



The Scandalous Offense of the Cross

Luke 9:23

January 20, 2019

Please take your Bibles and turn them to Luke chapter 9. We come in our study of God's Word this morning to one of the most defining and one of the most descriptive verses in the Christian faith. It really is a verse that captures in a nutshell exactly what it means to be a Christian, it's in Luke 9, verse 23.

If you're visiting with us today, or if you've been visiting Grace Church, in and out, checking things out, we are, we just want to extend our welcome to you. We're so glad you're here. And this morning I just want to issue maybe, maybe sort of a warning about what you're going to hear today, what you're going to hear this Sunday, next week as well. What you're going to hear straight from the lips of Jesus Christ is what it really means to be a Christian. This is what being a Christ-follower is, is all about. This is what our church is about.

And listen, this is not for the faint-of-heart. I am warning you about what you're about to hear, but I'm not making any apologies because these are Jesus' words and not mine. So whether you have been visiting or whether you've just come today, or perhaps you've been here for many, many years, I want you to listen and listen carefully.

I want you to think carefully, and I want you to come to a decision in your own heart. If you're here because your family is here or because your friends are here or because of some other reason—but you, yourself don't really know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, you need to listen and think carefully about where your family and friends are going as followers of Jesus Christ. If you're here because you're lonely or you're in a dark place in your life, and you're looking for answers, perhaps you're looking for friends, again, you need to think carefully about what solution you'll find from Christ. You need to think carefully about the kind of friends you want.

As I prayed earlier, if you're looking for some kind of social network, perhaps a, some way to promote your own social mobility, a way to improve your image, or strengthen your reputation, increase your respect. If there are any other motives other than what I am about to preach now, listen, I don't mean this at all in any uncharitable way, but if you're here for any other reason than what you're about to hear from Christ, you may be dismissed. You are free to go. We would understand. Because what we're about to hear from the lips of Jesus Christ this morning is very hard truths. They're not easy listening. They don't tickle the ears. They don't go down easily. Okay, you've been warned. If you want to stick around, you've been warned because this verse is about true Christianity.

And the first thing I'd like you to do before we even get into the text is to take out your bulletin, scratch out the title for this morning's sermon that's written there. Write this instead. In your bulletin write: "The Scandalous Offense of the Cross. The Scandalous Offense of the Cross." That's what we're going to see and hear this morning from the text, Luke 9:23. "And Jesus said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him

deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.'"

We've come to a significant turning point in the earthly life and ministry of our Lord.

As I said last week, I'll say it again, Jesus has taken his disciples away from the region of Galilee. They'd been preaching in that whole area of Galilee for about a year and a half, and Jesus has been taking them north out of Galilee, walking from Bethsaida toward Caesarea Philippi. And along the way, Jesus has elicited from his disciples a confession of faith, a confession that portrays and displays their understanding, which is this understanding, they know the truth about his identity.

Jesus is not just another prophet. He is the Messiah; he is the Christ of God. Contrary to what we might expect, instead of encouraging the disciples to go out and broadcast this exciting news, he silences them. He doesn't want anyone to rush off just yet with the wrong expectations about who Messiah is and what Messiah came to do. He doesn't want anybody to hurry to enthrone him as king. They need to understand more. Even his own

disciples, they need to understand exactly what, Jesus equals the Christ of God, they need to know what means. So he told them what that means, Luke 9:22, "The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Before any glory, there's going to be suffering.

Today we're going to see, if he's going to be rejected and killed, so must you. If you, too, would follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The rejection of the world because of the shame of the cross, that is in your future as well and that's Luke 9:23, "He said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me.'" That, folks, is what really means to be a Christian. And unlike the people of the first century, those who first heard Jesus say those words, you're not scandalized by the mere uttering of those words. One word in particular, the word, cross. That word was a stigma. That word was an offense.

If time travel were possible, and we brought someone from the first century, maybe plucked them right out this crowd, and

we bring them to our century for a visit to the twenty-first century, I think they would be, after getting over the shock, absolutely, should I say, appalled? I think they'd be absolutely horrified at the barbarity and vulgarity of our religious observance: a cross symbol. A cross symbol hanging in a public space, a public meeting place. Women wearing crosses on pieces of jewelry around their neck and from their ears, dangling from bracelets. Children running around with crosses on their Bibles, drawing pictures of crosses in Sunday school.

Beloved, that's, that's death imagery and it's not just death, but it's the most brutal, terrible, horrifying death imaginable. It was death by cruelty, by, by torture. That was a symbol of sadism. In fact, when Jesus told the gathered crowd that following him meant taking up a cross, it wouldn't be hard to imagine an audible gasp coming out of the crowd that day. The word cross was an absolutely shocking word, a word that was to them crude and vulgar. You didn't talk about it in polite company. Only the dregs of society uttered it, more like a taunt for them. It was something you didn't say in public. It was something you didn't say in mixed company. It wasn't, certainly wasn't something that was spoken by any respectable teacher.

But ever since the Emperor Constantine the Great, he had, you remember, a vision of the Cross, heard a voice that said, In this sign, conquer. Out of veneration of the Cross of Christ, he banished crucifixion as a mode of capital punishment from the Roman Empire around the year A.D. 337. And ever since then, the cross has been used as a symbol of religious power, not what it had always been, which was a sign of shame and scorn. In this cross, conquer? It's what many who professed the name of the Christ throughout the centuries of church history did. It's the charges we still have to answer as Christians, as we evangelize. Oh, remember the Crusades?

So beloved, before we could talk about the meaning of Luke 9:23, I think we need to recover the sense of this text, which means that we need to understand the scandalous offense of the cross. That's how we're going to use the time that we have together today, to recover the scandal and the offense of the cross, so that you, beloved, can make a decision, so that you can ask and answer the most important question of your life: Do I really want to be here? Do I really want to follow the way of the cross? Because let me just tell you a preview, beloved: The

cross means the end of you. It means the end of you. The end of me.

Let's begin with a question, first point for today, a question: What picture does the cross portray? What picture does the cross portray? Here in Luke 9:23, this is the first mention of the word cross in Luke's Gospel. It's the first time we've read it, and for us, as I said, the word doesn't immediately bring to mind what it did for the first-century audience. For them, the cross was a form of capital punishment. But it wasn't a form of capital punishment like the guillotine or the firing squad, where it was over quickly.

For them, the mention of the cross evoked images, yes, of criminals dying, but barbaric cruelty, of violent suppression of Rome, mass executions, an unbridled sadism. That's what the cross brought to their minds. We've done a really good job of sterilizing capital punishment in our day. For humanitarian reasons we've hidden the execution of criminals away from public view. It wasn't that long ago in our country when public executions, everybody in town gathered around to see it.

Children didn't, couldn't turn their eyes away from it because public executions sent a message, warned people against committing similar crimes.

We've come to see that that kind of warning is barbaric and cruel. It's not something we want in a civilized society to promote people's obedience out of fear. Using human beings created in God's image, we don't want to send that kind of message, so we want to be humane to the condemned. I don't have an argument with that. I understand that. It's not that our sensitivity to the humanity of the criminal is a bad thing. It's understandable. We've got a more humane social image today. But when you consider the vile barbarism of the legal crime called abortion, I'm really not sure we can claim to be any kind of a better society just because we hide our sins. We ban those images from public viewing.

But I digress. The point is we're squeamish about public execution, understandably so. And we are very far removed from how horrible crucifixion really was. But as familiar as the ancient world was with the practice of crucifixion, you need to

understand that they, too, they, too, who saw it, they found it horrifying, and barbaric, and cruel. For people in the ancient world, as one author put it, quote, "The cross was not just a matter of indifference, just any kind of death. It was an utterly offensive affair, obscene in the original sense of the word."

It was Cicero who said, he died in about 43 B.C. He said, "Let the very name of the cross be far away, not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears." If they found it so terrible, why did they practice it? Because they believed that there were some people who deserved such indignity, there were some crimes that merited and warranted the cruelty of crucifixion. So they wanted to send a message to the rest of society: This is what that crime, this is what that kind of a person deserves.

The practice of capital punishment by crucifixion is ancient; it goes way, way back. The Assyrians, they used to, in their wars and campaigns and brutality, they used to suppress any kind of thought of rebellion through fear by impaling their

victims on poles or cutting off heads and stacking them at the city gates. Gruesome, I know! Over time, though, it was crucifixion that came to be the preferred method of making an example out of those who resisted, and it was the very worst of criminals, the very worst of crimes.

There's a man named Martin Hengel, wrote a book called, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, a very good book. I don't agree with all of his thinking and his theology, but he does go into great detail and is helpful on the issue of crucifixion. There may have been, in according to what he's written there, more expedient, maybe less troublesome ways, less labor-intensive ways of executing a criminal in their day. But for some criminals, for some crimes, they felt that the trouble was worth it. Crucifixion was about sending a message. It was about making a point. It was a matter, writes Hengel, of "subjecting the victim to the utmost indignity."

Crucifixion appears to have begun among the Persians. Darius, king of Persian, he's mentioned in Ezra, Daniel, other

books as well, he crucified several thousand Babylonians in his day. Persian King. The Persians, though, say they, actually adopted it from others. Hengel writes this, extended quotation, here, "According to the ancient sources, crucifixion was regarded as a mode of execution used by barbarian peoples, generally, including the Indians," that's those from India, "the Assyrians, the Scythians, and the Taurians," that is, those are places like modern-day Kazakhstan, all the way over in the west, and Ukraine, the Crimea region; "it was even used by the Celts, later by the Germans, the Britanni," the Germans, the Britains, who, "who may have well taken it over from the Romans and combined it with their own forms of punishment. Finally, it was employed by the Numidians and especially by the Carthaginians, who may have been the people from whom the Romans learned it." End quote.

The Greeks, they adopted the practice of crucifixion when Alexander the Great with great speed conquered the world. Remember, he went to Persia, conquered the Persians. He brought this practice back after conquering the Persians and then employed crucifixion in punishing the people of Tyre. The people of Tyre taunted him, said, you can't get it! You can't get in!

Well, he made an example of their resistance; he executed 2,000 Tyreneans at once in a brutal crucifixion, all of them on their separate crosses.

Antiochus Epiphanes, capturing Jerusalem in 167 B.C., according to Josephus, "He punished the best and the noblest of Jerusalem's men, who refused to bow the knee." Josephus says, "They were whipped with rods. Their bodies were torn to pieces, were crucified while they were still alive and breathed. They also strangled those women their sons whom they'd circumcised, as the king had appointed, hanging their sons about their necks as they were upon the crosses." End quote

If you're feeling uncomfortable, I understand. I am, too. But you need to understand that this is what the people heard as they listened to Jesus speak and use that one word: cross. They felt as uncomfortable as you do now, as I do in even saying this publicly. The cross was, as one author wrote, "a repugnant instrument of cruelty, pain, de-humanization, and shame." You might think that the Jews, having suffered this over and over by the Romans, by the Greeks, you might think they'd never stoop to

use the same form of execution. Ah, but they did. The Hasmonean king, Alexander Jannaeus, at the conclusion of the Judean civil war, he took the surviving rebels, rebels back to Jerusalem, many of them Galileans, by the way, and to make a public example, he executed 800 of them, most of them Pharisees, and he executed them by crucifixion.

But it really was the Romans who perfected the art of execution by crucifixion. They found it especially useful to make a public example of those who resisted Roman will, who defied Roman law. James Edwards wrote, quote, "The cross was the most visible and omnipresent aspect of Rome's terror apparatus, designed especially to punish criminals and quash slave rebellions in the most painful, protracted, and public manner possible as a warning against rebellion. In 71 B.C. the Roman general Crassus defeated the slave rebel Spartacus and crucified him and 6,000 of his followers on the Appian Way between Rome and Capua. A century later, Nero crucified, burned the Christians who were falsely accused of setting fire to Rome. There are no known survivors of Roman crucifixions. The cross was thus a symbol of absoluteness and totality." End Quote.

I want you to think about that, especially in light of Luke 9:23, "If anyone would come after me," Jesus said, "let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Listen, once you set out on that road, you are not coming back. There's no escape hatch. There's no detour. Hengel, in his book, describes the cru, cruelty of crucifixion this way, it's a number of different quotes, I've kind of pieced together here.

"Crucifixion included a flogging beforehand, and the victim often carried the beam to the place of execution, where he was nailed to it with outstretched arms, raised up, and seated on a small wooden peg. The form of execution could vary considerably. Crucifixion was a punishment in which the caprice and sadism of the executioners were given full reign. It was the rule in Roman times to nail the victim by both hands and feet, and the flogging which was a stereotype part of the punishment would make the blood flow in streams." End quote.

Dr. Cilliers from the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, he wrote an article in 2003 called, *The History and Pathology of Crucifixion*, which describes crucifixion more from a medical point of view. He writes this, "Death, usually after six hours to four days, was due to multi-

factoral pathology." With words like multi-factoral, bear with me. "After effects of compulsory scourging and maiming, hemorrhage and dehydration causing hypovolemic shock and pain. But the most important factor was progressive asphyxia, caused by impairment of respiratory movement. Resultant anoxemia, exaggerated hypovolemic shock, death was probably commonly precipitated by cardiac arrest caused by vasovagal reflexes, initiated inter alia anoxemia, severe pain, body blows, and breaking of the large bones.

"The attending Roman guards could only leave the site after the victim had died and were known to precipitate death by means of deliberate fracturing of the tibia and/or fibula, spear stab wounds into the heart, sharp blows to the front of the chest, or a smoking fire built at the foot of the cross to asphyxiate the victim." End quote. You can see the Roman soldiers sitting there at the cross, saying, let's, let's hurry this thing up. I've got stuff to do. They'd seen people die over, and over, and over again. That's why any theory of the crucifixion that say, Jesus merely swooned and revived later, what a lie! What grasping at lies to deny the obvious.

There are even more gruesome descriptions, believe it or not, of this, but I'm going to spare you the worst of it. That's enough, that is enough to help us understand how utterly abhorrent the word cross was to that first-century audience. And what you need to know, as we consider this text in front of us, Luke 9:23, is that the image of condemned criminals, carrying the patibulum, the, the crossbeam of his cross, called the patibulum, to the place of execution. You need to understand that that was not an uncommon image in Jesus' day. It was common enough. Children watched as criminals passed by, driven along by Roman soldiers. They watched them marching as if in a train, shuffling along, each one carrying his patibulum on his shoulders, exhausted, and beaten, and flogged, shuffling, heading to the place of their own execution.

And so the question we asked at the beginning, What, what, what picture does the cross portray, here? Well, it's a dreadful one. It's one from which we naturally recoil in horror, wanting to look away, feeling a sense of fear. Jesus, here, in Luke 9:23, he wants us to picture a scene. He wants us to picture in our mind's eye and imagine a train of criminals carrying their own crosses, proceeding toward the place of their own execution,

and at the head of the train is none other than Jesus, the innocent one.

According to verse 22, he was rejected by the greatest legal minds in the world, the Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin. He was delivered over by them to the dreadful power of Rome to be crucified. Jesus was judged a criminal, and he was sentenced to death by the world, the greatest and the best of the world, the rich and the famous, the people that you and I look around and everyone is aspiring to be like them. Jesus was condemned, rejected, condemned to death by them. You still admire them? It was absolutely, for the Jewish and Roman's auth, Roman authorities, it was absolutely ludicrous to them why we would want to follow this condemned and crucified God.

Augustine recorded in complaint of a man who was trying to dissuade his wife from becoming a Christian, and in the exasperation, the advice that he got from another atheist, another, another pagan really, in exasperation he said, "Let her continue as she pleases, persisting in her vain delusions and lamenting in song a god who died in delusions, who was condemned

by judges whose verdict was just, and executed in the prime of life by the worst of deaths; a death bound with iron.” End quote. That reference, there, to a death bound with iron, refers to the nails that fastened Jesus’ hands and feet to the cross.

Listen, for the world, there is no honor, there is nothing commendable about following after Jesus and that, folks, is exactly what Jesus wants us to picture, here. He’s heading to the cross. He’s heading there a condemned criminal, verse 22, and following behind him is a train of disciples in verse 23, and they’re all carrying their own crosses. The Cross is the very symbol of what led Jesus to his sentence of rejection and death. It’s our symbol of rejection as well.

Each disciple places his foot carefully in the footprint of his Lord, who has gone ahead of him, the one who went before him to the place of execution, to Golgotha, to the Place of the Skull. That’s where we’re going. Beloved, that’s what Jesus is portraying for us. This is what he’s calling us to do. Again, I ask, knowing what we know, do you want that? Do you want that? It’s a very real question. I’m not just being rhetorical, here.

So we ask a second question in a short outline, here, two points. Knowing what we do know now, why would anyone, why would anyone follow the way of the cross? Why would anyone follow this way? If it means the end of self, if it means my reputation doesn't go up but goes down, means my, my income might reduce, means I might not get opportunities, it means that people around me scorn me, reject me, hate me, because I follow a condemned criminal as my God, why would anyone want to follow the way of the cross?

Look at the verse again, Luke 9:23, "He said to them all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, follow me.'" Amazingly, this is Jesus' call to discipleship. This is Jesus, here, being evangelistic. This his A-game of evangelism. He's out preaching on the streets, and what does he say? Here's what it means to follow me. When we really understand the word of the cross, we need to see that most of the people who listened to him found this word of the cross offensive and entirely unacceptable.

As we read earlier from Paul, "The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing." It's *mória*. *Mória*, utterly moronic, foolish, "but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." What's the difference between us and them? They look at the cross and see abhorrent shame, and indignity and profanity, even. We look at the cross and see Christ as the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Martin Hengel cites Melito's homily on the Passion, where the crucifixion, one that's scorned by the world is pondered as a wonderful mystery by believers who follow him. Here's the quote. I have some exceptions with a little bit of the expression, here, but it is rhetorical and beautiful. But listen to this, "He who hung the earth in its place hangs there. He who fixed the heavens is fixed there. He who made all things fast is made fast upon the tree. The master has been insulted. God has been murdered. The King of Israel has been slain by an Israelitish hand. O, strange murder, strange crime! The Master has been treated in an unseemly fashion, his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a covering that his nakedness might not be seen. Therefore, the lights of heaven turned away. The day darkened that it might hide him who was stripped upon the

Cross.” End Quote. That’s a reference to criminals being stripped down completely, held out for public indignity and shame.

It’s interesting to note in Luke 9:23 that Jesus is not speaking only to his disciples at this point. He’s speaking to them, but he’s also speaking to others. He’s speaking to a whole crowd of people, many of them unbelievers. Amazing, isn’t it? This is the way Christ spoke to unbelievers. This is how he evangelized. He gave them the hard truth about discipleship. He didn’t soft pedal anything to them. Luke is very clear to show us this in verse 23. He’s not speaking not just to his disciples. He had been talking directly to his disciples and only to them in verses 18-22.

But then Luke says, “He said to all.” Mark tells us the same thing, Mark 8:34, “calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them,” plural, to his disciples and the gathered crowd. We’ve got to understand that between verse 22 and verse 23, some time had passed. We don’t know how long the conversation lasted on any given point. We do know that Peter’s

rebuke of Jesus for this prediction of suffering happened in here. We see that in Matthew 16, clearly. There was, there was more conversation that happened. We don't know how long any of that lasted on any given point, or where they were along the journey, but it does seem that they've come toward Caesarea Philippi, where there would be more people gathering, hearing about the popularity of Jesus that had preceded him.

All three synoptic writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they record Jesus' prediction of suffering, as we've said, Peter's confession, the prediction of suffering, then after Jesus' predicts his suffering and delivers that stern warning to silence, commanding that they keep the, the matter secret, as a matter of operational security in all three Gospels, as I've said, though some time has passed, much has been discussed, the next thing we see Jesus doing, here, is evangelizing.

And he's calling, after he's said all that he said, he's calling for total commitment, and the only promise he makes in the tract that he hands out, self-denial, cross-bearing. Only his close disciples know that he's the Christ. Only the Twelve

know the prediction of his suffering. The crowds don't know.
They'll know, know soon enough, in about six months' time.
They'll know; they'll see for themselves.

But though the crowds don't know, Jesus still calls them to discipleship, and he tells them exactly what's involved. He doesn't sugar-coat it. He doesn't hold anything back. This is like the, the hard-to-swallow fine print you find on what would otherwise seem to be a very, very attractive contract for you. You start looking at the fine print. You say, whoa! This price I'm paying for this house, it comes with all these exceptions. Oh, there's a neighborhood association. Ugh! That's hard to swallow. Oh, they're going to tell me what color I can paint my house. Okay. You find all that in the fine print.

This, here, is the fine print made bold. This is the small print writ large. Jesus wants us to understand exactly what it is we are getting ourselves into when we profess to be his followers. **//END MSG #1//** In the words of that famous philosopher Mary Poppins, there's no sugar to make the medicine go down, here.

You'll see it there, verse 23, when Jesus says, speaking to them all, a mixed group of people, believers and unbelievers alike, speaking to the elect like Peter and the non-elect like Judas Iscariot, Jesus says to them all, "If anyone would come after me." Stop there. "If anyone would come after me." This is when we start to answer the question that we're asking: Why would anyone want to follow the way of the cross?

Verse 23, there in verse 23, in the ESV, the translators actually left a word out of that sentence. When translating this from the Greek, the ESV translators have left out a very important word. I'm guessing they made the decision for the sake of a smooth, readable translation. You can get the point a little bit in that word, would. But they inadvertently left out an important word, and I think if that's all you had, that's missing an important point.

You know how the other translations render that part of the verse? The King James Version, "If any man will come after me..." The New American Standard, "If anyone wishes to come after me..."

The New English Translation, "If anyone wants to become my follower." The New International Version, "Whoever wants to be my disciple." Any of those options I think are better than the ESV on this verse. Why is that? What is the ESV leaving out? It's the verb *thelo*.

Missing from the ESV translation is a very small word, but one that is dealing with one of the hardest forces on earth, the human will. Not everyone really wants to follow Jesus in discipleship in this way. And I think if we were clearer in our evangelism, many people would turn away and save us a lot of trouble because they would know what it requires. But for those who draw near, who are willing after hearing the way of the cross, that's a different story. Not everybody desires to come after Christ, to become his follower. Obviously, we know that's true for self-protested atheists or pagans or those who are adherents of other false religions. We still evangelize them.

But what about those who say they'll follow Jesus; do we take everyone at their word? Didn't Jesus warn us in the Parable of the Sower and the Soils that many who initially profess a

desire to follow Jesus, they don't actually keep on following? They fall away in times of testing. They're choked by the cares, and the riches, and pleasures of life. They fail to realize from the beginning, they fail to take account of what Jesus has told them plainly. They didn't understand the significance of what he said in verse 22, I will be rejected and killed, and then in verse 23, If you want to follow after me, so will you. And you must endure it, if you're going to be my disciple.

What makes the difference between those who turn away and those who stay? What makes the difference between those who reject and those who follow? What makes the difference in the will? What makes one person willing and another unwilling? The answer to that question helps us see why it's not our job, really, to win people over. Our job is to please Christ. If we please Christ, we say what he says. It's his Word actually converting souls. It's the Holy Spirit at work in their hearts. We just need to tell people the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about what it really means to follow Jesus Christ.

Listen, one's will, your will, my will, it's property of nature, it's property of one's nature. You want to go after, seek after, desire, follow, you want what's in accord with your nature. Dogs, they like to play with little kids, chase sticks, and all the rest. Why? Because it's in their nature to do so. Cats, they like to remain aloof, feign affection, claw your furniture. Why? Because it's in their nature to do so. I like cats. I do. But just as dogs do what dogs do because they have a nature to do so, and cats do what cats do because they have nature to do so, sinners, too, sinners like sin. Why? Because it's in their nature to do.

Saints, on the other hand, saints hate sin. Saints love righteousness. Again, why is that? Because God has changed their nature. They repent of their sins and believe because it is in their nature to do so. God isn't coercing a will. He's changing a nature, and the will follows. They've been born again. They've been regenerated. They've been granted new life, and since will is a property of nature, since they want, they want and desire and will what is in accord with their nature. Change the nature, change the will. Only God can do that. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come." That

is manifest in a new will, with new desires, with a new set of wants, a new set of loves, a new set of hates.

That's the theology that undergirds this, and it comes right at the beginning. It's the theology of regeneration, followed by a theology, which we'll get to next time, a theology of sanctification. And in the middle of all this is the theology of conversion. Verse 23, that's a conditional statement, you'll notice, there. It's an, if-then statement. The protasis of the condition, the if statement, is this: If anyone wants, wishes, desires, wills, to come after me. So the willing, the wanting, the desiring, that is the condition that must be met, and it's met in regeneration, which leads to the theology of true conversion, which leads inexorably, intractably from the, to the immediate response of repentance and saving faith.

So if that happens, then what, then what follows? The theology of sanctification: He must deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me. That's Lordship salvation, which is a bad word in our day. There are whole churches that are built on denying this principle of truth. This is demanding self-

denial, cross-bearing and following and get this, it's continual; it lasts for a lifetime. Jesus said, "If anyone wants to come after me," and those verbs are present tense verbs, come after me. The wanting, wishing, desiring, that's *thelē*, the present tense form of *theló*. This refers to someone who wants to follow Jesus, has an abiding desire to do so, a continual longing.

I know, you look at yourself and say, you know sometimes I just wake up, I'm having a bad day, I don't want to follow Christ. But is that the trajectory of your life? If you're a true Christian, you'll answer that emphatically No. Deep down in my heart, though I fail, though I stumble, though I sin, that is not what I want. That is what I hate."

You find solace in the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 7, The things that I do, the sin that I do, I don't want to do. Those are the things I hate. I hate those things. They're part of the sin nature in me. I want to tear it out and throw it away. The things I love, righteousness, holiness, truth, those are the things I long for. That's what a Christian says. Someone

who has a desire to follow Christ, it's an abiding desire, a continual longing. It's someone who knows who Jesus is, that he's the very Christ of God. He seeks him. He wants him. He wants to follow after him, to follow him in discipleship no matter where that goes.

Another present tense verb, the infinitive, to come, "anyone who wants to come," present tense, to come. I love how Jesus says this. Literally, it's "If anyone is wanting or willing," and he puts the words "after me" up front. "If anyone is wanting after me to be coming..." The emphasis, here, is on the fact that when we come, we're already coming to a place where Jesus himself has already passed.

We're to follow him because he's gone on ahead of us. He's not asking us to do anything that he, himself, has not done. He's not calling us to go where he has not gone before. He's not calling us to go where he has not been. In fact, he's calling us to be where he is right now. He's saying, I've gone before you; I'm calling you to come after me. Now, did you hear that? I told you in the tract that Jesus gives, hands to people, all the

crowd, self-denial, cross-bearing. You know what else is in there? This: there's a word of promise. There's the reward.

Following Jesus is not about your physical, temporal health, wealth, and prosperity. It's not about your best life now. It's not about male, female empowerment. In fact, Jesus said that by following him, it virtually guarantees, Luke 6:22, people are going to hate you, and exclude you, and revile you, and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. But he says, "Blessed are you." Why? Why are we blessed for all that? Because the word of promise, the reward of following Jesus as Lord, you know what the reward is?

No matter what happens to you now, no matter what the diagnosis comes from the doctor, no matter how many of your relations turn from you, no matter how much inner turmoil it causes you from having to repent over and over and over and over for the same sins, no matter how much it requires of you to humble yourself before that other person, to confess your sins, to repent of your sins, no matter how difficult it is, you know what the reward is? It's Christ! It's Christ! Is he enough?

It's been one of those difficult sermons, I know. It's a hard word. I began with a warning, and I want to end with a very clear word. Some of you have been attending Grace Church for weeks, even months, or years, some of you for many years and you listen to a sermon like this, and then you leave and you go home, affect, unaffected and unchanged. I don't know what's going on in your mind and in your heart. I don't know how you can hear this and leave unaffected and go about your daily business. And I'm so very concerned. On the one hand, I'm thankful you're here. I'm thankful you're listening to the truth.

On the other hand, I fear for your soul. Listening to Gospel preaching week after week and never following Christ in discipleship like this verse describes, it's deadly for you. You're heaping up truth that you're going to have to answer for on the day of judgment. You're receiving light and truth week after week, but there's no change in your life. You don't do anything about it. As they say, "The same sunlight that melts the wax hardens the clay." "It's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." And I don't want any of that for



any of you. So won't you bow the knee to Jesus Christ today?
Stop! Stop sitting there!

There are others that we know, us believers, we know them: friends, coworkers, family members, like our children and our grandchildren, parents, for some of us it's parents and grandparents. And they profess to know Jesus Christ as Savior, but they live as if Luke 9:23 were not in the Bible, as if it's not true at all, as if this verse doesn't mean what it says. And again, I'm not talking about the world, about secular humanist or rank atheists or adherents to any other false religion.

I'm talking about professing Christians, those who may be, probably are, attending churches this morning. Perhaps this church, as I've said. But for many, they think it's okay to profess Christ and not attend a sound, faithful, Gospel preaching, and practicing church. If they attend any religious service, they prefer to attend a more light-hearted church, where you're not going to hear difficult things like this, one that's got a rockin' band, and lots of programs, and social projects.

Look, everything that removes the offense of the cross to make their church attractive to unbelievers, everything that's not going to challenge them, not going to make them to feel too uncomfortable. Beloved, you've got family members attending churches like that. It's not okay. You should grieve, and mourn, and pray that God awakens them.

There are so many who profess Christ today, and you look at their lives, and you find very little evidence of true salvation. You take the fruits of the Spirit, growing, maturity, reproducing in their lives things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, instead of all that, you find the exact opposite of that. You find the decay of the flesh. In fact, you find anti-fruit.

Instead of love for God and others, there's indifference toward God, indifference, bitterness, anger, hatred, unforgiveness toward other people. Instead of peace, there's continual conflict, contention, turmoil. Instead of patience,

you find impatience, intolerance, a critical spirit. Instead of kindness, you find uncaring coldness, a total indifference, and a lack of compassion for other people. Instead of goodness, you find badness, hidden vices, private indulgences in evil.

Instead of faithfulness, you find faithlessness, a lack of integrity, outright hypocrisy. Instead of gentleness, you find harshness, meanness, argumentative spirits, sharp tongues. Instead of self-control, you find self-centered, self-indulgence, ill-disciplined in mind and spirit, mind and emotion. I don't know about you, but I've met a lot of people who profess Christ, and they look like that, and look very little like Christ.

And you've got to wonder, I mean, listen, when the, when the world meets people who think and act and look like that, no wonder they distrust the church. No wonder they want to stay away from Christians. Paul said, Romans 2:24, "As it is written, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." Listen, beloved, there are a lot of wonderful, wonderful things going on at Grace Church, and I along with the elders,



along with many of you, I am really, really excited to see what God's doing in our midst. People are knowing, loving God, they're worshiping him not just in word, but in deed, and in truth. They're putting it on the line. People are confessing sin to one another. They're praying for one another. They're pursuing holiness in the fear of Christ. There's a love of the life of repentance as people are identifying sinful thoughts and attitudes.

They're seeing, hearing sinful words, seeing sinful behaviors, and they want to put them off and replace them, those internal and external sins with internal motives, external expressions of righteousness. People are loving one another in very practical ways, yes, taking care of physical needs, addressing concerns, challenges of life, lifting burdens. There are also some people who are studying, and training, and growing in Scripture so they can benefit others with sound, wise, biblical counsel.

But I also know that there are people here who don't know God, but they pretend to and that is what I'm talking about.

That's what's grieving me. They attend here, but they don't draw near for mutual accountability. They spurn mutual submission of church membership. There are people who walk in stubborn pride. They remain aloof from other people, making all kinds of excuses for it. They still call each other brother and sister, but prefer privacy to transparency. They don't really want to know others or have people know them. Instead, they love self. They refuse to give themselves to others. They remain at a distance.

Brothers and sisters, this should not be for any of us. Because Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me." You want to know what is absolutely exposing and transparent? Being crucified on a cross. As I said, Jesus, stripped down of clothing. What were the soldiers doing gambling for at the foot of the cross? His clothes. It doesn't get more transparent living than that. Beloved, that's what we need to be with each other.

We say that we love Christ, follow Christ. Luke 9:23, that's where he's going. It's the end of self as the life of

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Christ shines in and through us to glorify God and bless others. You know what the reward is? The reward is not a better you. The reward is Christ. Is he enough? We're going to learn more about what it means to take up the scandalous offense of the cross next week. I know that our numbers may be down next week. I don't rejoice in that, but I, I would understand.

But, let's pray. Our God and our Father, we pray that you would bless us by your Spirit, by your Word, that we would take the words of Jesus Christ seriously, sober-minded as we think about what he's calling us to do. This is about the end of us. It's about a daily death. As excruciating as being crucified on a cross was, a death that could last from six hours to four days, Lord Jesus, you are calling us to a death that lasts the rest of our lifetime as we take up our cross daily.

We ask that you would be gracious to us and remind us of your glory and the joy that you had in your heart as you took up your cross, despising the shame, because now you have risen from the dead, and you've ascended into heaven, and you sit at the right hand of the throne of God, nevermore to endure shame. You

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still live through the afflictions of your people, as we, like the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1:29, "bear the afflictions of Christ every single day." Those are your afflictions, not ours. They're merited because of our adherence to you, our walking with you. We know you feel it.

We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you've gone ahead of us, and we look to you, our eternal reward. We thank you that you have died so that we might be reconciled to God. Please help us as a church to grow to be more faithful as a people, after the, who follow after the command of Luke 9:23, following our Savior, putting our feet in his footprints, heading to Golgotha. We love you. We thank you for this morning and pray that you would use it to affect many souls. In Jesus' name, Amen.