

## The Deliverance of Discipleship

Luke 9:23

February 10, 2019

Back on January 20th, we got an introduction to this most pivotal text, Luke 9:23. If you're not there already, I'd ask you to turn there in your Bibles, Luke 9:23. We want to return, there, today. It's probably fair to say that we've all been arrested by this text. I certainly have. In fact, I kind of feel like Peter at the Transfiguration. I just want to make some booths and camp here for a long, long time because this is such an impactful, profoundly impactful, text. But we will take this Sunday to ponder the meaning and implications of this single verse, Luke 9:23.

After predicting his own rejection and death, and revealing that shocking truth to his disciples, Jesus turned and he called to the surrounding crowds, so not just to his disciples, but to everyone present, believer, unbeliever alike, Jew, pagan. He was

up in a region where there were a lot of pagans, non-Christians, Gentiles.

And he called out to the surrounding crowds, saying these words to everyone, starting in Luke 9:23, "He said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses," or forfeits, "himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.'"

Go back to Luke 9:23. That's where we're going to camp today. These are the demands of discipleship. "If anyone wants to come after me," Jesus says, "let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." I just want to give you a general comment that applies to all three of those commands in that verse. They sound, there, like Jesus is giving permission to a would-be

disciple, "Let him deny himself" and "Let him take up his cross."

It's a third-person imperative that can be translated that way, but while it may sound like a permissive imperative, let him do this, let him do that, it's actually much stronger than that, here. These are demands. We could translate it this way: If anyone wants to come after me, if he has that desire, if he has that intention, he must deny himself. It's not an option. He must take up his cross daily...he must follow me. And this isn't moralism. This isn't Jesus saying, do this, and you'll get that. That's why he said, "If anyone wants this."

He presupposes the work of God in the soul to convert the soul, to give it a new nature. He's calling out to all those in whom the Holy Spirit has worked, bringing about new birth, bringing about regeneration. To some of those hearing Jesus at this time wouldn't get it. Some of those hearing Jesus may be there at his cross, shouting "Crucify him! Crucify him!" But later, later, they may come back after the Spirit is working in them to cause them to be born again later. They'll come back to this text and

say, You know what? I want to follow him. I want to come after him.

So these are demands of discipleship. They're demands of discipleship, but it's not, do this to get; it's, you've got this. Here's how you follow Christ. Here's how you follow him. These are the demands, and we, when we are obedient to these three commands of Christ, they become the very means of our deliverance from our three greatest enemies, deliverance from the flesh, deliverance from the world, and deliverance from the devil himself. So these demands, obedience to these commands of Christ, they become the means of our deliverance. They become the means of our escape. They become the means of our sanctification, of our growing in holiness.

And what we find, here, is that following Christ means leaving everything else behind. To save your life, you must lose it. To profit for yourself, you must forfeit everything; you must forfeit the world. If the Son of Man is to embrace you when he comes, if you're ever to see the fullness of his glory on that

day, you must embrace his shame today. You must bear his reproach now. You must walk with him. You must bear the cross.

As we said before, by mentioning the cross, here, Jesus has intentionally put a very vivid and horrid metaphor and picture in the minds of the people of his day. He's calling all would-be disciples to follow him to the place of public execution, shameful execution, humiliating execution, nailed up high on a cross so everybody can see, stripped down naked, nothing keeping your shame from the leering, jeering crowds.

He's picturing here a train of would-be criminals, condemned by the world, filing along one after another, each condemned man, each condemned woman carrying that cross beam, trudging along to the final appointment with their own death. Jesus could not make the true demands of a Christian disciple any plainer than this, any starker than this. If you intend to follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, it is the end of you.

As unattractive as that may sound to most people, to those who are trying to make something of themselves in this world and



let's be quick to admit that if you want to be somebody, to make your mark in this world, to gain worldly honor and acclaim, to get respect for yourself, or money, or power, or follow your dreams, and ambitions, there's no better way to discourage the superficial than to turn them away from your cause than to invite them to be crucified with you.

Most people turn away immediately because they want none of that. I mean, if this life is all you've got, just one trip around the merry-go-round, here, who wants this deal? But there are some who hear this, and they still want to follow. What's up with that? He's talking to those who want this. He's talking to those who desire for this. He's talking to those who long for this with an abiding, deep longing that they can't get rid of because something's been done to them. They understand what Jesus means, and they want it more than anything.

They're willing to sacrifice everything to get it because, listen, for them it's not a sacrifice. It's not a sacrifice! It's deliverance. It's their very salvation, and not just in the distant future in the sweet bye-and-bye, when I'll finally be

delivered from all the difficulties, and pain, and struggles, and trials I have in this world and on and on and on it goes. No, it's deliverance right now. It's deliverance right now. So is that you? Let's find out.

We need to start by making sure, we really understand Jesus' demands, here. When he, What does he mean, here, when he calls us to follow him? As I said, our Lord means to deliver us, and according to his infinite goodness, and according to his profound wisdom, according to his immense love for us, he means to deliver us, to give us good, to give us a blessing. And in his mercy and compassion, he wants to deliver us from our greatest enemies: the flesh, the world, and the devil. Three points, three imperatives.

Here's the first. First, deliverance of discipleship, number one, you must deny yourself. You must deny, you could say, your old self. Jesus said, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself." This refers to the nature of Christian discipleship. The nature of Christian discipleship, which, which begins at the very moment of its inception. It begins with the

commitment to self-denial. That is the first and most fundamental element of Christian discipleship. This is what we should tell people when we evangelize. We should tell them, now you understand before you too quickly pray the prayer and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, you must understand it's the end of you. It's denial of self.

Many people will turn and walk away, won't they? You could be the most eloquent evangelist, the greatest spokesman for Christianity. You could say all the right things, try to knock over all the intellectual obstacles they have, greatest apologist, but when they face this demand, that it's the end of you; it's not about your health, wealth, and prosperity, many turn away. You must deny yourself.

What does that mean, then there, to deny yourself? What does it mean? The verb *arneomai* has to do with refusing, disdaining, resisting. Someone who practices this verb *arneomai*, he's putting a distance between himself and whatever is the object he is denying, the direct object, whatever he intends to reject. In this case, the direct object, here, is a reflexive pronoun, it's



himself: *heauton*, himself. So the one who does the denying, the one who does the renouncing, he himself receives that action. He's also the one who is denied, who is being denied.

When this verb is used, often when a verb is used and a person is the object of denial, the verb means to disclaim any association with that person. So it's used scripturally when one *arneomai*-s Moses, he's disowning, he's repudiating Moses. When someone *arneomai*-s Jesus, he's repudiating Jesus, disassociating with Jesus, disowning Jesus. That's the, the force, here, of what Peter did when he denied Christ three times. Same word, same idea, same verb used, there.

Peter, then, at the point of crucifixion and the trial leading up to his crucifixion, Peter wanted to disassociate himself from Jesus. He wasn't, he wasn't obeying this command. He disowned him. He refused to associate with him. Such a tragic and a heart-breaking sin. I could tell you that we can all understand the temptation, can't we? We can all understand that. It's a sin, though, that for Peter, and for all those like Peter, who put their faith in Jesus Christ, repented, lived a life of

repentance, it's a sin for which Jesus died to pay the price and he forgave. So this is a very strong word. It's got a deep, emotional impact and import.

We need to acknowledge, though, that it's impossible to disassociate, like Peter wanted to do with Jesus, it's impossible to disassociate with one's self entirely. Okay? That's not really, I mean, we all, wherever, you know that saying "Wherever you go, there you are." You can't get away from yourself; you can't. Hey, is that you, Travis? No, not me. So we're not talking about some kind of existential self-denial, here, okay? God wouldn't want us to do that on a, on a certain level.

There's actually, though, another sense in which Jesus calls us to *arneomai* ourselves. This is what Jesus means. The verb, verb can also mean, to refuse to pay attention to. Okay? To disregard, to renounce one's own interests, that's the idea, here. One lexicographer provides this explanation, "To say 'no' to oneself firmly and radically is to treat oneself as a negligible," quality, "quantity that should never enter into

consideration, to suppress oneself, in a way, a meaning reinforced by the image of the bearing the cross, which leads to death." End quote.

So basically, to deny yourself means to live a life of saying, no to yourself. No. No. I want that, no! I want to go that direction, no! Treat yourself like a scolding parent might treat you; no, no, no, no, no, no! That's how we're to live. That's what Jesus is saying. As a basic, fundamental, defining aspect of living our lives, Jesus wants us to walk day by day, is saying, no to self; no to desires; no to ambitions; no to pride; no to self-exaltation, no, no, no, no!

Now, why would anyone want to do that, to treat oneself as a negligible quantity that should never enter into consideration? In the era of our modern, secular age, to suppress oneself is rank heresy. This will never make it on Oprah. It's a quintessential example, in fact, of all that is sick in the religious mind. Many today believe that this, it's this faith-based, self-denial that leads so many to mental illness, to psychological burdens, to paralyzing phobias. So why would

anyone, why would any sane person want to deny self, to say, no to self?

We're back to our point, how is it that we're understanding self-denial as something positive? It's deliverance. Let me give you two reasons. First, a negative one and then a positive reason. Why would we want to deny self? First, we desire, here, to say, no to ourselves, because we no longer want for ourselves what we have naturally wanted for ourselves from our birth. So we're willing, now, we're even eager, we are zealous to deny ourselves. Problem here in being human is not with our biology. It's not our ontology. It's not a flaw inherent in the fact that we're human beings.

This is not some, as I said, some existential denial of reality, that we are not who we are. This isn't a denial of our existence or the renouncing of self in some ontological or biological sense. God still expects us to feed our bodies with food, to get sleep, to groom ourselves, and all the rest. Self-denial is not to be equated with self-starvation, some kind of severe, even immoral treatment of the body, like is so common today of

saying, I'm not a man, I'm a woman, or I'm a woman, not a man. It's not that. Or I'm not a woman or a man, I'm a, I'm making it up as I go along. It's not any of that.

There are some of us, though, on this planet who by the mysterious operation of the Spirit of God, by the grace of God, we have come to see God for who he truly is. We see him and his majestic holiness, high and lifted up. We see his perfect standard of righteousness. We see that towering justice. We acknowledge in all that strength and power a continual and abundant goodness and kindness, at the same time, a daily outpouring of love toward us in common grace.

We've learned of this, God's truth. We've discovered in his Word a mind of impenetrable wisdom. We've come to realize how God has acted toward us even when we've been completely oblivious and unaware. And not only that, but even we do become aware, what are we? We're ungrateful and even wicked toward him in return. God acts toward us with mercy and compassion. Not only has he withheld his hand of judgment, but he has blessed us instead. We

have, by the grace of God, we've come to see ourselves in stark contrast to this high and holy One.

And not only have we committed the most basic of sins, we haven't honored him as God or given thanks, we've also run headlong into worshiping the creature and all created things. We've been worshiping and coddling ourselves rather than bowing before the One who created all things. So with our minds so consumed with idolatry, we have been immersed in all manner of defiling delusions, depraved passions, degrading desires. So why would we ever think of following that heart, one that is immersed in idolatry? Why would we want to follow those dreams, the dreams of a, of an unbeliever? How is that flesh and that sinful thinking going to lead us anywhere good because a "mind set on the flesh is death."

We've come to see ourselves in that light. We've come to see our old selves as not to be trusted. So self-denial, then, makes perfect sense especially when we hear what the Bible says about us, Ephesians 2:1-3. You were having some trouble with mistakes you've made. Is that what the Bible says? No! It says, "And you

were dead in the trespasses and sins." Wow! That's stark. That's confrontive. You were dead! You were a corpse in your sin, in which you once walked; you followed the course of this world,; you followed the prince of the power of the air. Who's that? Satan. We followed him. He was our god. He was our ruler. He was our, our champion and our leader. Why? Because he is the original, I will...I am, not God, I am. I am the center of all reality, and the center of my world, and the center of the universe.

And we said, you know I kind of like that. We kind of like Satan's mantra. Put yourself first. Feed yourself. Service yourself. We really liked that. That was, "the spirit that is at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, we carried out the desires of the body and mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." That's what we were. That kind of thing called the sin nature still lives in us, and it stills insinuates its thoughts into our minds. Why would we want to listen to any of that? That's the self, Jesus is saying to deny. Deny; say no to.

With Paul we've come to realize, Romans 7:18, "Nothing good dwells in us, that is in our flesh." The problem with us, with our flesh, that's a hostile principle within us. It's opposed to the very goodness of God that we love. And that is why we are so eager to deny ourselves. Now that the Spirit of God has awakened us, we do not trust ourselves. It's self that led me away from God in the first place. We see a principle of sin within us, and we find ourselves easily led astray by it, so easily deceived. So we want to starve that sinful desire. We want to choke it out. We want to mortify it, kill it. We want to silence its voice. We want to choke out its life.

Paul says, Romans 8:5, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." That's a first reason, that's a negative reason for us to be eager, really, really eager, to deny ourselves. We want to say, no, to ourselves because we no longer want for ourselves



what we naturally wanted for ourselves. We don't want that anymore; no longer want the flesh to prevail because it leads us to death.

So second reason, a positive reason, that we also want to deny ourselves, that we desire to say, no, to ourselves, because we want for ourselves, not what we wanted, we want for ourselves, whatever God wants for us, and we as ourselves keep getting in the way. For this we look to our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, as you know, did not suffer from the same malady as we do. He was not born in sin. Jesus was not born a sinner. He's conceived by the Holy Spirit miraculously in the womb of the virgin Mary. He didn't have a sin nature. He didn't have that hostile, rebellious principle within him against God. He never sinned.

Therefore, he is the only human being, 2 Corinthians 5:21, "who knew no sin." Peter said it this way, "Jesus committed no sin; neither was deceit found in his mouth." Writer to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus "was tested in every respect as we are. But to the greatest degree", to a degree that you and I can never understand. Why? Because if a full force of temptation comes on

us, at some point we'll break. Jesus, the full force of all temptation came upon him. He never broke. So he experienced temptation. So if temptation comes upon you, eventually, if the pressure is strong enough, you're going to break. Why? Because you're human; because you're peccable. Because your, you have a sin nature, you'll eventually give in unless God is gracious, right?

Take Jesus Christ, temptation pressure came, pressure came, temptation, testing, testing, testing, and what did he have? An impeccable nature, a divine nature that would not allow him to fall. So he outlasted every temptation. I had a professor once describe it to me like, we in our human nature, like a broomstick, wooden broomstick handle. You put enough pressure and force on that broomstick handle, it's going to break, right? It's going to snap. Well, Jesus had that human nature, that wooden handle, but his divine nature was like a titanium bar. And the wood was tied to the titanium bar and so the pressure, the same force came upon the wood, he felt it all; he never broke. Put through the greatest trials and temptations by the devil himself, never sinned once.

So can we agree that Jesus found in himself no negative reason, as we do, for self-denial? Absolutely. But did he deny himself as he's calling us to do? Yes, he did, John 5:30, he said, "I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me." Hmm. Next chapter, John 6:38, "I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me." From the earliest days, just 12 years of age, Jesus is in the Temple, he's learning what he could from the rabbis. He's not like other twelve-year-old boys, I've known a few in my lifetime; pursuing their own interests, like me as a twelve-year-old boy. What was he doing? He wants to know and understand his Father's will. It set his course to do the Father's will, and he needed to know it.

Father pronounced his pleasure in Jesus, when Jesus was in the waters of baptism, being baptized by John, not because he was guilty or a sinner and needed cleansing, but because he came to represent guilty sinners who needed cleansing. John tried to prevent his baptism, saying, "I need to be baptized by you." And Jesus said, No, no, no! I've embraced the father's will for my life, as a representative of all who will repent and believe, and I'm bearing their guilt, and I'm bearing their sin. Let it

be so, now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. What was the father's response? "This is my beloved Son; with him I am well-pleased." Jesus' commitment to self-denial that he might do the father's will, that's what eventually took Jesus to the cross, to give his life in crucifixion, to drink that bitter cup that you and I deserved.

Remember how Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane? "My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me. But nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." Why did Jesus deny himself when there was no sin to deny, no sinful nature to fight, no sinful desires to mortify, because he so dearly loved, and took pleasure in the wisdom of God, in the perfect plan of the sovereign father. He wanted nothing in his life but the will of God. Psalm 40 verse 7, "'Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O God, your law is within my heart.'"

We, too, beloved, we desire to say, no, to ourselves because we want for ourselves whatever God wants for us. He's the all-knowing, all-wise, all-good God. Why would we not want for our

lives what he wants for our lives? When we resist his will, we just see that sinful impulse in us, don't we? We delight to do the will of God because it's so infinitely superior to whatever we could come up with. Again, Romans 8:6, "The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit," though, "is life and peace."

Command, there, Luke 9:23, is in the aorist tense. In this case, it stresses the urgent summary nature of that command. In other words, you must do this, and you must do it now. Self-denial, it's the most basic, most fundamental pre-commitment of the Christian life. It is the defining mark of discipleship. Listen, do you see evidence of that in your life, or have you subtly, imperceptively maybe to yourself, have you dethroned God? Have you crawled back up onto the throne in your life, taken an underserved place of self-importance?

Perhaps it's worth some self-reflection today, maybe some repentance over your lack of self-denial, your self-indulgence, maybe even a religious form of self-indulgence, where you fulfill yourself in the church and become full of yourself and

proud and self-righteous, rather than meek and humble. Again, self-denial is distrusting our natural impulses. It's always examining ourselves to see what our sin nature is insinuating into our minds and our thoughts, how our flesh is tempting us, how our, our motives can be corrupted by sinful desire, going to that all-pervasive and fundamental sin of pride and saying, where is it? Where is it, and how do I get rid of it? We treat ourselves, our desires, our wills, our preferences, our rights, all of that is negligible. All of that is unworthy of consideration.

Self-denial means we crucify all self-centeredness. We mortify the flesh. We set aside every supposed claim that we think we have to self-importance, every self-perceived right. It means we let go of every, every perceived slight by someone against us, every petty grievance. And in light of eternity, isn't every grievance, every offense against us, petty? All offense, all, we let it go for the sake of Christ. Self-denial is the starvation of the flesh. It's the end of you, that God's will might be done in us. It's the end of our perverted wills. It's the end of our ignorant and misguided ambitions, the end of self being at, at the center and we rejoice in that!

We rejoice in that, beloved, because this is the end of fleshly tyranny. It is the end from our base instincts of food and self-preservation, and sexual desire, and every other thing in our life having its sway. It's the end of that. It's deliverance from worldly desires that are tainted by sin. It's the end of you. It's the end of your old self. And more than that, deliverance from the flesh through self-denial means deliverance to the loving Lordship of a good and wise father. That is what Jesus rejoiced in. Was there anybody happier on this earth than Jesus Christ?

Second deliverance of discipleship, second deliverance: You must carry your daily cross, you must carry your daily cross. Jesus said, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him take up his cross daily." He must take up his cross daily. Verse 1 refers to the nature of Christian discipleship. This is about the extent of Christian discipleship. To what degree? To what extent? To the extent of the point of death, even if it means the most horrible death ever imagined by the depraved human mind: crucifixion on a cross.

The verb, here, about carrying your cross, picking up your cross, taking up your cross, it refers to picking something up, just literally picking something up. Here, it's picking up the very implement that results in your death, the patibulum, the cross-beam of the cross. And here in the action of the verb, it's not just to pick it up or lift it on your shoulders, but it's to carry it from one place to another. So take this crossbeam today, where you are now; pick it up, put it on your shoulders and you do this daily, and you carry that to the place of your execution. That's what you do. That's what discipleship is. That's what it is to be a Christian. If you don't live this way, you're not a Christian.

This is the extent to which you must die to self, and again, the verb is in the aorist tense. It indicates an urgent, summary action, you must do this, you must do it immediately. You must do it right now. I. Howard Marshall put it this way, "Let up the disciple take up the position of a man who is already condemned to death. Hence the saying refers not so much to literal martyrdom as to the attitude of self-denial which regards its



life in this world as already finished. It's the attitude of dying to self and sin, which Paul demands." End quote.

Notice, here, that Jesus did not say, if anyone wants to come after me, let him take up *my* cross. You see that? He didn't say that. He said, "Let him take up *his* cross." Jesus bore his cross; we bear our crosses. Jesus bore a literal cross to a literal execution; we bear a metaphorical cross to a different kind of execution. The cross of Jesus Christ resulted in atonement for our sins; the crosses we bear have nothing whatsoever to do with our personal atonement. That is won and finished in Jesus Christ.

The crosses we bear have to do, instead, with the sufferings of Christ, which are not yet complete. We're to set out every day entrusting ourselves to the perfect will and wise providence of the God who cares for us, even, even and especially, if he has ordered suffering for the day, if he's ordered affliction or difficulty or sickness or any host of other comparatively minor but altogether irritating inconveniences. We embrace all of it

as given from the good hand of the God and father in whom we trust.

Okay, so let's get more clarity on this. What does specifically Jesus mean when he says, "Take up your cross daily"? Yours? Us individually? How is my cross, which differs significantly from his cross and its theological and atoning nature, how is ours similar? How do we share in the sufferings of Christ? What are we talking about? To answer that question, think through what the cross symbolized for Jesus in his death. Yes, it was the literal, physical implement used to crucify him.

But what does that cross represent as a symbol? The cross represents, very graphically, very vividly, the rejection and condemnation of the world. Both Jew and Gentile, remember? The cross represented the scorn of the Gentile world, which counts all those who are crucified as the very pinnacle of stupidity; the example of folly, the very worst of losers and rejects. The cross also represented the informed judgment of the Jewish world, the studied, considered, theological rejection, Luke 9:22, of the elders and the chief priests and the scribes. Total

rejection from the intellectual elite, total rejection from the Gentile world.

Let's go a little deeper than that, what is it that led to Roman crucifixion? What is it that led to this Jewish rejection? It's the fact that Jesus denied himself. It's the fact that he rejected the world in order to fulfill the will of the father for his life. That led to his death. It was his desire, it was his decision to follow God with his life that led to his rejection by his own people; his crucifixion by the world. He is the perfect, quintessential, flawless example of doing the father's will, and what did the world say? I don't want God! Kill him! No matter how religious they seem, beloved, they can say, oh, I just love God. I just love Jesus. Listen, the more you truly love God, the more you truly love Jesus Christ, you're a dead man, because the world hates you.

Get this, Jesus was not a victim in this. So his rejection by the world, it was preceded by his prior rejection of the world. You may remember back in Luke 4 when the Spirit took Jesus to the wilderness to undergo testing by the devil. It says in Luke

4:5, "The devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time." He enticed Jesus with the world, with the glory of the world, with the power and the authority to rule it, to take it for himself.

And the devil spun the temptation this way, "To you I will give all of this authority and all of this glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will be all yours. All yours! " Remember how Jesus answered? "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" He made that commitment before he ever went into the wilderness. He despised the world before he ever went into the wilderness, before he ever heard those words from Satan.

Jesus had a prior commitment; a greater loyalty had a hold of his affections. He loved the Lord his God, as it says in the Law of Moses, he loved his father, Deuteronomy 6:5, "with all of his heart, with all of his soul, with all of his might." The glories of creation, the monuments of men, trading the finite for the

infinite, are you serious? That's no bargain at all. That's a devilish trick.

Later, as Jesus made his way to the cross, he told the Pharisees, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again." Then this, "No one takes it from me." No one takes it from me. I'm no victim; I chose this. "I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down; I have authority to take it up again. This charge I've received from my father." What does that mean? Again, it means that long before the world rejected and crucified Jesus, he crucified and rejected the world. The world was dead to him. He didn't seek the world's approval. He didn't fret about its ultimate rejection and the judgment of rejection on him. The world was dead to him, and he was dead to the world.

That's the sense in which Jesus despised the shame of the cross, Hebrews 12:2. He cared more for pleasing the father than about pleasing the world because he had taken up his cross from the very outset of his ministry, that is, in the desert wilderness when he despised the ruler of this world. That led to rejection

at his trial. That led to the crucifixion at his cross. Listen, in a satanically inspired world, the spirit that flows among all the sons of disobedience, some of them you and I know and love very much.

Doing the will of God can get you killed. The devil, all those who are aligned with him, all those who are allied with him, they love wickedness. They hate righteousness. So when one comes in the Spirit of say like psalm 45:7, "Loving righteousness hating wickedness," that is someone who provokes and receives the cruel fury of the satanically inspired world. Hebrews 1:8-9, connects that text Hebrews 45:7 to Christ, "Your throne O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of your uprightness is the scepter of your Kingdom, you have therefore," your, "you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness therefore God your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."

Listen, enduring the scorn, the wrath, the hatred, the rejection of the world, it is so worth it! Well why? As I said, none of this for a true Christian none of this is truly sacrifice. None

of this is like, oh, this is so troubling to me." No! This is rejoicing! This is joy! In Hebrews 12:2 we have the testimony of Jesus, who has gone before us. He's "the author and the finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, he's seated," right now, "at the right hand of the throne of God." We, taking up our cross, bearing our cross, we endure as well, despising the shame for the sake of joy, for the sake of God.

So what's your individual cross? What does it mean to take it up and carry it daily? Listen, the cross you bear is not your difficult marriage. That may be the context in which you bear your cross, but it is not the cross. The cross you bear is not your weight problem, not your health issues, it's not your unreasonable boss, it's not your disability, or whatever. Your cross is not circumstantial; it's not situational, it's not your marriage, it's not your, not your family, it's not relationships. That is not your cross; that's the context in which you may bear your cross. It is not the cross. That's not what Jesus is talking about, here.

So what is the cross you're to bear daily as a Christian? As you pursue the will of God every day, you entrust yourself to the good providence and kindness of God, and by walking according to the will of God, doing what he wants because you love him, it may raise the ire, and it will raise the ire, of the world around you. But you go on anyway, despising the shame, caring nothing for the rejection. You continue to do what may result in your rejection.

What will result in that? What will result in your condemnation may result in your death; more likely, perhaps more difficultly, it's not going to result in an immediate martyrdom death. It's going to be a long, slow death, a death to self, and you're happy with that. Why? Because, like the Apostle Paul Galatians 6:14, you've learned to "boast in nothing except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified," to m, "to me and I to the world." Why do you despise the world, because you know that "friendship with the world is enmity with God," James 4:4, and "whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." And you don't want to be an enemy of God. You love him!



You're mindful of what the Apostle Paul said, or I should say, the Apostle, what Apostle John said, warning us so clearly, do not love the world, "Do not love the world, neither the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You want to be so far from that text. "For all that's in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and pride of life, is not from the father it's from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

That's you! You want to abide forever. You want to know the father. You want the father's will to be done in you. You want his goodness. You want to rejoice in his will, his perfect word and his great wisdom. So you're eager to carry your cross daily, to receive the disapprobation of the world, to embrace its rejection and condemnation because God is using that to further crucify yourself, and you're into that! A long, slow, daily march following Jesus Christ to the place of execution means a long, slow, but very happy, increasingly joyful, death to self.

You may have heard this, an unknown author wrote this about dying to self, words you can use to test yourself, to examine yourself. He says this, "When you're forgotten or neglected, or purposely set at naught, and you don't sting and hurt with the insult of the oversight, but your heart is happy, being counted worthy to suffer for Christ, that is dying to self. When your good is evil-spoken of, when your wishes are crossed, your advice disregarded, your opinions ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise, rise in your heart, or even defend yourself, but take it all in patience, patient loving silence, that is dying to self. When you lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity, any impunctuality or any annoyance; when you stand face-to-face with waste, folly, extravagance, spiritual insensibility, and endure it as Jesus endured, that is dying to self.

"When you're content with any food, any offering, any climate, any society, any raiment, any interruption by the will of God, that is dying to self. When you never care to refer to yourself in conversation or to record your own good works or itch after commendations, when you can truly love to be unknown, that is dying to self. When you can see your brother prosper, and have

his needs met, and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit, feel no envy nor question God why 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."

Permit me to use that same pattern of expression and ask her, ask here, and answer the question, "What does it mean to bear my cross daily?" It's a matter of bearing the shame and the scorn of the Christ-rejecting world. So we could put it this way: When you are silenced by unbelieving family, shunned by neighbors, maligned by coworkers, not because you, yourself, are unpleasant and self-righteous but because you talk about God and Christ, that is bearing your cross.

When you're not invited or you're uninvited to social gatherings, like birthday, retirement parties, neighborhood barbecues, after-work outings, not because you're socially awkward and lack social grace, but because you refuse to

participate in gossip, laugh at lewd or coarse joking or share in worldly chatter out of your love and worship of Christ, that is bearing your cross. When you're passively passed over, forgotten and ignored, when you're treated with cold indifference as an irrelevant oddity, or when you're actively despised and hated because you humbly but boldly stand upon Christian principles; that is to say, when you speak up for the dignity of all human life, even those not yet born, those who are physically ormentally disabled, those who are elderly or diseased or infirmed.

When you speak out about God's design for human sexuality, and in the most unpopular places, insisting upon a gender binary in our God-given biology, insisting upon the complementary partnership that exists in marriage, which is the union of one man with one woman for life; when you insist upon and live according to God's design for men and women, created in God's image, therefore co-equal image bearers and yet created for different roles in the home and in the church, and all that speaking and insisting and protesting is not out of a self-righteous morality, but out of a love for God and his truth, out

of a love of living by his revealed wisdom, out of a desire to glorify God and his ways, that is bearing your cross.

You get the idea, right? Our Lord's death by crucifixion allows us to see what it means to up our own crosses daily. It's living in the fear of the Lord and not in the fear of man. It's living to please the Lord even, and especially, and it will happen, at the risk of the wrath and the rejection of the world. God has designed our crosses, each one of our crosses.

He's designed our, daily, daily burdens by his loving providence. He is an all-good, all-wise God, and that is why Jesus wants us to be delivered from self and delivered from the world in order that we might really live for him. So by calling us to discipleship, our Lord has lovingly, compassionately, generously delivered us from the tyranny of the flesh and from pursuing the approval of a God-hating world.

Which leads us to a third deliverance of discipleship. He delivers us from the tyranny of Satan. Delivers us from the ruler of this world by binding us to himself, a new Lord, a new

and loving Master. So, deliverance number 3: You must obey your new Lord. You must obey your new Lord. Jesus said, If anyone wants to come after me, let him follow me. He must follow me. So we've talked about the nature of discipleship, the extent of discipleship, this is the purpose of discipleship. This is the purpose. It starts with self-denial even to the point of death for the purpose of delivering us from enslavement to sin, to death, to the devil himself, in order that we might walk in life-long, joyful obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord, and for all of eternity. But it starts now.

That's what Jesus' self-denial and Jesus' cross-bearing meant for us, deliverance from the cruel tyranny of Satan. Hebrews 2:14-15, Jesus incarnated, he took on flesh and blood like us that he might suffer and die in that flesh, that human flesh. Why? That "through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to life-long slavery." To deliver us. That, folks, is what it means to truly live.

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." What's abundant life? What is, what is abundant, joyful life? It's to live in obedience to Christ's commands. It's to follow his example. It's to live as he lived. It's to be free from the cruel tyranny of the devil, free from the fear of death in order to walk in a new way of life, to walk in freedom and fullness of the father's love for us and our love for the father.

Think about the times that you've stumbled into sin, or you've squandered hours that you know you could have been spending with a much more profitable spiritual exercise. Do you long to do it again when you come to that realization? No. You hate those things. You want more than anything to live a consistent Christian life. Why? Just to spare yourself from the trouble of a condemning conscience? No, not at all. I mean, yes, that's part of it. We don't like being condemned by our conscience.

But it's not just that internal shame, feeling ashamed before God. It's not that. It's that that falling and that squandering and that waste, it kept us from what we truly love and treasure:

God. It kept us from knowing him. It kept us from rejoicing in him. It kept us from the, the study and the rich treasure of his Word. It kept us from being his hands and his feet in serving other people. It kept us from what we really, truly delight in. And if you don't truly delight in God and in loving his people, you may check yourself to say, am I really a Christian?

Was there ever a happier, more joyful, more contented, more fulfilled human being than Jesus Christ? No. Perhaps we should study him. Perhaps we should see how he did it. Perhaps we should live as he lived, walk as he walked. Perhaps we should live in daily obedience to the father's will, again, I've got to repeat this, not to gain the father's approval. That's Pharisaism; that's legalism; that is another cruel tyranny. That's running from one ditch and falling off a cliff. Not to gain the father's approval because we already have it through Jesus' perfection. Perhaps we should die to self, take up our cross daily, and follow him, as a result of his approval. Because what did he save us for? For him. To know him, to love him.



Just prior to enduring the suffering of the cross, the betrayal unto death, the trial by the Sanhedrin, the mockery of kings and soldiers, and then being delivered over to death by Pontius Pilate, just prior to bearing the weight of divine wrath, just prior to absorbing the hatred of God for everything that offends his holiness, Jesus prayed this prayer, "Father, the hour has come. The time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. Since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have glorified you on the earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do."

Jesus walked in full, perfect obedience to the father. He accomplished all the work the father gave him to do. Because he walked in obedience, the father was glorified. God's people were saved from their sins, and through faith in Jesus Christ, eternal life from God himself pours forth from God by the Spirit to everyone who believes and follows Christ as Lord. That's the result of his obedience.

It's profound, eternally meaningful, when we follow him. There's no discipleship without Lordship. There's no experience of life eternal apart from walking in obedience in the now, knowing the joy of walking in his ways, living in accordance with his wisdom. That's why it has been rightly said, "If he's not Lord of all in your life, then he's not Lord at all in your life." Christ must have his way with your life, with every single step you take, with every word you speak, with every thought you think.

Is Jesus Lord of your bank account? Is he Lord of your daily schedule? Is he Lord of your appointments, your commitments? Is he Lord of your interpersonal communication? Is he truly Lord of your business and your work? Is he truly Lord in your marriage? Is he truly Lord for you, child, with your parents, or your grandparents. Is he truly Lord of you, parents and grandparents, with your time, that you give it to others? Is Jesus Lord of your priorities, your ambitions? Is he Lord of your imaginations? Is he Lord of your affections and your reactions? Does he have your allegiance, or does he only have your allegiance when you're getting what you want? Will you only follow him if it means you get what you want, you get what you

think will get you out of the trouble you're in? Then you'll follow him?

Listen, that's the prosperity gospel right there. That's the prosperity gospel! Sow a seed of faith, money, and you hit the slot machine and hope you get a big payoff. Don't we live the same way sometimes? Does he have your loyalty when you feel set aside, when you feel you've been slighted or offended? If Christ commands you to be baptized, will you do it? If he commands you to join the local church and submit to its leadership and to its authority, will you do it?

If he commands you to order your life in such a way that you can practically and meaningfully obey the one-another commands of the New Testament, will you do that? I mean, does he have to stand before you in flesh and blood, like come down, say, say, set aside my greater work in the world, come down from the throne where I'm at my Father's side, interceding for you and for all of you around the world, and all times, do I need to step off that throne, come and pay you a personal visit so that you'll take me seriously? Or can I just write it, here, in the

Word, at the cost of martyrs, at the cost of blood? Will you listen to it, here? Will you listen to it if a loving Christian says it to you?

If Christ commands you to evangelize, to know the Gospel well enough that you can explain it to somebody else and not have to defer to others all the time; you can actually explain it to other people, will you obey his command to take the Gospel to unbelievers? Isn't this a joy to us? Yes, it's a joy! If he commands you to make disciples in the church, to use your time and your efforts and your energies to invest into other people and teach other Christians to obey all his commands, will you do that?

Listen, that's what it means to follow him. It's not to play church. It's not to inhabit a pew for a few hours. You can understand why I say that this is a paradigm-shifting text. It demands your all. And if you're anything like me, I've had to re-examine my life in light of this text. In fact, it seems that God gave me a sickness so I could sit and meditate for a few weeks on the meaning of this text for my life, and say, I, too,

must repent. Will you join me? Will you repent with me? Can we do this together?

At the very end of this road is Christ, my Savior, God, my eternal reward. At the end of this road is the never-ending joy of knowing him and learning his ways and marveling at his wisdom and discovering his wonders and rejoicing in his full and complete salvation. We get to do that eternally, and you know what? If you're with me, we do this together! Amen?

Let's pray. Our Father, we're so grateful and humbled before this text, and we just pray that by your Holy Spirit you'd lead us into full obedience. We want to deny ourselves because we see nothing good in ourselves, like the Apostle Paul. We don't trust our thoughts and judgments. We don't trust our dreams, desires, ambitions; that course that we set long ago was set in a course of unbelief. We want to learn now what your will is. So we deny ourselves that we might set aside ourselves for you, who are greater. We take up our cross; we bear the shame and reproach and the suffering and rejection of the cross, following Jesus Christ and living in such a way that to demonstrate your



goodness and your wisdom in our life. We know that it's going to bring rejection and suffering, and we embrace it heartily.

Can we suffer more than Jesus did? Not at all. We haven't even suffered to the point of shedding our own blood. And we follow Jesus Christ because, as the most joyful human being who ever lived, we want to know what made him tick. We want to know what made him understand you so well. We want to walk in his ways, putting our feet in his footsteps, and listening to his commands from Scripture and following them and heartily obeying them out of zealous desire and obedience.

Please help us, dear Father, because we're so weak, so frail. We're prone even this week, even this week to forget Sunday, to forget the sermon, to forget this text. We're prone to be caught up in yet another triviality and petty thing. Please protect us. Please, by your Spirit, cause us to walk in your ways. We love you. We thank you for the atonement that Jesus provided in his cross. We pray that through bearing our own cross and dying to self that we would be of some good earthly use to you however you determine. In Jesus' name, Amen.