovered...everything hidden will be made known.

So, beloved, that's the perspective we want. Someday God's going to look at the record of our life. God's going to expose everything. And those who have looked like they were the winners will turn out to be the eternal losers. And the losers who have been persecuted for their faith are going to be the winners forever. That's the plan. So, we aren't afraid of what the world does because we are looking for an eternal vindication at the hands of God. You see?

There's a second word in this passage that I would call to your attention, it's the word veneration. Not only vindication, but veneration.

tion.

John Calvin was actually banished from ungrateful Geneva after giving them the truth of God. And he said this: "Most assuredly if I had merely served man, this would have been a poor recompense: but it is my happiness that I have served Him who never fails to reward His servants to the full extent of His promise."

What he said was, Hey, when they threw me out of town, if I was serving man that would have been a bad situation. But I was never serving man anyway. I was always serving God. And God will keep all His promises and bring all His rewards. And that is essentially what this second point means....veneration.

In other words, if you really worship God and fear God then you won't fear man. Right? Look at verse 27. He says: "What I tell you in darkness, speak in the light; what you hear in the ear, proclaim on the housetops. And fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." What He is saying is Don't fear men, fear God. And if you fear God enough and you honor God enough and you revere God and you venerate God enough, then you're not going to be concerned about men. If you have enough fear of God, you'll have no fear of men.

Now let's back up and look what He says in verse 27, most interesting. "What I tell you in darkness, speak in light; and what you hear in the ear, proclaim on the housetops." The whole idea is this the Lord says, I've been telling you the secrets in your ear, and I want you to tell the whole world. There are no secrets in Christianity... did you get that?

I don't like that term, in a sense, the Christian's secret of a happy life...I don't like that. This is no secret. Whenever there's a group that comes along like the Royal Order of the Goats, or the Lodge of this or that, and they say, We have secret rites.

There are no secrets in Christianity...that's not a Christian perspective. Nothing in Christianity smacks at all of anything secret. "What I tell you," He says, "in the darkness, you speak in the light; and what you hear in your ear, you shout it from a housetop." There are no secrets. We are to give the message as we receive the message.

You know, there was a custom in the time when our Lord was teaching this, the Rabbis would train their pupils to speak and teach by standing beside them and they would speak in their ear and then the young man learning would speak what the Rabbi told him. And so they taught them by rote to speak. And the Lord is sort of identifying that simple technique and saying I've been training you to preach and teach and speak, and I've been telling you whispering in your ear, speaking to you in the darkness, and now I'm telling you you say it in the light.

Now, there's two things here that you're to note. And I want you to note them carefully. Number one, what I tell you in darkness, speak in light; and what you hear in the ear, proclaim...no restrictions. Whatever I tell you, whatever you hear, you say.

That's the first thing you need to remember is we are to hold back nothing. There are no secrets.

I've had people say to me, You know, you just...you came on too strong. I think you alienated all the unsaved people. You've got to...you've got to find a different approach. And you know, that's our...that's our style, isn't it, today? We want somebody to become a Christian so we go up and say, Would you like to be happy? Would you like to have joy, peace, all your problems solved, go to heaven forever? Would you like to have love in your life? You know. And by the time you're getting through all this list, they say, where do I sign? Where do I sign?

See? I mean, if you were to go in your office, up to a guy, and lovingly and kindly say, You know something, my friend? Do you know that you are in danger of hell-fire forever if you don't give yourself to Christ? I think he'd probably react.

Don't you think so? He'd say, What??? Yeah, you're going to go to hell forever. Where the weeping and the wailing and gnashing of teeth. I think you might get a little persecution.

But, we don't want to talk about that. See, we want to guard it, we've got to have a few secrets, cause those will scare people. But, He says Whatever you hear, hold nothing back.

Second point, Say only what you hear from Me. Now you know what the sum of the verse is? You tell them what I told you, nothing

less, and nothing ...what?... more. That's it. Very simple to define the ministry, people. Verse 27 says you go in the darkness, you find that secret place, you find that place of quietness, that place where you're alone with God, and in His Word, and you pour over the Word and you pour over the principles of the Word, and you pour your heart out to God and out of that secret place is born the truth of God in your heart and you come out of there and you speak it. In those days announcements were made from housetops.

The houses would have a little flat roof with a little short wall around the edge and that was the patio. people slept up there, ate up there, had their social events up there, sat under the stars up there. And if you wanted to make an announcement you just stood on the edge of your roof and hollered. And if you could find a high roof you could even accomplish more. And there were no cars making noise everywhere, like today. And people weren't locked in little boxes. They were out in the streets. And there were no windows, and no TVs and no stereos, and you could just yell whatever message you wanted to yell. And the Lord says Make it public. You go out and you just yell it from the housetops, and maybe the housetop today is radio, maybe its television. I don't know. But its got to be a public message. And we've got to get out of our little cloister with our message. We can't be standing around telling each other we need to get saved, and we've already been saved for years. We got to go where they are.

And so, He says, I've been telling you in secret, and its a message that you're going to have to give to the world, nothing less and nothing more. So, we don't alter our message for fear of what the reaction is going to be.

There was a price to pay for this, sure. The Apostle paul knew it, and they kept telling him, You go to Jerusalem and preach that message, and you know what will happen? They're going to put you in jail, paul. And he said, I know that. And every city he went they kept telling him they're going to put you in jail. Agabus the prophet came out and gave him a demonstration, said, Let me have your belt. Took his belt off, wrapped up his hands and said that is a demonstration of what's going to happen, you're going to be made a prisoner.

And in Acts 20 he says, Look, everywhere I go you keep telling me the same thing, but none of these things move me. I just want to do the work that God's given me. And finish what the Lord wants me to say. He's told it to me and I've got to tell it to them. And you can't pull the punches...nothing less, nothing more than what He told you in the darkness, what you heard in your ear, you shout it from the housetops. This is no secret organization. We seek a public place to preach Christ.

Now, you say if you do that though, boy, that's going to be a little hairy because people are going to react. That's right.

And by the way, the housetop was a typical Jewish way to do this. The Rabbi sometimes would teach there. The Talmud tells how religious officials would climb up on a housetop with a trumpet at the approach of any religious holiday. The remnant of that today is the minaret used in the Moslem world where the guy goes way up in that tower and calls everybody to prayer. Only now they do it with a tape recorder.

Josephus writes about the time a mob was chasing him and he went up on the roof of a house while they were outside and tried to calm them from the roof. So, that was a very common thing and it simply seeks a public forum. You need to get the message out, people, we need to shout it where it needs to be heard. And we need to hold nothing back. You see? Nothing back. Say nothing less and nothing more than what the Word says. Our message is limited. That is why it is so serious when Christians eliminate part of the message or when Christians get another message in addition to the one from God, and everybody gets confused about what our message is.

And you say, Well, but we're going to get flack. Yeah, well, that's the next verse. "And fear not," again you can't be afraid or you won't do this. "But fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul."

Now, who is that? Who can kill bodies but not souls? Who? Men. That's just a designation of men. Fear not men. The worst they can do is kill your body and that isn't the real you. Right?

That is not the real you. So, don't fear them. All they can do is

kill your body and that isn't any big deal. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is...what?...is gain." So that isn't a problem. Don't fear them.

"But rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Whose that? That's God, that's not Satan. Satan will be being destroyed himself there. He doesn't have the keys to death and hell. Read Revelation 1 again, God does. Don't fear men, fear God. That's the issue. And He's only using the idea of killing the body and He compares it with destroying the soul...to show that God has so much more power. He's...it's a comparison. He's not saying That if you don't live the right kind of Christian life, God will send you to hell. That isn't the point. The point here is we are to fear the One who can determine the destiny of souls, not the ones who can only determine the destinies of bodies. You see? It is a comparison between men and God. Don't fear men, fear God.

You actually come down to that very issue. There's an occasion where you're given an opportunity to communicate Christ and to witness, and you say If I do this I know I'm going to get it.

Maybe it's in your own family, and they're going to get mad at you and kick you out of the house. And you say I don't want to do it. You have feared them more than you feared God. Right?

Because if you really feared God in the sense of awe and reverence of His infinite holiness and majesty. and of His blessed name, if you worshipped Him as He ought to be worshipped, you would speak for Him on His behalf with any threat that stood in your way. True? But whenever you opt out of that, you have said I fear men more than God, and that is silly, because the worse men could possibly do would be to your body and God is a God that determines the destiny of souls.

As a footnote, some people think that the verse at the end where it says, Destroy soul and body in hell, means that hell is where you get totally annihilated. That is not what the word destroy there means. And if you compare it with 2 Thessalonians 1:8 it says, "You are punished with everlasting destruction."

It is not a destruction of annihilation, it is an interminable, everlasting destruction in hell. And hell is Gehenna which was the name

of the city dump in Jerusalem where the worms were and the fire never went out, as all the garbage and refuse was burned, and that is the imagery. You will be in hell....and notice also, soul and body. The unsaved will be resurrected, given eternal bodies which will dwell in that fire, so they will have actual bodies. People always say, Is it an actual fire? Well, its some kind of a fire because its an actual body. I don't know what kind but body and soul.

But He'sHe's not saying to Christian disciples Boy, if you goof up, you're going to go to hell.....no, no, no.

He's saying Get your fear right. Fear the One who is really powerful. Fear the One who determines the destiny of souls.

Don't fear the ones who can only fool with the body. And there have been Christians through the years who have been that way.

Paul would not disobey God because he honored God and he venerated God. That's what the word veneration means, to worship. He worshipped God so much that he would never say no to God to say yes to men. That's why I say veneration eliminates fear. We don't fear because we so worship God that we would do what His will is and fear Him rather than men. I'd rather fall into the hands of men who are upset with me than God who is upset with me.

Latimer, that great, great English martyr, was preaching one day and King Henry was present. And he said to himself, Latimer', Latimer! Latimer! Remember that the king is here, be careful what you say. And then he said to himself; Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! Remember that the King of kings is here, be careful what you don't say.

You know what happened to Latimer? They burned him at the stake. They didn't want to hear what he said.

The one who faces the world comes out of a secret place, verse 27...comes out of a quiet place, a lonely place where Christ speaks to him. And then he speaks. And, beloved, if you haven't been in that quiet place, you haven't got a thing to say.

Colet, during the time of the birth of the Reformation, went to Erasmus, the scholar. And he invited Erasmus to come to Oxford to give a lecture. He wanted him to lecture on Moses, and Isaiah. Erasmus didn't think he was ready. And I think he gave a marvelous reply. He said: "You are not acting wisely, Colet. You are demanding

water from a pumice stone. With what effrontery shall I teach what I have never learned? How am I to warm the coldness of theirs, when I'm shivering myself?"

He was right. If you don't have anything you haven't got anything to give. You go to the secret place, and out of the secret place comes the fire lit in your heart by God and then you say what has to be said...nothing less, nothing more.

And you say, Yes, but men might kill my body but don't be afraid of that. Fear the One who has eternal destiny in His hand. Fear God....fear God.

During the years of the martyrs in the Roman Empire, Christians fled into the underground caverns outside Rome. There are now, they can pretty well determine, 800 miles of catacombs that the Christians dug. Ten generations of Christians were buried in those over a period of nearly 500 years. And archaeologists estimate that up to four million Christians are buried in the catacombs in the time when they were, of course, being persecuted.

I will never forget being in a church down at the bottom of one of those catacombs...one that had been built out of the earth.

And one of the most frequent inscriptions is the sign of the fish. You can still see it...I saw it on a lot of the places where they laid the bodies. But there's another inscription that you see there in several places and it says this: "The Word of God is not bound.? The Word of God is not bound.

In other words, we fear God too much to fear men. And so we speak.

It is estimated that more than 50 million Christians have died for their faith in the Dark Ages. That a million Christians died for their faith when the Communists took over China. Thousands upon thousands upon thousands have died in the civil wars in rebellions of Africa.

How can they be so unafraid? Well, for one thing it's vindication. They're looking at an eternal reward. And for another its veneration. They worship God so much that it removes the fear of man.

Lord Laurence is buried in Westminster Abbey, and I've walked the aisles of that church. And on his grave it gives his name, and the date, and then it says, "He feared man so little because he feared

God so much." What a great testimony.

This week, the East/West News Service, which I receive, says that five Rumanian pastors are in imminent danger of being sentenced to from twenty years imprisonment, to execution. And the government of Rumania is going to sentence them to this because they accused them of failing to consult the government in spending church funds. And they've called it embezzlement.

The real issue is that these five Rumanian pastors are among the pastors of Rumania who cannot be bought by the government, they cannot be manipulated by the government, so the government trumps up a charge and throws them in prison or executes them.

One Rumanian writer living in paris writes: "Except for official orthodox church, all the churches are persecuted.

Communist regimes have to maintain silence and fear among the people to keep their power." end quote. So, they just persecute the church.

They have halted all church construction in Rumania. You find the same thing in Russia. Valentina Zotova, a Russian Christian, is persecuted because of her bold faith. She is being harassed by the Soviet police, may be committed to a mental institution. Her husband has divorced her. She has been fired from her job and lost her children.

They can kill the body, but they can't touch the psuch?, the soul. That is the immaterial part of man...the real part...what does it matter to lose the body? But what shall it profit a man if he ...what?...lose his soul? The soul here in verse 28 means the real part of the man... the real immaterial part...the substance. This is the dichotomous perspective. Man is body...outside, he is soul...inside. This is the real person. They can't touch that. They can't touch it. And if going to heaven bothers you and you're not...you don't want to go, it's simply because you're too earthbound. If you really were heavenly perspective, you really had a heavenly perspective you'd be so concerned about that ultimate vindication in God's presence that you wouldn't have any fear. You'd so worship God that you could care less what men might do.

And I say that to myself too. Cause I hold to this world also. But

we ought to fear God, and worship God, so that we don't fear men.

I must add that I think verse 5 also may have been directed at Judas. And there will always be in the church and in the group of disciples, the phonies and the fakes. And oh what a warning this would be...to remind him that God is the one who destroys forever, soul and body in hell. All the Judas' of all time need to hear that.

Thirdly, finally, the third reason we need not fear is because of what I call valuation....vindication. veneration, and valuation.

Verse 28, and this is a beautiful balance. "Fear not, therefore." why? Well, let's go back with the therefore...verse 29: "Are not two sparrows sold for an assarion," and that's a...let's just say it's a penny, it's too hard to compute. It's a penny. Sparrows were two for a penny. Sparrows a word that refers to little birds, just little birds. And there are lots of little birds.

And they were actually bought for hors d'oeuvres. That's right. They just take a little bird and make a bunch of hors d'oeuvres out of it, and you ate this little bird. They were bought and sold two for an assarion, two for a penny. I mean, that's a cheap bird. Right? Two for a penny.

In fact, Luke says you can get five for two pennies. In other words, if you bought four they'd throw one in for nothing.

And then they'd bring in a big plate full of these little birds.

They used to roast them, and they would eat them just like finger food. Cheap little birds!

And yet, verse 29 says: "Not one of them falls on the ground without your Father knowing it," and caring about it is implied.

You mean, God cares about a two for a penny hors d'oeuvre? You mean, God knows when a bird dies? I mean, you go along the road and you see a dead bird all the time. See, God has got a list of the dead birds. I mean, He knows. And some Greek texts indicate that the word fall may even mean hop. He not only knows when they die, He knows when they hop.

Oh, you say, wait a minute. Birds hop all the time. That's right. They hop all the time. God knows when they hop and they stop hopping. Nothing happens in the most simple insignificant element of life, cheap little nothing birds, God knows and He cares...that's

implied. The smallest animal doesn't perish without God caring. He may those little birds. Your Father...tender, personal emphasis, isn't it? Your Father, He knows.

Verse 30, "And the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

Do you know that the average is 140,000 hairs per head? Some of you are really messing up the average, I hate to say that. But anyway, one hundred and forty thousand hairs per head. And it doesn't say that God counts them, He numbers them. Each one has its own number. Oop, there goes Sg!, oh, there goes 28. I mean.

He actually identifies every hair on your head. For some of you its not that big of a problem. As one guy said "Earth is receding and heaven is opening up before me." But, God knows the numbers of the hair.

You say, Well, what does it say that...what is the point?

The point is this. If God is concerned about little birds, and God is concerned about numbering and knowing the hairs of your head don't be afraid, verse 31, "You're of more value than many little birds, and than a whole lot of hair." That's added by MacArthur. But that's the idea. You know why you cannot be afraid?

You don't have a thing to fear. If God takes care of little birds, and God numbers the hair of peoples' head, to take care of that and that's in the framework of His care, don't you think you fall into His care also? And you're never going to get into a situation where God can't sustain you in that situation.

Psalms 91 says, "A thousand shall fall at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee." Isn't that great? It all...it will all collapse around you but it will never touch you. God cares about you...tender, loving care, for His own marks our God. If God so clothed the grass of the field, if God cares for the lilies, if God cares for the birds, Matthew 8 says, shall He not also care for you? O ye of ...what?... little faith. You know, we're so afraid we might lose our reputation or our job, or we might get injured and we...and we get fearful and He says "Look! God who takes care of little insignificant birds, and hairs on peoples heads, don't you think you're more value than that? Birds don't have souls. Hair doesn't either. But you do and you're eternal.

Oh, of much more value.

Listen, you're My disciple, He says. You've crowned King...the Christ King of your life..and you've said I submit. Now you're going to face a world and you're going to be like Him and you're going to be treated like Him. And how you going to react to that? Are you going to be afraid? You don't need to. Because you'll be vindicated in the end, and have an eternal reward if you have an eternal perspective. And if you really worship God you'll transcend the fear of men, and if you understand how highly He values you, you won't be afraid of what they can do to you.

Where's your commitment?

My father told this story and I've heard it several times. I don't think I've ever related it to you but it is one of the greatest stories of commitment...to come out of the Roman era. Listen carefully. And I close with this.

Nero was Emperor. And Nero wanted around him some of the finest men of Roman stock. And so he identified his own personal wrestlers, known as the "Emperor's Wrestlers." And he wanted them selected from the bravest and the strongest and most stalwart of all of the Roman athletes. They were like the Olympic team of Rome. And they surrounded the Roman amphitheater.

They attended the arms of the emperor. They were around all the time. And they had a famous statement that they said, according to historians. "We, the wrestlers, wrestling for thee. O Emperor to win for thee the victory and from thee, the victor's crown."

That was their motto, We, the wrestlers, wrestling for thee O Emperor, to win for thee the victory and from thee, the victor's crown.

On one occasion the Roman army, including these great wrestlers, was sent representing the Romans into Gaul, to put down some kind of rebellion. No soldiers were braver, or more capable than the wrestlers of the Emperor. They were led by a centurion under the name of Vespasian, who was also a brilliant man.

But while they were in Gaul, history tells us, that many of them were converted to Jesus Christ. Word came back to Nero that some of his personal wrestlers had become Christians, and he sent a message to Vespasian that said: "If there be any among your soldiers who cling to the faith of the Christian, they must die."

The decree was received in the dead of winter in Gaul. The soldiers were encamped on the shore of a frozen inland lake. And with a sinking heart, Vespasian, the centurion, read the message.

He called the soldiers together and asked the question: "Are any of you those who have embraced the Christian faith?" And forty of them stepped forward, and saluted him. He said, "I give you till sundown tomorrow to deny that or you must die."

At sundown the next day he asked the same question. The same forty men stepped forward. He said, "I cannot allow you to die at the hands of your fellows, I strip you naked and banish you to the middle of the lake and leave you to the elements." And so he stripped them bare and sent them to the middle of the lake in the dead of night...frozen in the winter.

Not long after they had arrived there, he heard this coming across the ice. "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, to win for Thee the victory, and from Thee, the victor's crown."

And he heard it again and again through the night, and it grew fainter and fainter as the morning came.

Finally, near morning one lonely figure approached the fire who could not stand the coldness with the others and who did not hold to the faith in Christ that firmly that he should die, and he came to warm himself and admitted that he had denied Christ.

And then the cry came faintly across the ice; "Thirty nine wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, to win for Thee the victory, and from Thee the victor's crown."

Vespasian by this time was utterly overwhelmed. And God did something in his heart at that moment, and he threw off his helmet and all of his armor, took off across the ice shouting at the top of his voice, "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, to win for Thee the victory, and from Thee, the victor's crown."

Let's pray together:

Lord, You've called us to follow You at any price, be Your servants, be Your subjects, Your pupils. Make us faithful, first of all, to be marked by the hallmark of discipleship. We're like Christ and we don't fear the world. Lift us above that that we may say nothing

less, and nothing more than You have whispered in our ear through Your precious Word by Your Spirit. Make us bold and use us in a mighty way. Thank You, Father, for our time this morning. What a good time. We pray, Lord, that You'll drive deeply into our hearts Your truth, make us faithful, bring those to the prayer room that You would have to come. Bring us back tonight with excitement and expectation for a great evening. And we'll thank You for what You've accomplished this day in Jesus name.

Amen.

~ 11 ~

The Hallmarks of Discipleship Part 2

John MacArthur
Matthew 10:32-33
8.23.1981

Let's turn together in our Bibles to the 10th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, Matthew chapter 10. We desire this morning to continue our study in this marvelous section of Scripture that deals with true discipleship. And this morning for our lesson we're going to be examining verses 24 through 82. Last time we were in Matthew chapter 10 we really went through verse 31, I want to just review that briefly as a setting for verses 32 and then on to verse 55 this morning. It's difficult to cover much more than a couple of verses in this passage because of the tremendous weight and nature of the sayings of our Lord. Follow along as I begin reading in verse 24,

The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? Fear them not; therefore; for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; and hidden, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak in light; and what ye hear in the ear, that proclaim upon the housetops.

And fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. And the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows. Whosoever, therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father, who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father, who is in heaven.

We can stop right there.

The following record is taken from a book written by Festo Kivengere, who is a leading evangelical minister in Uganda, and in this book he describes basically the history of the church in Uganda. and particularly in the section I'd like to read to you where he talks about the first martyrs in that nation's history. In the year 1885, he writes,

Three Christian boys shed their blood for Christ in Uganda. The king had ordered the arrest of these boys in an effort to stamp out Christianity. The oldest was fifteen and the youngest was eleven year old Yusufu. They held fast their faith and staked their lives on it. Though people were weeping and their parents were pleading with them. At the place of execution the boys sent a message to the king, quote, "Tell his majesty that he has put our bodies in the fire but we won't be long in the fire, soon we shall be with Jesus which is much better. But ask him to repent and change his mind or he will land in a place of eternal fire."

They sang a song which is now well loved in Uganda, as known as the martyr's song. One verse says, "O that I had wings like the angels, I would fly away and be with Jesus." It is reported also that little Yusufu said, please don't cut off my arms, I will not struggle in the fire that takes me to Jesus.

Forty adults came to Jesus the day the boys died, this was a new kind of life which fire and torture could not control. We now have a memorial near Kampala where these

youngsters are remembered as the first Christian martyrs of Uganda. By 1887 the end of the first decade of the church hundreds had died, there were martyrs out of every village that had believers. They were only beginners, they knew little theology and some could barely read but they had fallen in love with Jesus Christ, life had taken on a completely new meaning, the value of living and living eternally had been discovered, they were not hugging their lives but ready to give them up for Jesus.

During these dangerous days there was an immediate and steady increase in the number of those embracing Christ.

Now that is just a little slice of the history of the church in one place at one time. But that kind of story goes on and on and on.

Little boys, little girls, men, women, old folks, people throughout the history of the church who have been unashamed of Jesus Christ, who have been willing to confess Him, as verse 32 says before men. No matter how hostile those men might have been. No matter if the cost was their own life, and that says our Lord marks a true disciple. Not necessarily educated in theology, maybe not a Christian very long, but nonetheless willing to confess Christ before men at any cost. That marks a true disciple. On the other hand, says our Lord in verse 33, one who denies Christ before men, marks one who will also be denied before God, a false disciple.

Now what is the Lord saying to us in these two verses? How does this really relate to us? What does it mean to confess and be confessed, to deny and be denied? people, this is the basic message that needs to be preached in every place where Jesus Christ is named, this is a message that calls so called Christians to self examination. It is a message that says look at yourself' in your life and confrontation with the world, are you confessing or you...are you denying? For your eternal destiny depends on that.

Let's back up and see if we can't understand the context in which our Lord speaks. In verses 24 to 42 you have one great section on discipleship. And I told you before that this is really the summation of all of our Lord's teaching on the subject, the greatest single sec-

tion on discipleship in all of the Bible. It sums up everything the Lord wants to say, as it were about discipleship, and He has a marvelous masterful way of summation, it's all right here. I also told you that this is some of the favorite teaching of our Lord, teaching which He repeats in many other places and many other times. Little pieces and bits of this teaching are here and there all over the gospel record, sometimes with a little different nuance of meaning and application. but this is the heart and soul of His instruction on discipleship.

Now let me set the context for you even broader than just this particular message beginning in verse 24. The 10th chapter in total is our Lord's preparation and sending of the twelve, and so it is in the context of the training of the twelve that He gives this general teaching about discipleship. He starts out for example in chapter 10 with just the twelve, and then the chapter begins to telescope, and it telescopes outward until finally it embraces all men in all times, in all places who will name the name of Jesus Christ. It starts with the twelve and even names them. But it begins to move outward, and I think the key is verse 25, the end of the verse mentions, "till the Son of man be come." In other words it talks about the second coming, and that is the key to seeing this instruction as pressing all the way through all time until Jesus comes again. Some of what He says in the first 25 verses is explicitly to the twelve, some of it begins to reach beyond them, some of it is explicitly for that time and that place, and some of it begins to reach beyond, but by the time you hit verse 24 it is a full-orbed general instruction on the matter of being a genuine disciple. He uses general terms such as, the disciple, or the servant, or whosoever, or he that, and He says, he that, he that, he that over and over, it could be any he, any whosoever, anyone who calls himself a servant or a follower, a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And so in a sense then we're looking at something that was for them and for us, what a marvelous thing that the Lord should have such a clear word on discipleship that it embraces all people in all time and all places. This is the genius of Scripture, it knows no limitation as to date, it touches us as profoundly as it touched them in their own lifetime.

Now basically speaking it is written to a disciple, verse 24, and a

servant of the Lord. That would be anyone who follows Jesus Christ.

Anyone who lines up to go after Jesus Christ. Anyone who decides that he wants to belong to Christ. Now having said that, it is important that we learn the marks of a disciple so we can tell the true from the false, right? And what are they? Well the hallmark is in verse 24 and 28. "The disciple is not above his teacher, the servant is not above his lord. It is enough," in other words it is sufficient, "for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his lord." And you remember we talked about Luke 8:40 where it says, and when a disciple is fully matured he will be like his teacher.

The goal then of a true disciple is Christ-likeness, that's the basic hallmark. First John 2:0, "If we say we abide in him then we ought to walk as he walked." In other words if you say you are a Christian it ought to be manifest in the way you live, right? And if it isn't then you're not very convincing, and you may not be a Christian at all.

This is the message of the Scripture, I'm absolutely appalled at how many people miss this message. But the Scripture is inevitably saying, you say you follow Christ then show me your Christ-likeness. Is His character manifest in you? It has to be if you're genuine, it has to be. For you are in the process of becoming like your Lord, it doesn't mean that there aren't some lapses, oh there are. There are times when we fail but there is a flow and a pattern of Christ likeness, there.

So the first thing is that we are called to be like Him, that is the meaning of discipleship. So when somebody comes along and says as J.p. Murray of Trinity College Dublin once said, "I am a Christian but inoffensively so." What do you mean by that? Well I mean that I don't want it to interfere with anything. Then that's not what Christianity is. There is this basic Biblical principle that if you follow Jesus Christ, you will be becoming more and more like Him.

And if you're not then you may not be a Christian at all. It's also possible that you might be a wayward disobedient Christian, and this might be just a seasonal thing for you. But there's also the possibility you're not even in the kingdom.

Second element of this first hallmark, to be like Christ is to be treated like Christ was treated. Look at verse 25, the second half,

and if they called the master of the house Beelzebub or Satan, you shouldn't be surprised if they call you evil names as well. In other words, if they say that your leader, the worthy one, the highest one, the glorious one is Satan, if they don't have any compunction about saying that about a perfect person, you think they're going to have any compunctions about condemning you as an imperfect one? And if they call your leader Satan, don't you think they're going to identify you who are less than he is with the same system? They're going to blast you as they blasted him. So we see two things that mark a disciple, one, he is like Christ, two, he inevitably will...treat...be treated as Christ was treated. Now that's the heart of the text. Jesus is sending out the twelve and He basically...He says to them, the world is hostile. Go back to verse 18, "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." Verse 17, "Beware of men; they will scourge you. They will bring you before their kings and their governors." "They will deliver you up." Verse 10. Verse 21, your own family will kill you or deliver you to be killed. Verse 22, "You will be hated." Verse 25, "You will be persecuted." "But the disciple is not above his lord." That is your goal is to be like Him and in being like Him you will inevitably be treated like He was treated.

May I hasten to add that the more Christ like you become the more of a problem you become. It may be manifest in your family as we see down in verse 84 when we'll get to that, He came to bring a sword to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother etc, etc. "And a man's foes may be they of his own household."

It may be in your job, in your school, in your neighborhood, in your relationships, inevitably the more Christ like you become the more you become an irritant to the system. So a genuine mark of a disciple is that he is like Christ so much so that he tends to be treated like Jesus Christ was treated, and that simply means beloved that you cannot survive living the way the world expects people to live. And if you do there is no genuineness there. So discipleship involves an identification with Christ in His person and His rejection. I think Paul summed it up so wonderfully in, in Philippians 5 he said, "That I may know him," first, "the power of his resurrection." That was the

positive identification, wasn't it? That I may know the fullness of His power, His person, His life, and the fellowship of His what?

Sufferings, that was the negative part of it, "being made conformable unto his death." I want to be identified with His power and His person, and I know I will be identified also with His pain and His suffering. That's how it is for a true disciple. We are like the Lord and we are to be treated like the Lord was treated.

All right now that puts us in the middle of a hostile environment.

And I really think that we need to understand this and the tendency for us is to try to make things comfortable and make things easy and, and soothe over the waters and never be confrontive and never be bold and so forth. And that is really not what the Lord wants, that is the picture of an untrue disciple. Frankly I feel that we go back Matthew, you know where Jesus said, "The way is narrow, and the gate is narrow, and few there be that (what? that) find it." There are very few people He says in effect that are genuinely saved, there are masses of people identifying with the movement but you can pick out the truly saved because they are confronting their world, and they are being treated as their Master was treated. Not necessarily constantly, prolifically and totally but there are times of persecution, times of confrontation, and they respond as a genuine disciple.

Now there are five marks of a true disciple. The Lord then goes on to give these in the section all the way to verse 42. Now we're not going to be able to cover all of those in one lesson, maybe we'll cover them in five lessons, I'm not sure. I've already done the whole chapter, I just have trouble getting it all out, and I really don't know till I get up here where I'm going to end. Some of you are aware of that. Number one we said, a true disciple fears not the world. A true disciple...this is the one we talked about in our last discussion, fears not the world. Verse 28 to 31. Now He says you're going to be in a hostile environment, you're going to be in a difficult place. I believe there were times in, in America years back when we were so Christian in our orientation that this was somewhat lessened and mitigated, but I think it's going to become more and more a problem.

I received a letter last week that told me...it was written by The

American Civil Liberties Union, and it came...I don't know why I got it, I think somebody passed it on to me, I'm not on their mailing list by any stretch of the imagination. But I received this letter and what it said in there was, watch out for the Christians, they are deadly. If they had their way homosexuals and abortionists would all be killed, and it went on for like five pages warning people about Christians, and about people with morality.

So the battlelines are being drawn. And it may be that the protectiveness that we've known in our Christian society here is lost in our post Christian society, and we may see a little more of the kind of heat. And by the way, may I confess to you? That I, I've been here twelve and a half years and secretly, at least for the last six or seven, down deep inside I have wished for all out persecution on the church. You say, what in the world are you wishing that for? Now I want you to know I have not prayed that yet, that is not a prayer request. The Lord is listening, He knows. That is not a prayer request. But there's something in me that wishes that, you know why? Because the heat would blow away the chaff, and then we'd know what we really had, and we could mark out the ones that weren't saved and go after them. And we could find out who's really committed, it would all clear, see? As I say, I haven't quite come to a request yet, time will tell. But we see that the mark of a true disciple is that he doesn't fear the world. And He gives three reasons, and He encourages them to show their genuineness in this way, in verse 28 He says, fear not, in verse 28 He says, fear not, and in verse 31 He says, fear not. And you remember what we went over? He says don't be afraid, first of all because of vindication.

Someday the truth will be revealed, verse 28. Someday what is hidden will be made manifest. In other words God's going to overturn all the inequities and He's going to vindicate the righteous. Don't be afraid of the world, the world will be condemned and you will be glorified, you will be lifted up, you will be honored, you will be exalted. If you just have an eternal perspective, see? The true disciple has come out of this world, his affections are not of the world, he is transcending the world, he is a new creation, he's living in the heavenlies, his citizenship is there and he has an eternal perspective

and he's not afraid of the world because he knows ultimately it'll be overturned and he'll be vindicated. He lives for eternity's value.

Secondly, is what I called veneration in verse 2? He says, "What I tell you in (in) darkness, speak in light; what you hear in the ear, proclaim upon the housetops. And don't fear them" that is men "who can only kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul;" or the real part of man, "but fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." And that is just a comparative title for God, don't fear men, fear God. And I'll tell you something, if you truly fear God you don't fear men. What can men do to you? They can only kill the body at the worst and God is the one who controls eternity and the soul of men. In other words what He's saying is instead of fearing men, fear God. And it comes down to that, doesn't it? Let's say you're in a situation where you know you ought to speak for Christ, you know you ought to stand up for Christ, you know you ought to say something for Christ, there's something going on that isn't right and you know you ought to confront it. Maybe it's at your job or in your classroom or whatever, and you know you ought to do what's right and so the fear of God says, I must speak for God, the fear of men says, shut up, don't make a fool of yourself. And it comes right down to that, and you can determine by how you reacted whether you fear men more or God more. But a true disciple fears God, because he knows the worst that men could do is with the body and God is the one who controls eternal souls.

And then the third thing, He says is we don't fear the world because we know in the end God values us more than anything. Two sparrows, He even knows though they're worth a penny every time one of them hops or dies, the hair of your head, He's got it all labeled and numbered.

Now if He cares about sparrows, don't you think He cares about you?

So on the one hand we don't fear because of promise. On the other hand we don't fear because of power. On the other hand we don't fear because of protection. God cares. And so the first mark of a true disciple is he doesn't fear the world, he'll stand up and boldly speak, he'll be confronted with the evil system and He'll confess Christ.

Now, let's go to the second one, verse S2 and S3. I call this a true disciple favors the Lord. Fears not the world and favors the Lord. In other words when it comes down to the decision he'll favor the Lord. Verse S2, just one word, "therefore." "Whosoever, therefore."

What do you mean, therefore? Well it's all built on the previous passage that's why I had to go over it. If you know that you have the promise of God for vindication, if you know you have the power of God, and that He is the one you truly venerate and fear, if you know you have the protection of God therefore you would be willing before men to confess Jesus Christ without fear, right? So He says, where..."Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father, who is in heaven." You mean you have to confess before men to be a true Christian? Sure, because in order to be a true Christian you have to believe one, that in the end God will gain the victory and lift up His people. And you believe that God has a greater power than men, and you believe that God is a Father who cares for His children, and if you believe that then you're going to be willing to confess Christ. That's just basic. If you've got the right doctrine of God, you're going to be anxious to confess Jesus as your Lord, and get in on that blessedness. And so in view of God's promise and power and protection, what could be more reasonable for a disciple of Christ than to fearlessly confess Jesus before men no matter how hostile they might be. Any shame would be overcome by eternal glory. Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because I know it's the power of God unto salvation." I'm not ashamed of it because I know its power. He was not ashamed also because he knew God would protect him. I mean after all he'd been stoned one time and God raised him from the dead. If God didn't want him dead he wouldn't be dead. And so there's the real heart of discipleship.

Now I want to look at verses 32 and 33 and it's a very simple word that I want to share with you this morning, and I didn't even plan to do this and in the first service I found myself doing it for forty five minutes and so I just figured the Lord was in it. Now if I can remember what I said I'll say it again. The real heart of discipleship is to be committed to being like Jesus Christ, and to being like Jesus

Christ means to be being treated as He was treated and that means having to face a hostile world and to face it fearlessly, and in the midst of it to be willing to confess before men, Jesus as your Lord, and have the confidence that He'll do the same before the Father.

Now verse 32, confess. What does that mean? That means to affirm, to acknowledge, to agree. The idea is a verbal statement of identification, faith, confidence' trust, belief in Jesus as your Lord, and subsequent life that follows that confession. You confess before men. You can confess with your mouth, as Romans 10, and you confess with your life as you live out that confession. God will protect His own, God will care for His own, God is the ultimate judge of the earth and so we have no excuse for shrinking from our duty through the fear of men.

This goes for times of persecution as well as good times. Whether you're standing in front of a, an agreeing group and confessing the Lord, whether you're standing in front of a neutral group or whether you're standing in front of an utterly hostile group, a true Christian confesses. Now look at verse S2, here's the key, "Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me" here it comes, "before men." In front of men literally it says. Standing up in front of men. This emphasizes the public character of the confession, and it cannot be reduced in any way. You cannot be saved genuinely unless you are one who does this. If someone is not willing to do this, if you think you're some secret Christian and nobody knows you've missed it folks. Romans 10, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, having believed in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be (what?) saved. For with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

It says, as well as with the heart, where there is faith. There must be this verification. Now this is not a work of man, this is a work of God. Some people say, that's work's righteousness if you have to confess, if you have to do anything. Listen, that's what the Bible says. The Bible says it's all of God, and the Bible says you must confess with your mouth, therefore confessing with your mouse... mouth must be the work of God. And so it's going to cost us something to be a Christian, it must be public, it must be genuine, and its

genuineness is marked by our willingness to confess, to affirm and acknowledge that we belong to Christ no matter how hostile the elements around us.

In First John 4:15, "Whosoever" just listen to it, "shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God." How do you know a true Christian? Well he's one who confesses Jesus as the Son of God. How does he confess? With his mouth and with his life. he makes that confession. That's the mark of a true disciple. Sometimes people say, well so and so you know once walked the aisle or once did this or did that but now their life gives no evidence. Then they are not a genuine disciple, for this is the mark, this is the mark. In Revelation 2:13 He says to the church at Pergamus, "I know thy works, where thou dwellest, you dwell where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast my name, and have not denied my faith, even in those days in which Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you."

He says, you have named My name and you have never denied My faith even in the midst of persecution when somebody died. And that's the point, that's how you tell a true believer, the hallmark of genuineness. You see a kind of a converse illustration, Second Timothy, I'll just mention this to you but Paul says, "I'm now ready to be offered, the time of my departure is at hand. I've fought a good fight, finished the course, kept the faith;" talking about the warfare and the struggle and all, and he says in verse 10, "That Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world." Here was a guy who identified with Paul, followed along, said he was a disciple, but when it got tough and the heat was on he was gone. True disciples confess the Lord in the face of any hostility at all. This is a good place for us to examine ourselves, you know we say to ourselves, boy I, I'm...find myself ashamed often to speak of Christ in my family or here and there, I wonder what I'd do in the middle of a persecution.

Well that's a good point, maybe you'd better examine your heart, see if you're really genuine. Now may I hasten to add that there are lapses in all of our lives as Christians where we fail to live up to the standard, right? I mean that's what forgiveness is all about, if the Lord said, all right if you're a genuine disciple this is how it'll be, and

you were always that way you'd be perfect. There will be lapses, can you think of one classic individual who was a true disciple but lapsed into denying his Lord? Of course. Peter. He denied his Lord, but you know what his reaction was? Ha. he went out and what? "Wept bitterly." His heart was broken, because he knew the standard and he was broken when he failed to live up to it. Then there was Timothy, imagine Timothy the protege of Paul, the finest that he ever disciplined, the man who was to take over, the pastor who followed him into the church at Ephesus, this incredible young man with all the talents and the gifts that God could ever give a young man, and Paul writes to him in Second Timothy chapter 1 verse 8 and says, Timothy, stop being ashamed of our Lord. How would you like to have to hear that from the one who disciplined you? Stop being ashamed of our Lord, and of me, His prisoner. Timothy had a lapse.

Peter had a lapse. I've had them, you've had them. But still there's a turning around, and Timothy turned around and Peter wept bitterly and he turned around. A true disciple confesses. As it says in Philippians 2:11, "Confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, to the glory of God." That is the mark of a genuine Christian, a willingness to speak no matter how hostile the environment might be. Now, you look at your life and you're the only one that can really tell. I don't know you well enough, cause I don't know what goes on inside. That is all of you, some of you I know. But you need to ask yourself the question and it's a fair question as Paul said to the Corinthians, "Let a man examine himself." Take inventory. Are you willing to stand up and confess Jesus Christ? If you will, look at the end of verse 52, "He will confess you before the Father, who is in heaven."

What does that mean? That means He will say to God on the day of judgment, this one belongs to Me. He will affirm His loyalty to you as you have affirmed your loyalty to Him. Now this is the way our Lord is looking at true discipleship, and I really think in many ways this, itself was the first of many pointed messages that...messages that should have pierced deeply into the heart of one named Judas Iscariot, for he was the false among the true. But the Lord says, that's the one I will confess before my Father in heaven. You can tell a true Christian because they're willing to confess Christ, oh

there'll be lapses, times when they fail but the pattern of their life will be a willingness and a desire to be more like Christ and if need be to be treated even as He was treated. And that kind of a person the Lord will confess before the Father. I just ...I mean I can hardly imagine the wonder of someday standing before God, and having the Lord Jesus Christ say, this one belongs to Me. What an incredible thought, what a marvelous promise. It's kind of a double loyalty.

When we are loyal enough to Jesus Christ to speak His name in the midst of any situation He will speak our name in the Father's presence.

Archaeologists have found a lot of interesting information in their studies. Some of what they have found out of the Roman Empire is I think especially interesting because it fits of course Biblical data in the New Testament. There was a governor in the province of Bithynia by the name of Pliny, I've mentioned his name in the past, and Trajan was the Roman emperor at the time of Pliny ruling in Bithynia or sort of leading Bithynia under the emperor. Now on one occasion Pliny wrote a letter to Trajan and he was trying to explain to Trajan some of the problems he was having with Christians in his in his little ah, province. Some anonymous informers had come to Pliny and told him there were Christians among the populous and so he decided that he would try to sort of stamp them out and so he called for all Christians to immediately abandon Christ, revoke Christ, reject Christ, and worship the gods of Rome and most specifically the emperor himself, and in those days to worship the emperor you drank wine and you offered incense and you did a whole big pagan thing to the emperor to show you worshiped him. And in the letter he wrote and told Trajan that he had tried this, he was trying to get in good with him I guess, and he had tried all of these things and tried them and he confronted the Christians and he closed by saying this, "None of these acts, those who are really Christians can be compelled to do."

Isn't that interesting? From a pagan. If they're real Christians, he said, they won't do this. And of course they went through all kinds of torture. You say, but I can't imagine that, I mean I shut up when somebody comes around that's not a Christian in a, in a good en-

vironment, what would I ever do in that environment? That's a fair question and I think there's a certain amount of God given grace for those kinds of times. But you see that's where we're right back to that narrow gate, there are a lot less real Christians than we think.

Now let's look at the other side of it, verse 33, "But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father, who is in heaven." That's the converse side, that's the other side.

Now this could speak of open rejecters, people who deny Christ flagrantly, openly, who have nothing to do with Him, who don't identify with Him, who despise Him, who hate Him. people who blaspheme His name. My son told me the other night that he was down with some friends and they were walking down the street and a little fella was on a corner preaching Christ. And he was...he said, dad, Matt said to me, dad, he was right on, I mean he...his message was right, you know and he'd stand in the wings and make sure it was according to Hoyle, you know? And so he listened to him for awhile and he said, he was right on and the message was right. And he said a bunch of people came up and thought they were real smart and they got up within about three inches of his face and just cursed him, and said all kinds of obscenities about Jesus, right in his face. And they mocked, he said it was awful, it was just awful.

So he and the one he was with walked up apparently and put themselves between the two, kind of taking a, sort of a stand for the Lord in defense of this fella. But he said I couldn't believe the obscenities they said in the name of Jesus. Now on the one hand there are those kinds of people who will deny Jesus that way. but I don't think they're really the primary issue in verse 33. I think the primary issue in verse 33...and that little story would have been how the other man who was preaching reacted. If he was a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ that intimidation would not have affected him negatively, it probably would have made him more bold than ever, and that's in fact what Matt told me happened. If he had been a false disciple he probably would have clammed up and run. In fact he probably wouldn't have been there to begin with. But verse 33 is talking about someone in the sphere of Christianity, someone in the surroundings of discipleship, someone who follows, outwardly.

Who goes along, but when it comes to the test, he denies the Lord. You could deny the Lord by silence, did you know that? You could deny the Lord by just not saying anything.

You know, the secret Christian. people sometimes say to me you know I...I'm a Christian. Well, isn't that wonderful, are you reaching the folks around you? Oh, they don't know. They don't know? No, they don't know. One of these days I...If, if they don't know then maybe you're not a Christian at all. You could deny Him by absolute silence, just don't say anything. You could also deny Him by your actions, just live the way everybody else lives and you're denying Christ. You can deny Him by your words, you can just sort of, ah no, well I'm you know. Saying the things they say, talking the way they talk. You can deny Christ a lot of ways, short of someday facing a firing squad and denying Him. But that kind of a denial it says in verse 38 will be repaid by a denial on an eternal level when the Lord denies before the Father in heaven. Notice in verse S2, "I will confess," in verse SS, "I will deny," and the future tense verb points to the final judgment. And I think maybe what you're going to see here are people who are going to come up and say, Lord, it's us. We did this in Your name, we did that in Your name and this other thing in Your name, and He'll say, "Depart from me, I never (what? I never) knew you." He will deny that He even knows them, why? Because their life was a denial of Him. What is it you say, and what is it you do that affirms your confession of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

Very important. As I've said before you know, the gnawing anxiety of the heart of the pastor, the shepherd is that there is someone in the midst of the sheep who isn't real and wakes up in eternal damnation.

Fearful thought. And the Lord had that in His heart all the time. I think everyday of the Lord's sojourn with His disciples He was deeply drawn to the situation of Judas. And I think Judas is the classic of this, he was going along pretending to belong but when it got tough he got out, and got some money. And in effect said, He's not the Messiah, I gotta buy my way out of this deal. He didn't just run he tried to take as much as he could with him. But on judgment day ohh, what a day, fearful, fearful thing.

Look with me and we'll just kind of wrap it up at this point in Matthew 25, verse 84. Here's a kind of a picture of the judgment and how it might be, this of course is the judgment of the sheep and goats at the end of the tribulation, the judgment of the nations.

The Lord comes and sets the sheep on His right hand, those are the ones who love Him and know Him and the goats on the left, those are the ones who don't know Him. Verse 84, "The King said to those on the right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." In other words He says, these are Mine, come and inherit your kingdom. They were the ones that confessed Him, that's right, they were the ones that confessed the Lordship of Christ. How did they do that? Oh they did it by their mouth, Romans 10. They did it before men, Matthew 10.

But look else how they did it, "For I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; I was naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came unto me. And then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee; or thirsty, and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger, and take thee in; and naked, and clothed thee? And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as you've done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you've done it unto me." What is this saying? It is saying this, listen now beloved, you confess Christ with your mouth, that's the public affirmation of your faith, you confess Christ before men. No matter how hostile they might be, and that shows your genuineness. And here you confess Christ by your actions, by so living in the world that you manifest to His people His own heart of affection, do you see that?

And love. And if you have not that love how can you say God dwells in you, says John. In other words you will confess Christ by feeding someone who's hungry and giving someone food when they need it, by quenching the thirst of one who's hurting, by giving a home to a stranger, clothes to someone naked' by visiting the sick

and calling on the prisoners. Why? How does this fit? This is a manifestation that you're like Christ, isn't it? Because that's how He would respond.

Do you confess Christ with your mouth? Do you confess Christ before men, no matter how hostile they are? And then do you confess Christ in your lifestyle by reaching out as He reached out? By loving as He loved, by caring as He cared? You remember I told you earlier in chapter 10 that the credentials, the credentials of a true disciple are not only the power of God but the compassion of God. And if you . . . the hallmark of a Christian is to be like Christ then you ought to manifest Christ likeness in your relationships. You know I guess I worry about people who say they're Christians, but I don't see Christ, I don't see attitudes and actions and words that radiate Christ, and I wonder. Well maybe they poke around the church a little bit, but that isn't the issue. Maybe they can come and sit and kind of survive the service, leave. Or maybe they can look at the world dying, going to hell around them and they don't have any concern, they just don't seem to care they're indifferent. And I guess I ask myself, they're not like Christ.

Christ could see a crowd and all He could do was weep over it, Christ could see an injustice and He wanted to make it right, Christ saw somebody hungry He wanted to feed him, He saw somebody thirsty wanted to give him water, saw somebody who was sick and wanted to touch that individual. I mean...and I certainly am the first one to admit that I'm not all I ought to be but I see a progression in my life for which I thank God. I can take spiritual inventory and say that's not John MacArthur loving that way that's gotta be Christ in me. That's the mark.

So I ask you to look at your life. There's a cost, that's open confession, and if you're willing to do it then He'll confess you before the Father. He'll say, that one's Mine, that's real, that's genuine. And if by your life and your lip you deny Him then He'll deny you. Now I'm just telling you what it says, the way it says it. The inventory belongs to you. You say, well I look at my life and I fall so short, I see those lapses, what is your response to those lapses? Do you weep bitterly? Is there a certain brokenness, do you ask His forgive-

ness, do you say that's not what I want to be and do you move on? That's the attitude and the heart of a believer. Do you don't...if you don't even know the lapses are going on then you're in real trouble.

Well there is more marks of a Christian than that, and we'll look at the next one next week, and you know what it is? Sometimes a true disciple also not only fears not the world and favors the Lord but forsakes his own family.

I talked to a lady this week and she said, since I became a Christian my father will not speak to me. That's just part of what happens, and we'll get into that next time.

Prayer

Thank You our Lord for showing us again this morning what is it that marks true discipleship, it's been a simple message and we know it's from You because it wasn't what was really planned. And so we accept the fact that You said this to us, that You spoke through this pulpit. God we know that it's so easy to just slide along and never really get into self examination, oh God may there be no one here who will perish under the illusion that they are genuine, bring whatever needs to be brought into their life to force the issue of examination, that there might be no confusion and no deception from that prince of deceivers.

And Father those of us who are true disciples we, we react so to those times when we fail. We are ashamed sometimes. And we do not confess You as openly and boldly as we should in circumstances when we are given opportunity, and Lord those things break our hearts.

Help us to renew the commitment to be unashamed, to get an eternal perspective that says someday You're going to reward the righteous, that says Your power is greater than all and Your protection is in our behalf, what would we fear. May we be willing to confess with our lips before men and with the way we live that we are like Jesus Christ. For we're committed to Him as our Lord, wanting to be like Him. willing to be treated as He was treated if need be.

God raise up out of this congregation thousands of people who are true, that we might touch this city and this world we live in, for Your glory and the advance of Your kingdom.

Father bring those that You would have to come and do the work that You would do in every heart. Help us to be genuine, real disciples. Thank You for meeting every need that is brought to You, for Christ's sake. Amen.

The Hallmarks of Discipleship Part 3

John MacArthur
Matthew 10:34-42
8.30.1981

Look with me at the tenth chapter of Matthew...Matthew chapter 10. Our text continues to be verses 24 through 42, Matthew 10:24 through 42. And we're looking at the characteristic of a true disciple...the hallmarks of genuineness.

Theodore Roosevelt once said, "There has never yet been a man who led a life of ease, whose name is worth remembering." Certainly when the Lord calls us to be His disciples, He does not call us to a life of ease.

A missionary who has influenced my life greatly because of what I read is a man named Henry Martyn. He went to India and spent a lifetime, really, there. Already in India he had done more than his share of missionary service when he announced that he was going to go to Persia because God had laid it upon his heart to translate the New Testament and the Psalms into the Persian language.

By then he was an old man.

They told him that if he stayed in India he would die because of the heat. And then they told him that Persia was hotter than India. But he went nonetheless.

He studied the Persian language. Translated the entire New Testament and the Psalms in nine months. And then he was told that he couldn't print it or circulate it until he received the Shah's permission. So he traveled 800 miles to Tehran, and he was denied permission to see the Shah. He turned around and made a 400 mile trip to

find the British ambassador. The ambassador gave him the proper kinds of papers and so forth and sent him back to the Shah. And so he traveled another 400 miles...that makes 1200 miles. He rode this at night on the back of a mule, and rested during the daytime... protected only by a strip of canvas from the sweltering desert heat.

He finally arrived and was received by the Shah who gave him permission for the Scriptures to be printed and circulated in persia.

Ten days later in 1712 he died. But shortly before he had written in his diary this statement: "I sat and thought with sweet comfort and peace of my God. In solitude my Companion, my Friend, and Comforter."

Certainly not a life of ease but a life worth remembering.

Bound up in the spirit of Henry Martyn is the key to genuine discipleship. It is to be so utterly consumed with the cause that you have no thought for your own life. Look with me at verse 23 of Matthew 10. "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life shall lose it. And he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it."

Now that is the heart of our text. That really says it.

This is a text all about commitment and all about dedication and all about self-denial, and all about self-sacrifice, and all about cross bearing. It is a text about genuine discipleship' selfless sacrificial discipleship. It is a text about commitment to the divine will at any cost. It is a text about the Lordship of Christ.

Now there are many people who claim to follow Jesus. There are many people who claim to be His disciples, and there always have been. But our Lord points to the proof here of genuineness.

And may I remind you that this message about genuineness is a common message from the Lord. But seemingly one that has been much overlooked in the Christian church in contemporary times. The Lord repeatedly speaks about genuineness, true disciples as over against false, the real as over against the fake. For Him this matter of who is real is essential. And so He talks about real salvation as opposed to that which is facade very frequently.

In Matthew alone it is a constant issue. For example. if you go back with me to chapter 5 verse 20, the first message our Lord gave,

He said this: "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." And here He says there is a genuine righteousness, and there is a false righteousness and unless you have the real thing you'll not enter the kingdom. And He is focusing on the non-reality of the righteousness of the Pharisees.

If you go to the seventh chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, you will find in verse 13 the same focus. "Enter in at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there be who go in that way. Because narrow is the gate and hard, or compressed, is the way which leadeth unto life and few there be that find it." In other words, He says there are these two roads which seemingly go to God but the one is real and the other is false. The one leads to life, the other to destruction. Make sure you're on the right road.

And in verse 17: "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth bad fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall...what?...

know them." And again He contrasts the genuine and the false. Then in verse 21 again He says: "Not everyone that says, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom, but he that does the will of My Father."

And then in verse 24 to 27 He says: "There are two people who build religious houses. One builds on a rock, and it stands. And one builds on sand, and it falls."

Now, go with me for a moment to chapter 13, and the Lord begins the chapter with a discussion of a sower and seed. And the sower in verse 3 went forth to sow. And when he sowed some of the seed, verse 4 says, fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them.

Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith sprang up because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns and the

thorns sprang up and choked them. But other seed fell upon good ground and brought forth fruit, some hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

In other words, the Lord says in response to the preaching of the Gospel, there are at least four different things that occur.

And only one of them is really genuine reception. And He goes on to describe all of that clear through verse 25.

He speaks in verse 24 of the same issue again. This time it is a parable of a man who sows wheat in a field and an enemy who sows tares, and the inability to tell them apart and the fact in verse 30 that they have to grow together until the Lord tells them apart. For He alone is the one who knows whose real.

You find it also in verse 47 of chapter 13, the kingdom is like a net cast into the sea and gathered every kind in it. When it was full they drew it to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels and threw the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the age, the angels will come forth and separate the wicked from among the righteous and cast them into the furnace of fire. There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

In a sense, the church is that net. And it pulls in all kinds of things that have to ultimately be separated...the true and the false.

So, we're not surprised now when we go back to chapter 10.

And we find a lesson on genuineness again because this fits our Lord's pattern of thinking as He approaches who is a real disciple.

The Apostle Paul put it this way, and I think its...its a good word for us to remember in this context. In Romans he said:

"All Israel is not Israel." That's a very, very provocative insightful statement. All Israel is not Israel. In other words, all who are outwardly Jews are not inwardly Jews. All who are outwardly identified as the people of God are not inwardly the people of God. And we could say then, all disciples are not disciples. All followers of Jesus are not followers of Jesus. We could even say all the church, as we see it, is not the church. And that's what our Lord is saying here. And here we find the marks in Matthew 10:24 to 42, of a genuine disciple. The marks of the real thing. And in this passage our Lord is preparing His disciples, sending them out, and He gives marvelous

instruction to them, then broadens His instruction to encompass the whole of discipleship. And I really think the message here is a message, first of all, about genuineness.

Secondly, its a message about effect. Who is a real disciple and how does he affect his world, and how is he affected by his world.

Now let's go back to verse 24 and find the initial hallmark of discipleship that we've been mentioning. The first characteristic of a true disciple is that he is like his Lord. He bears the character of Christ. That's why in Acts 11:26 they were called Christians...Christians...iani means belonging to the party of.

They were little Christs. They belonged to Christ. They manifested His character. They bore the marks of His pattern of life. A true Christian not only wears the name of Christ but he bears the character of Christ. And that's what it says in 24, "The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the servant above his lord, but it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his lord." And we went into that in great detail. A true disciple is going to manifest the character of Christ. Oh, they'll be lapses, to be sure, because of our humanness, but nonetheless there will be evidence of Christlikeness in the life of a true believer.

So, basically, the hallmark is that we are like Jesus Christ.

If we say we abide in Him, 1 John 2, we ought to walk as He walked.

That is the only verification there is. Christ's life produced in us, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ live it in me. And that must be made manifest. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation, old things have passed away and all things have become new." That newness must be manifest.

So, the mark then is Christlike attitude, character manifestation.

But, the secondary hallmark is that if we are like Christ, we will find ourselves being treated like Christ was treated, that's in verse 25 also. If they call the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? So, what does it mean to be genuine? It means to manifest the character of Christ and thus to be treated as He was treated. When we move into the world with Christlike character the world will react to us the way they reacted

to Him. That's the message of John 15 and 1B, isn't it? Don't be surprised if the world hate..hates you because it hated Me. So then, a true disciple is Christlike and is treated like Christ was treated.

So, if you're genuine you can expect the world to reject you.

That's what it means to be identified with Christ. Therefore we can now understand how to tell a true disciple by how he reacts to what the world does. So the Lord then, having given the principle in verse 27 and 28, then moves on and gives five marks of a true disciple. And they are sort of notations about his response to the pressure and persecution of the world.

First of all, we said that a true disciple fears not the world.

verses 28 to 31. And we've already gone into that in detail, but a true disciple is not afraid of the world. He's not intimidated by the world, first of all, because he knows he will be vindicated.

verse 27.

Secondly, because he venerates God, or worships God, verse 27, and 28. And thirdly, because he knows how valued he is by God who will care for him, verse 27 to 31.

So, a true disciple is not intimidated by the world. He's not afraid of the world. When the world is hostile, when the world is persecuting, when the world opposes against him, when the world ostracizes him, or alienates him, he's not afraid, because he commits himself to the Lord. He is utterly and totally given over to the Lordship of Christ at any price, even the hostility of the world.

Secondly, and we studied this last time, a true disciple favors the Lord. A true disciple favors the Lord. Verse 32 and 33 indicate that he will confess Christ before men, and thus be confessed before the Father by Christ. He will not deny Him, but he will confess Him. In other words, when the heat is on, and the pressure is on, and the persecution's on, and the world is attacking the true believer will confess Christ. He won't bail out. He won't deny his faith. He won't recant. He'll stand up and proclaim Christ no matter what happens. And he is the one whom Christ will confess belongs to Him.

So, a true disciple, a true believer, a true Christian is one who fears not the world. He is so committed to the Lordship of Christ that he's not afraid of what men might do to him, and he favors the

Lord. When he comes to the point of having to confess, he will confess and not deny Jesus Christ no matter what it costs him.

Let's go to a third, a true disciple forsakes the family. A true disciple forsakes the family. Verse S4, our Lord says: "Think not, or don't be under the illusion, that I am come to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword." Now this is a most dramatic statement. He says - Now some of you who are real will confess Me when you're brought to the tribunals, and the courts of men, and you have to face men even in day to day life.

Some of you will deny Me because it isn't that important to you and you'll save your neck and your reputation, and whatever else.

And that just proves that I have come to bring a sword, I cause divisions. I force people to decisions that separate one from another.

The very fact that some confess Christ and some deny Christ indicates the coming of Christ causes divisions. And so Jesus builds on that reality.

Now the Jews pretty well had figured out from the Old Testament that when the Messiah came He was..He was coming to bring peace. And we understand that. That's part of it. They were aware of that. They were aware that Isaiah ? said that He was to be the prince of peace. They were aware, for example, of the psalmist and it's a marvelous word of hope in Psalm 72, as it talks of the kingdom. It says the mountains shall bring peace to the people. It says in the days...in His days, rather, the days of Messiah, shall the righteous flourish and abundance of peace as long as the moon endures. In Isaiah chapter 2 verse 8 it says, "Many people shall go and say, Come ye and let us go up to the "Mountain of the Lord," this is in the millennium, "to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths, for out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." And then it says: "He shall judge among the nations, shall rebuke many people, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation neither shall they learn war anymore." In that day there won't even be any weapons because there won't be any need for them' there won't be any war. There will be peace. And so they knew that the Messiah

was coming to bring peace.

And as Jesus is speaking to the disciples, you see, they had already begun...begun to experience the peace in their hearts that came with being with Jesus. And they may have been anticipating that this bliss would just extend to everybody.

That is, they were sent out to preach, the whole world would fall at their feet. That the Messiah had arrived. And that He was...a King of peace, and they were experiencing this euphoria of being with Him. And everybody would just respond and it would all be a wonderful, peaceful kingdom.

But they didn't want to be just...just isolated to that view.

That wouldn't be the picture. So the Lord says - Don't be under an illusion about me coming to bring peace. I've come not to send peace, but a sword. Now it's expressed in that verse as if it was the intention of our Lord's coming, and consequences are often expressed as if they were intentions. For in the ultimate sovereignty of God they have to be seen that way. But here the direct result of His coming is described as if it were His deliberate intention. And this is, in a sense, a paradox. The Lord is saying on the one hand - I'm a prince of peace, on the one hand I've come to save...to bring peace, but on the other hand you have to realize that there's going to be a sword.

And the Old Testament saw both of these things, in a way.

The Old Testament saw the...the fracturing, it saw the breaking asunder. For example, in the sixth verse of the seventh chapter of Micah it says this, talking about the time when the Lord comes:

"The son dishonors the father, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, a man's enemies are the men of his own house." That is almost directly quoted by our Lord in the next verses.

So, the Old Testament saw the Messiah as a King of peace, but also saw a division as potentiated by His coming. Because there would be some that would accept, and there would be some that would reject. And you know, the Jews also believed this. In some of the Rabbinical writings we find this statement: "In the period when the Son of David shall come, a daughter will rise up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

The son despises his father, the daughter rebels against the mother' the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law, and a man's enemies are they of his own household." end quote. That is in the Rabbinical writings.

So, they knew on the one hand the Messiah would come for peace, but on the other hand He would come to cause a division.

It's as if Jesus is saying - It's just going to be the division that you're going to see for the moment. The intervention of God in history through the incarnation of Christ is going to split and fracture the world into segments, into parties that will be pitted against one another. So don't be under any illusion as you go out as a disciple to think the whole world's going to fall at your feet. You're going to go rushing home and tell everybody you've become a Christian. You're going to tell everybody at school, you're just...and everybody's going to wonderfully line up to sign on the dotted line. It's not going to happen.

In fact, Martin Luther said: quote: "If our gospel were received in peace, it wouldn't be the true gospel." end quote. And he, if anybody ever saw it divide, saw it divide. Stuck in the Catholic Church he preached the truth and it didn't bring peace, it created the biggest rift in the history of religion. It effectively shattered the complacency of the Catholic Church and gave birth to the protestant Reformation.

Now, in a real sense verse S4 is paradoxical because we should expect the Lord to bring peace. After all John the Baptist was His herald and he..he was to talk about peace. And when the angels proclaimed His birth they said, "peace on earth." And Jesus in John 11 said, "My peace I give unto you." And in John i8 He said:

"In the world you'll have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I've overcome the world," and again promised them peace.

The Apostle Paul in Romans, at least three places, talks about the peace that God has given us. Well, there is peace in the heart of the one who believes. But as far as the world is concerned there is nothing but division. Yes, He brought peace to the heart of a believer, the peace of God, peace with God, peace from God. And someday there will be a kingdom of peace, but the Old Testament didn't see a difference between the first coming and the second coming, didn't

see that time in the middle. The first coming brought a sword, the second coming will bring ultimate peace.

Oh yes, the first coming brought a partial peace, that being the peace that comes to the hearts of those who believe. But the Lord says - You just remember this as you go out, you're going to cause division. You're going to cause a fracturing and a rending and a splitting apart.

The Gospel does that. It is the refiner's fire that consumes.

It is the shepherd's separation of the sheep and the goats. It is the husbandman's fan when he throws the grain into the air and the chaff is blown away. There's a separation. The entrance of Christ splits, tears apart.

If Christ had never come the earth would have gone on in unity to hell...doomed. But when He came a war broke out.

In Luke chapter 12 we see something of this in verse 49. "I am come to send fire on the earth," He said. "And what will I if its already kindled?" Verse 51: "Suppose you that I am come to give peace on earth, I tell you, No, but rather division and from henceforth there will be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three, and the father divided against his son, and the son against the father, and the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother, and the mother-in-law against the daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law. I came to bring fire. I came to bring a sword, not peace."

And the worst possible expression of this is in the home because it gets right down to the most meaningful relationships.

Right? And so what He's really going to say here is this - If you're a true disciple, you'll be willing to even create a division in your own home which goes against the grain of your nature, doesn't it? Cause that's the place you want the peace. That's the place you want to keep intimacy. That's...that's...those are the people you love. You don't want to be at odds with them. But you will be true when you commit yourself to Jesus Christ with such commitment to His Lordship that even if it fractures your home you're willing to pay the price.

Look at verse 55, and here's how He expresses it: "I am come

to bring a sword, even to this extent that I would set a man at variance against his own father." By the way, the word at variance is a rare word, used only here in the New Testament, it means to cut asunder. I will cut a man off totally from his father. "And a daughter from her mother, and the daughter-in-law against a "mother-in-law." And He extends it from that very immediate family to the family by marriage. I'll fracture families every way possible. It's just the way it's going to be.

Now this is the worst rending that occurs. I mean, it's not so bad when you're at odds with your neighbor, or your boss, or your friend, or..or your acquaintance, but when it gets into the family and you're commitment to Jesus Christ means that you are set at variance against your family, that's where it really begins to rub. It goes against your...your affection and your love for them.

It goes against a harmony that you have to live with. But it will come right to that level. And being a Christian and following Jesus Christ may mean that you have created a division in your own home. But that's the mark of a true disciple. He's not going to hang on to those relationships to the extent that he will not commit himself to the Lordship of Christ.

Remember the ninth chapter of Luke verses 81 and 82, this guy came along and he was going to follow Jesus. And he said -I want to follow You but first let me go home and bid farewell to my family. And Jesus said, "No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom." Jesus said, I'm not going to accept you. Because you're too attached to your family. You'll never make the break. You'll never pay the price.

There are wives that will not come to Christ for fear of separation from their husband. There may be husbands who will not come to Christ for fear of separation from their wives. There are children who will not come to Christ for fear of their fathers or mothers...visa versa, and etc. People who will not take a stand for Christ because they want to maintain that family thing.

But Jesus said - The true disciple will forsake his family.

Now it doesn't have to be that way. I thank God that I didn't have to forsake my family to be a Christian. But when it comes this

will be the test, you see, if it comes.

I talked to a girl two weeks ago at Hume Lake who said she has become a Christian from a totally pagan family and she said my father will not speak to me. He will not have anything to do with me. He will not even talk to me if I call him on the phone, he hangs up. And then she said - I..I would think that he would be happy that I'm not an alcoholic, I'm not a drug addict, that I'm not a criminal, and not walk in the streets like a prostitute, that I'm not...haven't been in some terrible accident, crippled, or injured. I've never had such joy in my life and he won't talk to me. And I said that's because of the sword.

It fell between Cain and Abel, didn't it? Abel was a righteous man, Cain was an unrighteous man and the cleavage was so great that Cain couldn't stand it and he murdered his brother.

In I Corinthians chapter 7 it tells us how it comes right into a Christian marriage. It says if you have an unbelieving wife, and she wants to stay with you, don't divorce her. And if you women have an unbelieving husband who wants to stay with you, then let him stay. Because there's a sanctifying that occurs. "But if the unbelieving departs then let him depart, a brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases, for God has called us to peace."

That's the other side of it. Once the sword falls, then God's called us to peace and if he wants out, let him out. It's going to happen.

It happened with Cain and Abel and its still happening.

Somebody in a family commits himself to Christ and some of you know what I mean by this, and everything breaks loose. And then it comes down to the reality of that commitment. The real disciple will forsake his family if it has to be.

You see, beloved, what we're talking about is the Lordship of Christ and I saw this again and again, but its got to be repeated until people begin to hear it, becoming a Christian is affirming your commitment to the Lordship of Christ to the point where you forsake everything. It isn't just sticking up your hand, signing a card, walking down an aisle and saying - I love Jesus. It is by faith, not by works but the manifestation of true faith is a commitment that cannot be swayed by any influence.

Yes, you love your family and you love your children and your parents and your husband and your wife, and those people in immediacy to you, but your commitment to Christ if you're a real disciple is so deep and so profound and so far reaching that you will say no to those which are the normal extensions of your affection for the cause of Christ, if need be.

John Bunyan knew all about this, only in a kind of a special way. They told John Bunyan to quit preaching, but he said - I cannot quit preaching because God has called me to preach. And they said - If you preach we'll put you in prison. And so he said to himself - If I go to prison who cares for my family?

But how can I close my mouth when God has called me to preach?

And so he committed his family to the care of God and was obedient to the call of God and preached, and they put him in prison. And since then he's blessed millions of families because it was there that he wrote *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*.

Listen to what he said: "The parting with my wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place, as the pulling of the flesh from my bones; and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries, and wants that my poor family was like to meet with, should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I have besides. O the thought of the hardship I thought my blind one might go under, would break my heart to pieces...But yet, recalling myself, thought I, I must venture all with God, though it goeth to the quick to leave you; O I saw in this condition, I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children; yet thought I, I must do it, I must do it." end quote.

I pray to God I never have to make that decision, don't you?

And for some of us it doesn't have to be but for some of us it may.

Some of you have had to make a choice. You've confessed Jesus Christ and its alienated from...your family from you, but that's the way we prove the reality, you see. The one who says I'm not willing to make that sacrifice isn't genuine.

Verse 36 says: "A man's foes shall be they of his own household." That's true. Christ came to bring a sword, and the sword falls in the house.

And then verse 37: "If you love your father or your mother more than Me, you're not worthy of Me." Reversing it, if you love your son or daughter more than Me, you're not worthy of Me.

You can't be My disciples is what He's saying. You can't receive the salvation I offer if you're family means more than I do. You must make that break.

Now there is something even more apt to rob Christ of His rightful place in the heart of an individual, even more than the family. You know what it is? The love of his own life. You might want to be willing to take Christ and lose your family, but would...would you be willing to take Christ and lose your life? Now you're getting right down to where I live. Right?

I mean, I might say okay to the family deal. And so the Lord goes one step further and talks about giving up your life.

Now we're getting serious about whose a Christian, aren't we? And so we say the true disciple fears not the world, favors the Lord, forsakes the family, and fourthly, follows the call.

Verse 38: "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." The whole point of this section is to stress one thing, verses 24 and 39, listen, it is to stress total self denial to the point of death.

Now mark this, total self denial to the point of death. The Lord is really zeroing in who is a true Christian. One who is not afraid of the world, he is not intimidated by the world. One who favors the Lord and confesses Him, not matter how hostile the forces may be. One who says I love You more than I love the people that are closest to me in this world, and if it comes to that I'll choose You over them. And now it says, I love death for Your sake better than life for my sake.

Now you're getting down to whose real. Now verse 88 puts it so simply, "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me." Now you've heard a zillion devotionals on that

verse...bearing your cross, taking up your cross. And you probably have heard, like I have, so many definitions of what the cross is... your wife, my wife is my cross, your husband, my husband is my cross. I've got this one teen-ager, he's my cross. Your mother-in-law... your I??? Chevy...your leaky roof...your particularly distasteful class at school...a teacher that drives you crazy...your neighbor...your boss...the guy who works next to you. No, those are not your cross. I hate to do that to you, you've got to find a new category for all of them. What is your cross? And He...He said to them, "You have to take up your cross." Now what did they think about that? Well, I've even heard people say - Well, they were viewing Calvary. They didn't view Calvary, they hadn't even heard about Calvary. They didn't even know Jesus was going to die on a cross. I mean, after He told them they still didn't understand it and they hadn't even told them yet. They don't see Calvary here, this isn't some weird, mystical deal about the cross they don't understand, and it isn't some devotional thing about some person or object in their life. When He said - Take up your cross., they knew immediately what He was talking about. He was talking about dying, just plain old dying.

How they'd know that? They were of...they were from Galilee with the exception of Judas Iscariot, all eleven others were from Galilee. And very recently there had been an insurrection in Galilee lead by Judas of Galilee, and Judas had gathered a band together and decided to throw the Romans out. And the Romans won.

And the Romans crushed Judas and his insurrection, and the Roman general Varus, V-a-r-u-s, wanted to teach the Jews a lesson so he crucified over two thousand Jews. And he put their crosses up and down all the roads of Galilee so everywhere the people went they saw them hanging on these crosses along the roadside. And every Jew that was crucified carried the crossbeam for his own execution on his back as he marched to the cross. And these Galileans had seen all of that. And Jesus is talking to them in historical context and He is saying - He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me. You need to be willing to die, He says...rather than deny Me. This is a symbol of painful, torturous death. The most excruciating death man has ever invented is crucifixion. It's slow and

the slumping of the body on the wounds that are created by the nails not only causes excruciating pain at the point of the wound, but eventually suffocates the internal organs.

And He's saying - You take up your cross, you must be willing to go to the most excruciating painful torturous death imaginable.

Now I'm telling you, He really has the standard up there. I mean, Jesus isn't somebody you just say - Yeah, man, I'd like to have Jesus so I'll just say a little deal, a prayer, whisst, add it to the rest of my life. Committing your life to follow Jesus Christ means you would not only forsake your family, if need be, the people closest to you that you love the most, you'd lose your life. That's a mark of genuineness. And you're never to be intimidated by the world, you'd confess Christ in the most hostile environment, its the mark of your genuineness.

They understood that He meant death. They understood that to take up the cross means abandoning myself to the Lordship of Christ if it means I pay with my life. You see, the love of Christ has to overrule the normality of family love and the love of Christ has to overrule the instinct of self-preservation.

Then He adds this rich thought in verse 3g; "He that findeth his life shall lose it." What do you mean by that? Finding his life means securing his physical safety by denying Christ under pressure. Boy, if you're trying to hang onto your life and make sure that you don't ever get in too hot, or in too deep - Boy, I'm not willing to make that sacrifice, boy, I'm not going to give my life for the Lord. I'm not going that far. Man, I'm going to bail out. I'm not going to do that. I'm going to recant. I'll say -Hey, forget it. I just became a non-Christian. Don't throw me to that lion. I mean. I'll be anything. I'll be a...I'll worship any-body, just don't put me in there.

In finding you life. in securing your physical life you just lost your soul. But, if you're willing to lose your life for My sake, you'll really find eternal life...in the end. It doesn't mean you get saved by being a martyr. it just means that if you're a genuine Christian you.. you're willing to do that. When the issue is between the Lord and me, whether I live for me or die for Him, that's the ultimate test. The confessor who suffers death.

the one who confesses Jesus Christ and dies for it is far better off than the apostate who escapes death by denying Christ and receives eternal damnation. That's the issue.

Bunyan was brought before the magistrates when they put him in prison, and he said -"Sir, the law of Christ hath provided two ways of obeying: The one to do that which I in my conscience do believe I am bound to do, actively; and where I cannot obey it actively, there I am willing to lie down and suffer what they shall do unto me."

He was right. You do it actively and aggressively. and you pay the price. You see, it is better to lose everything. It is better to lose your ease and your comfort and to be hassled and intimidated, badgered by the world, it is better to even lose your family, it is better to even lose your life than to forsake Jesus Christ. And bless God, it is not that we will necessarily have to do all these, it's that if we're real when it comes to this we will do it. What a powerful lesson on true discipleship. These are the real ones.

See, up to now its all been kind of negative. A true disciple fears not the world no matter how intimidating they are. no matter how they try to threaten or scare us. A true disciple fears not the world. Secondly, favors the Lord, when they call for a confession he gives the confession boldly. Oh, there may be lapses as I said, but where there are lapses there will be repentance and sorrow. And a true disciple is willing to follow if it means loss of family, or loss of life. But that's all so negative. Isn't there a positive? I mean, is being a Christian just sort of being hassled by the world and having to confess before men and forsaking your family and giving your life...don't we do anything but create problems in the world? Sure we do. And the text ends on a positive note, and it is thrilling.

Verse 40, now just relax, and I want you to get this, don't be in a hurry to go anywhere, this is the best part. Fifth, -a true disciple fosters rewards...a true disciple, as well as creating war, and strife, and division, and separation. and friction, also fosters rewards. We do have a positive effect. You see. we are the destiny-determiners in the world. When we bring the sword that separates, on the one hand are the unbelievers, but on the other hand are the...what?...the believers. And when we preach and when we live and when we give

our testimony, some believe, don't they?

And for them everything is so positive. Not everyone is going to refuse the message of the disciple, some are going to believe, some are going to receive them, some are going to receive their Lord.

And since we have limited ability to reward their faith, the Lord will do it for us.

Look at verse 40, this is great. "He that receiveth you, receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me."

This is incredible. Let me tell you what's in the word receive here.

When you go out and you represent Jesus Christ and you speak of Jesus Christ and you give Jesus Christ's message, the people who believe it are the ones who receive you. It is a full receiving...

that they accept you and your message. And when you go out and they don't all get hostile, but some receive you, the ones that receive you are receiving the Lord. And the ones receiving the Lord are receiving the One who sent the Lord. So you know what? You become an agency of men receiving God Himself. What a marvelous thing, isn't it?

On the one hand you create this antagonism, on the other hand you create this marvelous reality that people receive God through you. Every time somebody says to me - You know I was saved when you preached...or, I received Christ when you talked, or when you told me the Gospel...I am thrilled beyond the ability to express.

Aren't you? Because God has used a frail, human instrument as an agency. And when someone receives us, they receive the Lord and the Father who sent Him. What an incredible thought. We give people the trinity, as it were. That's like John 14, you know, everything is bound up, I in the Father, and the Father in Me, and we'll both make Our abode with you. Great thought.

It goes beyond that even. Look at verse 41, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward." That's a tremendous divine principle. By the way, a prophet is what he says, and a righteous man is what he is...and they really speak of the same individual. For

a true disciple lives what he says. Right? He speaks and he is. He speaks the word forth and he is righteous.

The prophet is his task, the righteous man is his character. But he's a representative of God. And He says - When you go out representing God by your life and your lip, by your speaking and your living, those who receive you will receive the reward that you receive.

Now wait a minute. What does that mean? That just means exactly what it says. It could be a pastor, or a teacher, or a missionary, or an evangelist, or anyone who presents Christ, the one who receives that one will share that one's reward. If the Lord gives to me a reward for proclaiming to you, He'll give you the same reward for receiving what I proclaim. And we all share.

So, I then become a means to your blessedness. Do you understand that? So on the one hand when I proclaim - some are alienated. But on the other hand when I proclaim - some will receive the very reward that God has promised to give the one who preaches. So you become the instrument by which others are blessed.

You want to be a blessing in the world? Then confess Christ before men. Then stand up boldly and don't mitigate your testimony, and don't be ashamed of Christ. And let your life become the source of their reward. Great thought.

Look at verse 42. When you think of prophets and righteous men you think of kind of high class people. But the Lord brings in to verse 42 a wonderful thought. "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no way lose his reward."

What is the little one here? Young disciples, babes, a little nobody disciple. And by the way, that's what the twelve were right now, did you know that? At this point in their career they were a bunch of unproven nothings. Remember our series in the beginning of chapter 10? The company of the unqualified? They were nobodies.

And He says - When these go out to preach and to present Me, if you receive them, and you can demonstrate that by giving them just a cup of cold water because they're My disciples. In other words, you're helping them in the simplest way, responding to them in a

simplest way, you in no way will lose your reward. People then will be rewarded when they believe our message because they'll receive the salvation we preach. They will be rewarded when they receive us because they will share in the very reward we have for proclamation.

And they will be rewarded when they help us along in our ministry because God will not hold back a reward to those who have shared in the minister....and his ministry.

So, you know what its saying? We then become the source of blessedness for others. We give them the privilege of hearing and receiving. We give them the pleasure of receiving and being rewarded. We give them the pleasure of giving to us and being doubly rewarded. So the good thing you do for the messenger will be rewarded. The fact that you receive his message, you'll share in his reward. The fact that you receive his Savior, you'll receive his Saver's salvation.

A disciple then is a person who is a determiner of destiny.

And even the least of us shares with the greatest of us in what God does in blessing us.

There was a lad in a country village. And after a great struggle he reached the ministry. All through his days of study there was a cobbler, shoe repairman, in the village who had helped him. He was a simple man but a well read man and a man who loved God with all his heart. In time the young lad whom he had helped became licensed to preach, and on the day of his ordination the cobbler said to him, - Young man, he said, I always had in my heart the desire to be a minister of the gospel, but the circumstances of my life never made it possible. You are doing what was always my dream, but never reality. I want you to promise me one thing, said the cobbler. I want you to let me make your shoes for nothing, and I want you to wear them in the pulpit when you preach and then I'll feel you are preaching the gospel I always wanted to preach, standing in my shoes.

You receive a prophet, and a righteous man in the name of a prophet and a righteous man. In other words, because of who they represent you receive a disciple no matter how meager he is because of whose disciple he is. And in effect, in that true receiving you're

receiving the message they bring and the message is the Savior and the Father, and you will...you will embrace the whole of the blessedness of God's eternal gifts to those who are His own.

I'll tell you. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is pretty fantastic. You become the source of conflict for half the world, and for the other half the source of blessing. But you and I who are the disciples of Christ, we are the issue in the world. We draw the lines. I pray, God, we'll be willing to follow the Lordship of Christ at any price, that some may be antagonized and some may be blessed.

In the *LEGEND OF THE EAGLES*, George D'Espartes says, "The most heroic piece of self-sacrifice known to history occurred in the building of a bridge." It is an incredible story. It was in the dead of winter. And the French army was pressed on all sides by the Russian Cossacks. The Cossacks had destroyed all the bridges and Napoleon was at his wit's end. He had no way to go to escape. Suddenly there came an order that they might build a bridge across the river immediately behind them. And the men nearest the water were the first to carry out the almost impossible task.

Others, after a few minutes, sank through cold and exhaustion.

Some were swept away with the force of the moving icy water. But more and more men came and the work proceeded as fast as possible.

At last the bridge was complete and the army reached the opposite bank and was completely safe. And then followed the most dramatic scene, and one of the most touching recorded in the annals of history. When the men who had built the bridge were called to leave the water, not one of them moved. Clinging to the pillars, says the historian, they stood silent and motionless, frozen to death. And even Napoleon shed tears.

In a real sense God may call on you and me to give our lives to build a bridge for someone to cross into the presence of God.

If you're real, you're willing. Let's pray.

Just as we close this morning, would you just in your heart refresh your commitment to our Lord? Let the Holy Spirit give you words to pray silently. Would you renew your commitment to Him?

Be an obedient disciple who submits totally to His Lordship.

And where there have been those lapses, would you confess them?
And renew that commitment to stand for Christ.

Father, thank You for our time this morning, for Your Word and its power and penetration in our hearts. Bring us back tonight again with excitement and anticipation of what You have to say to us. And may we be true disciples, willing to follow You, not intimidated by the world, loving You more than our families, yes, more than our own lives. And knowing that while there is hostility created by our confession we also become the source of blessedness for those who believe. For Christ's sake we pray. Amen.

Servant or Slave?

John MacArthur

8.26.2010

I want to talk to you about a word, okay? A word in the Scripture, and I just finished a book. I can't predict the sales of a book; I never even think about that. But I...I feel that this book, no matter whether this book is purchased or not—purchased by lots of folks, or a few—says something that has not been heard in the church in America, or the English speaking part of the world. And I'm in shock, really, that it hasn't.

I was on a flight one night from Los Angeles to London, I was flying to Leicester, England to the University of Leicester to speak for a week to young people and ministers at The Banner of Truth Conference with Iain Murray. It was on that all-night flight that I was studying this word, and by the time I got to the end of the flight, it had captivated my mind and my heart to a profound degree. That's several years ago, now--two and a half. And that word has really dominated my thinking ever since. It is the word slave, slave.

Now if you look at your English Bible, you won't find that word very often. If you look at the Old Testament in the King James, you will find the word "slave" once. But the Hebrew word appears 800 times in the noun, and nearly 300 in the verb. There is a word in the Old Testament for "slave" that appears eleven hundred times, but in your English Bible it's translated "slave" once.

If you go to the New Testament, you will find the Greek word for "slave" about 150 times in all its forms. And you will find it actually translated "slave" only a few of those 150 times. The New Testament translators only translate the Greek word for slave "slave" when it's referring to an actual physical slave, or when it's referring to an

inanimate object, like "slaves of sin" or "slaves of righteousness."

So there is this concept of slavery in the Scripture that has been completely hidden to the English reader. Now this was by design because the word "slave" is the most important, all-encompassing, and clarifying word to describe a Christian used in the New Testament, and yet whenever a Christian is in view, it's not translated "slave." The word is *doulos*. Have you heard that word? The word is *doulos*. In the Greek, that word means "slave"—never means anything but "slave." It doesn't mean "servant"; it doesn't mean "worker"; it doesn't mean "hired hand"; it doesn't mean "helper." There are six or seven Greek words that mean "servant" in some form. *Doulos* never means "servant." A servant is someone hired to do something. The slave is someone owned. Big difference—huge difference—and yet all through the New Testament the word "slave" is masked by the word "servant," or some form of the word "servant." Truly a remarkable thing.

When I started doing the research on this word, I found 22 English translations of the New Testament, 22. There was only one of them of all the translations of English New Testaments going back to the King James—up until today—there was only one of those 22 that translated *doulos* "slave" every single time, even though everyone knows it means slave and only slave. In fact, the most formidable of all Greek dictionaries, Kittel, says, "The word *doulos* means slave, the meaning is so unequivocal, no study of history is necessary." It always means slave, and yet it's not translated slave.

Recently there have been a few new translations. Only one of them translates the word *doulos* "slave" every time. It's called *The Holman Christian Standard Bible*. But up until that one a few years ago there was only one, and that's the *Goodspeed* translation. You ever heard of it? Edgar Goodspeed was a cutting-edge Greek scholar in the 1930s at the University of Chicago. But everybody knows what *doulos* means. Why don't they translate *doulos* "slave"?

For the answer to that question, you have to go back to the first English Bibles, back to the sixteenth century, back to Calvin and John Knox and other translators putting together the Geneva Bible, who made a decision not to translate *doulos* "slave." The reason?

There's too much stigma with the concept of being a slave. It's too strong a downside. It's too humiliating, too belittling. So they opted to cover the word by replacing it with "servant," "bondservant," and eliminated the word "slave," except when the New Testament talks about an actual, physical slave, or an inanimate object, as I said, like slaves of sin or righteousness. They said it's just too negative.

They thought that was negative in the sixteenth century? Slavery for all intents and purposes was abolished in the fourteenth century. What were they afraid of? And if they think there was some stigma in the sixteenth century with the concept of a slave, how about in the first century when the writers of the New Testament used the word? There were as many as twelve million slaves in the Mediterranean world. One out of every five people in the Roman Empire was a slave. And if you study the history of the slavery, it was everything that any kind of human relationship could be. There were places in relationships in which it worked very well, and there were others in which it was horrendous and abusive and demeaning. But nonetheless, the Holy Spirit inspired the word *doulos*, *doulos*. Since we don't see that word in our English Bible, we are missing a paradigm in which to understand our relationship to Christ. Frankly, I started doing research. I found one book from about ten years by Murray Harris. I found an article in the 1960s by Doug Yamauchi on this issue of slave. And they were saying exactly the same thing I'm saying. And I said, "Why didn't anybody pick this up? Why hasn't anybody responded to this?"

Just a couple of illustrations to show you how important it is. Jesus said, "No man can serve two"...What?... "masters." Well, you could if you were a servant, right? You could serve two people, couldn't you? You could have a day job and a night job. A lot of people work for more than one person, but you can't be a slave to two masters because you can only be owned by one.

Jesus talked slave talk all the time. The writers of the New Testament talked slave talk all the time. But we don't see it because it's not there in our English text. The Russian Bible has it right. Other international translations have it right. We don't. This was how Christians referred to themselves in the early church. There's a story

about a man named Epheneus who was imprisoned by the Romans for his commitment to Christ. And then he was brought into some inquisition, and they asked him to answer their questions and to recant his devotion to Christ and swear his allegiance to Caesar. Every question they asked him got the same answer. He said this, "I am a slave of Christ. I am a slave of Christ." And for that, he was executed.

When you think about terms used to describe Christians in the New Testament, we're called children of God, right? We're called heirs and joint-heirs. We're called members of the body of Christ. We're even designated as branches, sheep. And you don't want to mix all those metaphors because each of those gives you a facet of understanding and aspect of our relationship to Christ. But the dominating word inside of which our full understanding of salvation is best seen as this word "slave."

Now there's a corresponding word that I want to mention as well, and that is the word "master," right? If I were to ask you...let me ask you a fundamental question: "What is the foundational reality that defines what it means to be a Christian? What is the fundamental reality that distinguishes the believer's relationship to Christ? What is our great confession in three words?" Jesus is Lord.

In fact, if you want to be saved, Romans 10:9 and 10 says, "You confess Jesus as Lord." *Kurios* is the corresponding word to *doulos*. *Kurios* is "lord and master." *Doulos* is "slave." You can no more eliminate *doulos* from the believer's relationship to the Lord than you could eliminate *kurios*.

For years I have written books dealing with the issue of the Lordship of Christ to try to help people who think you can become a Christian without acknowledging Jesus as Lord, which is an impossible thing; but nonetheless it's advocated. And the simple answer to that is this. If He is Lord, which is to say He is Master, then I am His slave. There's no such thing as a master with no slaves or a slave with no master. And 1 Corinthians 12:3 says, "We call Jesus Lord by the Spirit of God." We like to talk about Jesus being a personal Savior. And I understand that. But that is so ambiguous. What do you mean "a personal Savior," like a personal butler? What are you talking about? People say, "You have Him as your personal Savior." Well,

I understand that it's not a corporate thing, I understand what's being stated there. But the ambiguity of that phrase suits the contemporary vagueness of the gospel. Like Jesus is my own genie who jumps out of His little bottle when I rub it and ask Him for what I want.

You have to understand, everybody on the planet has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, everybody. And for most people it's not a good one, but it's very personal. We have lost this incredibly important concept of Jesus as Lord and I am His slave. We have a man-centered emphasis in the church. We have man-centered theology that dominates evangelicalism, in which we talk about Jesus coming along as a kind of a buddy who loves you and wants to satisfy all your desires and give you everything you want. But that's not what the New Testament teaches. What the New Testament teaches is not that you're lord and He's your slave; it's that He's Lord and you're His slave. That's the center of all New Testament teaching. It is inherent in saying Jesus is Lord that you are a slave who understands that obedience is the necessary response. The reality of Christ's lordship has been obscured by hiding the word "slave."

Turn to John 15, and I can't say everything that's on my mind about this because I just finished writing a whole book on it, so...I'm just touching lightly on it, but the book will be out in December. It will change...it will absolutely change how you view salvation and your life and your relationship to Christ, and your identity as a believer. Listen to this, John 15, verse 14, okay? Verse 14, "You are My friends if you do what I command you." Does that strike you as an odd thing to say? What? What kind of friendship is that? If I come up to you and say, "I want to be your friend."

"Ah, I'd love to be your friend, John."

"Yeah, I just have one requirement. You can be my friend if you do exactly what I command you."

What kind of a friendship are you talking about here? I never heard of a friendship like that.

Well, that kind of a friendship must assume another prior relationship, right? If I'm in charge of you and I command you and you obey me, you're a slave. But you're a slave who is also given the privilege of being a friend.

Look at the next verse. "No longer do I merely call you slaves, I'm taking you beyond that. I have called you friends." And what's made the difference? The assumption is that we are slaves; He says that. What's the difference? The difference is, you've become my friends. Well, what is the distinction between just being a slave and being a slave who is a friend? Here it is: a typical slave doesn't know what His master's doing. He has no reason--he's not given a reason; he's not given a motivation; he's not given a big picture. A slave is simply told, "Do this, do this, do this." The Lord of the slave doesn't have to give Him his agenda, his motivation, his purpose, his strategy, or his plan. But once he becomes a friend, a slave who is a friend, he says, "All things I've heard from My Father, I've made known to you. I let you in on the inside secrets."

So, we're slaves who have been given the privilege of being friends. What does that mean? It means He is in charge. He commands, we obey; but He commands us with full disclosure of all the reasons, marvelous, glorious reasons for doing what He's doing.

There are two critical things to understanding the believer's identity. One is Jesus is Lord. Kurios--"one who has the power," "one who is the owner" is what the Greek word means. One who has an absolute right to command. It is synonymous with another word. In Jude this other word is used, and this is a good comparison. You'll remember this in Jude. At the end of verse 4, it talks about ungodly persons who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Do you hear the slave talk there? Our only Master and Lord; you can only have one, right? No man can serve two masters. He is our only Master and Lord. What I'm driving at is the word "master." "Lord" is kurios. Master is used here as a synonym, and the Greek word is despotes, from which we get the English word despot. Now we use it as an adjective. We say somebody who is overbearing, totally in charge, dominating is despotic. That's exactly the word that's used. It means an absolute ruler, a sovereign ruler. He is our only despot. He is our only master--extremely powerful words, extremely narrow words.

That is why, when our Lord offers the invitation to follow Him, He says this: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself."

You're no longer in charge; you're no longer in charge. "Take up your cross and"...What?...*"follow Me."* That's what it means to become a believer. You just became a slave of Jesus Christ.

Our life is not defined by our own wants, our own will, our own desires, our own ambitions, but by His will, His desires, and His purposes. This is the basic truth of Christianity--Jesus is Lord.

When I say I'm a Christian, I am saying Jesus is the sovereign over my life. Whatever He wants, I submit to that. That's the first great understanding of Christian life. Second...first, Jesus is Lord; two, Christians are slaves. We are *douloi*, that's the plural. It means we're owned.

Now if you expand on that, I only have a few more minutes to kind of whet your appetite a little bit on this. It's really, really amazing. You start to study slavery, how did it work? The slave market, right? Slave market. Slaves are on a block, for sale. You want to buy a slave; you go into the slave market. You pick your slave and then you pay for your slave and then you own your slave, and then you control your slave, and then you provide for your slave, and then you protect your slave, and then you discipline your slave, and then you reward your slave. That's slavery. Think about that with salvation in mind. The Lord went into the slave market of sin, didn't He? And He chose, and then He paid the redemption price, and it wasn't silver and gold. What was it? Precious blood. And we are not our own; we are bought with a price. And now He is our Lord and He said this, *"Whoever obeys Me, he is My child."* Another metaphor, but the same concept.

So we have been chosen. We have been bought. We are owned. We are provided for: *"My God shall supply all your needs."* We are protected, are we not? We are disciplined. We are rewarded--*"Well done, good and faithful slave."* All those concepts within the magnificent realm of what it means to be a Christian are tied to the concept of being a slave.

You say, *"Wow! This is a pretty hard pill to swallow."* Put yourself in the position of the early church, okay? Listen to this. *"Go into the world and preach the gospel."* Okay, let's go to the Gentile world; let's go to the Roman world. That's where they went. And here's

your message, a crucified Jew--crucified by Romans--is God incarnate. What? Yes, He's not only the Messiah of Israel; He's the Savior of the world. Do the Jews believe that? No, the Jews do not believe that. They were the ones who sought His death and the death of Jesus was final proof that He wasn't the Messiah and that is why the preaching of the cross to the Jews is a stumblingblock. It's a stumblingblock to the Jews, but to the Gentiles it is foolishness. What are you talking about? A crucified Jew executed in an obscure place in Palestine is God in human flesh to be worshiped? If you're near the Circus Maximus in Rome, you can look behind some bars that have been there for a long, long time and you will see what is remaining of an etching in a wall that pictures a cross and hanging on the cross is the body of a man and the head of a jackass. And a man below is bowing down in worship and the inscription says, "Elix asinus worships his God." What a joke. A crucified man is God, and mock it by giving Him the head of a jackass. That's what the Gentiles thought. Sell that gospel. Sell that gospel when you get to Rome.

Oh, and by the way, not only do we ask you to acknowledge that this crucified Jew rejected by His own people and executed as a criminal by the Romans in an obscure place in the Middle East, but we are expecting you not only to acknowledge Him as God, but to become His...What?...slave? If you think slavery had a stigma in the sixteenth century, how about the first? You think they had a little uphill climb in evangelism? You say, "Well, you know, we've got to adapt the gospel or people will never believe it." But that's exactly what they preached. Jesus is Lord, not Caesar; Jesus is Lord. You must become His slave.

You go in the book of Acts and that's what they preached, that's what they preached. You...this is what's so hard...you aren't going to see it there because the word is not translated "slave." Acts 4:29, "And now, Lord, take note of their threats and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your Word with all confidence." No, "That Your slaves may speak Your Word with confidence." Colossians 1 talks about being slaves; Colossians 4, and many other places. You see in the pastoral epistles Paul referring to himself, Philippians 1:1, as a servant of Christ. In the Greek it's "a slave." In Romans 1:1, "slave

of Christ." Titus 1:1, "slave." James, the half-brother of our Lord; it doesn't say, "James, the half-brother of Jesus." He says "James the slave." Peter, not to be outdone (2 Peter 1:1), "Peter the slave." "Jude the slave." Revelation 1:1, "John the slave." Every one of them identifies himself as a slave of Christ--chosen, bought, owned, subjected, dependent, disciplined, rewarded, provided for, protected, and obedient--and obedient. It was a very offensive message. And that is why 1 Corinthians 12:3 says, "No man calls Jesus Lord but by the Holy Spirit." Only the Holy Spirit could overcome the natural resistance that the sinner has in his heart.

Dear friends, we do evangelism, we preach the truth, we preach the message, but only the Holy Spirit can change the heart. Now, I was doing a pastors' conference with African-American pastors in North Carolina, and the subject came up. We were having a great time. We were in the football stadium at Wake Forest; it's really kind of a neat place. We were up in this beautiful football complex with a glass window overlooking the football field; all these pastors were there. One of them said, "How in the world am I going to tell my congregation? How am I going to tell my congregation this message about slaves when it has such a stigma? What am I going to tell them?"

And I said, "Well, I've got good news for you. You have a loving Master who is all-wise, compassionate, generous, powerful, resourceful, protective, kind, merciful, forgiving, who takes you from being just a slave to making you a slave that is also a friend...Are you ready for this one?...and takes you from being a friend to a son, and not just a son but a joint-heir. And if you follow the rest of the count in the New Testament, you become a citizen of His Kingdom. Do you understand that no slave in the Roman Empire could be a citizen? Couldn't own anything? Didn't have any rights? Couldn't give testimony to a court of law? Couldn't be defended in court? This is a different kind of slavery. He provides everything you need; makes you an intimate friend and gives you full disclosure of everything that's on His heart. First Corinthians 2:16, "We have a mind of Christ." He's revealed it to us on the pages of Scripture, and He makes us sons, and He makes us heirs and joint-heirs with His own

Son and He--we could go on--He makes us reign with Him, citizens of His glorious kingdom.

In John 13 He who is in the Upper Room--Jesus was--and He was looking at His block-headed disciples who struggled to understand things and were so selfish. They were always fighting about who would be the greatest in the kingdom, right? James and John even got their mother to go and beg. What man would do that? The strange part is they were the sons of thunder. At one time they're praying down fire on people's heads and Jesus has to calm them down. The next time they're hiding behind their mother's skirt. But there was always this thing about who is going to be the greatest in the kingdom, and they have no thought for what He's about to suffer. He's told them day-after-day that He's going to suffer and die. And they're just into their own thing. And in John 13 when it says, "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them" is telos--"He loved them to the max." This is a Master who loves with a perfect love, with a complete love, with an everlasting love.

You will never understand your relationship to Jesus Christ until you see it in this sense. Jesus is Lord, I am His slave. You say, "I still have a problem. It seems demeaning."

Turn to Philippians 2, Philippians 2; there's a lot more I could say about this. That's what your pastor always says when he's just run out of material. Philippians...How do I know that? Ha-ha, I'm not saying. Philippians 2, verse 3, you know this: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind, regard one another as more important than yourselves and do not merely look out for your own personal interest, the interest, but the interest of others."

This is humility, right? Okay, humble yourself. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." Christ is the model of humility, now watch this," who though existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself, taking the form of"...Guess what?...a doulos." How far down did He come? In the likeness of men, humbled all the way down, verse 8, "To become obedient to the point of death." What kind of death? The worst--"even death on a cross."

So if you're having a little trouble thinking it might be beneath

you to be considered a slave, better think again 'cause Jesus was a slave gladly. What did Jesus say? "I do what the Father tells Me to do. I do what the Father shows Me to do. I do what I see the Father doing, not My will, Yours be done."

When You confess Jesus as Lord, you confess yourself to be a slave--a slave who was a friend and a son and an heir and a joint-heir and a citizen of that eternal kingdom, and who is loved, having been captured, enslaved. His captor is a despot of love and a master of mercy, and one day He'll gather us in, Matthew 25:21, and say, "Well done, good and faithful slave."

I close with Luke 17, Luke 17. Once you understand this, you'll start to see this unfold as you go through the Scriptures and the gospels and through the rest. You can go through the book of Revelation, there are references to believers in every age up until the last age before the return of Christ, and we're identified as slaves. So it's a long-lasting identification. Luke 17:7, "Which of you having a slave" ...This is because it's the actual slave in this little illustration; it's translated correctly..."Which of you having a slave plowing or tending sheep will say to him when he comes in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat?'" No, no; would he not say to him, "Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself" ...Go get cleaned up..."and serve me while I eat and drink and afterward you may eat and drink." That's what slaves did, right? They served their masters. He doesn't thank the slave 'cause he did the things commanded, does he? He's not like above and beyond the call of duty to be obedient, is it? To do that which pleases your master?

"So you too," verse 10, "when you do all the things which are commanded you, say this, 'We're'...What?...'we're unworthy slaves, we only did what we should have done.'" Wow! Kind of deals a death-blow to the self-esteem notion, doesn't it?

You say, "Well, I thought we were free in Christ." You are--you are free to do what your Master desires.

Prayer

Father, it's been wonderful to think about this tonight and great fel-

lowship and we thank you for being able to fellowship around the truth. We confess Jesus as Lord and we confess that we're His slaves. What a privilege. As slaves in the Roman Empire who happen to have the privilege of being slaves of Caesar, which speak frequently of the dignity and the honor, being slaves of the one who reigned. We speak with honor and dignity, being chosen and bought to be slaves of the One who reigns over all, King of kings and Lord of lords. May we be obedient slaves, may we be slaves who do what our Lord commands and in all things endeavor to be pleasing to Him, the One who chose us, the One who bought us with His own precious blood.

Lord, thank You for this great high calling. Thank You that we're Your friends, and we have Your Word, and we know Your mind. Thank You for the promise of eternal reward, which we will enjoy in Your presence. May we be faithful to bear the name, a slave of Christ. We desire to honor You in all we do, and we thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

