

Why We Follow, Part 1

Luke 9:24-25

February 17, 2019

Take your Bibles, and we're going to go back to this pivotal portion of Jesus' teaching in Luke chapter 9. So I invite you turn to Luke chapter 9, and we are in verses 23-27. This is Jesus' call, his call to anyone who will listen, really, anyone who is listening and willing to listen, calling them to follow him in permanent discipleship. We're going to read this section again today, Luke 9:23-27, and I'm hoping that by reading this section as we've been doing, re-reading it week by week, it becomes branded on your brain. That's really the goal, here. We need to really memorize this section of Scripture, this section of the Lord's teaching because it marks the call of his Gospel on all of those who name his name.

So let's look at it there, Luke 9:23-27, "He said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and 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. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.'"

As we move from verse 23 into verses 24-27, notice how these verses, 24-27, expand on verse 23. They provide reasons for listening to and heeding Christ's call to discipleship. Notice in these verses, 24-27, the repetition of the word, for, at the beginning of verse 24, verse 25, and there again at the beginning of verse 26. The word, for, in each verse introduces an explanation of verse 23. Each verse providing a separate reason or motivation for following after Jesus Christ. So the question could be, why obey Christ's call to discipleship, in verse 23, which seems very severe, stark. Three reasons. First reason, verse 24, it will save your life. Second reason, verse 25, you'll gain your soul and the third reason, verse 26, you will see the glory of God.

These verses provide reasons, motivations for heeding the call to Christian discipleship. These are the reasons for following Jesus as Lord of your life. If you talk to any professing Christian, and they don't give you some form of these kind of reasons for being a Christian, you might want to press them further: Why are you really following Jesus Christ? Is it for, as we've been talking about, health, wealth, prosperity? Is it because following Christ leads to your riches in your bank account? Better relationships? Is it to improve your standing? Is it to get exposed to more people in a community setting, so that you can make, coninctions, connections for your business? People have all kind of reasons for professing faith in Christ. But these are the reasons why we follow.

Notice more specifically that each of these three verses connects with each of the three imperatives in verse 23. So notice, for example, when Jesus says, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself." Why is that? Answer, verse 24, "For whoever would save his life," that is, himself, he "will lose it, and whoever loses his life," or his self, "for my sake will save it." So verse 24 expands on that first verb, deny

self. Jesus says in verse 23, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him take up his cross daily," which has to do with embracing the rejection, the scorn, the condemnation of the world. Why should we do that?

Well, the answer comes in verse 25, "For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world," gains the whole world's acclaim, the whole world's money, the whole world's land, and holdings, and property, and fame, and fortune, and admiration, "what does it matter if he gains the whole world and he loses or forfeits himself?" "So let the world be crucified to you, just as you are to the world," Galatians 6:14. Verse 25 answers that second imperative in verse 23.

Finally, Jesus says in verse 23, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him...follow me." Why is following after Jesus Christ so important? He answers the question in verse 26, "Whoever is ashamed of me," now, doesn't want to follow me now, doesn't want to identify with me now, he's ashamed of me and my words, if he's ashamed to talk about my actual teaching in the public square, in the universities, in the workplace, around

the, over the backyard fence, in the community, if he is ashamed of me and my words, "of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and the glory of the holy angels." Each of these verses answers an imperative in verse 23.

And as we've been saying, this is Jesus' way of evangelism. This is his initial, out-of-the-gate, meeting, pees, some of these people for the first time, he's evangelizing them. He is calling sinners, here, to turn from sin and follow him. Yes, his disciples who've been following after him are among this crowd. His twelve Apostles are also among this crowd. But he called out to all. Many of these people up in the region that they're in, Caesarea Philippi, many of these people are actual pagans. Not, they're Gentiles, not Jews. So he calls sinner to turn from sin, follow him, this is how he does it.

But this is also describing discipleship. This is also describing the way of the cross that we follow when we walk and follow after Christ. So if you are living this way, if this is a present reality of your life, if this is the trajectory of your

life, then you are very likely a Christian. I mean, I could say without any fear of contradiction that if you are living this way, you are a Christian. This is how Christians live. But listen, if you do not live this way, you'd better examine yourself to see truly whether you are in the faith. Because if you're not living this way, you may not be a Christian at all.

That puts us Christians in an interesting position, doesn't it? As we follow our Lord's pattern for evangelism, when we explain the call to discipleship, the call to follow Jesus as a Christian, we call people to do what is completely counter-intuitive to them. We call them against all their natural inclinations and impulses. We call them to deny that. People like to be liked. We tell them, you gotta stop wanting that. This call to discipleship here as you see there in verses 24-26, there, is really a series of paradoxes.

You say, what's a, what's a paradox? A paradox is a statement that seems, on the surface, to be self-contradictory, but it's really not. Still, it sounds like that on the surface. "To save your life you've got to lose it." How does that make

sense? Got to dig deeper, right? To gain, you need to give it all up; to see glory, you need to embrace what is counted to be utterly inglorious, what is viewed with universal scorn and contempt and shame, that is, like the rejection, suffering, and condemnation of the cross of Jesus Christ."

Listen, these, these paradoxes are not just intellectual hurdles that we jump over to become a Christian, and once we've landed, well then, it's back to the same old, health, wealth, prosperity, message. Be good to get good; be good to feel good. God is our cosmic genie, there to, to respond every time we rub the lamp of prayer, and he pops out and says, three wishes. No, this isn't just what we hurdle over to become a Christian. These paradoxes are how we actually live as Christians. This how we follow Christ.

So the question is, especially for some outsider, some observer, someone who's listening in to the conversation, the question for them is, why? Why? Why in the world would you follow Jesus as a disciple if it means forfeiting, losing, if it means shame? Why would you do that? Well, you can consider

everything that follows from this point forward, you can consider everything here, what we're going to cover next week as well, consider this as an apologetic for Christianity. This is a defense of true Christianity; genuine, biblical, apostolic, God-centered, Christ-commanded, Spirit-generated Christianity. This is what it looks like right here.

Here are the reasons we follow. Here are our motives for obeying that stark command and call in Luke 9:23, for abandoning the self, taking up the cross daily, and following Jesus as Lord. So why do we follow? Because Jesus said, number one, first point in your outline, "Lose your life to save your life. Lose your life to save your life." Jesus said that. That's why we follow. He called out to all in verse 23, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself," why? Verse 24, "whoever would save his life will lose it, whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

Jesus wants us to see clearly, at the center of concern is this issue of life. Life, it raises the questions like, what does our life consist of? What does it mean to lose a life? Or,

oppositely, to save a life? Preserve life? What is life? The word rendered, life, by most of our translations, it's the word *psuche*, which literally means soul. But, life, is actually a very good translation. It kind of captures the idea. It's a word that stands for a broad and profoundly important concept because we're talking here about the whole of one's perceived existence. It's what makes me, me. It's what's important to me. It's what I spend my time on, my energy on; it's what I spend my money on. Life.

When a man says, football is my life, or a woman says, shopping is my life, we usually take that as a bit of an overstatement, right? I mean, literally, it can't be your whole life, right? It's got to be other things as well, like sleep and eating and work. All they mean by that statement is that football or shopping is something that they really, really enjoy. However, when a wife says about her husband, football is his life, or when a husband says about his wife, shopping is her life, it's generally not a flattering comment or a positive statement. It's a complaint, right? It's often coming from someone who on the outside sees maybe better than that

individual what's driving the heart more clearly than himself or herself as the case may be.

So when we say something, is like life to us, or when we can make that observation about somebody else, that thing is his life, we're saying that that thing occupies undue importance in his life. It occupies all of his attention, consumes all his thinking, his planning, his activity. It's got a hold, deeply, of his affections. It's captured his loyalty. And whatever else he may do with the rest of his time, really all of that is subservient to and in the service of what he really wants, what he really loves, what he really wants to do. That thing is his life.

So if we consider that thing as a person's life, and we put that in theological terms, what are we talking about? We're talking about worship, aren't we? That which occupies all my heart's affections, that which dominates my thinking, what determines my willing and my planning and my acting, that thing that I'm anxious and concerned about, that is the thing that I

worship. We know, biblically speaking, theologically speaking, that God created us to be worshipers. That's part of the design.

We're always worshiping something by virtue of the way God made us. He put it in our hearts to always bow before him. Sin took us away from him, perverted that. So we worship all manner of other things that are not God; they cannot satisfy and fill that place. We're always worshiping something, and our worship is either pure and righteous, or it's unholy and unrighteous. We're either worshiping the one and true and living God, transfixed on the pursuit of the divine glory; or else we're worshiping some kind of an idol, "having exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image," just a worthless idol.

Idols come in many, many, many forms. In fact, John Calvin said, "The heart is an idol factory," just pumping out idol after idol off the conveyor belt. Some idols have the faces of loved ones painted on them, photos of family members taped, stapled to them. Some idols are paper thin, so thin you can hold them in your wallet. They're green in color; they faces of old men, old dead men printed on them. Some idols are like that.

Some idols come with corporate branding, which is really the mark of our servitude. Some idols have our own faces stamped on them, always with a smiling face, too, showing personal happiness and fulfillment. We love that idol.

So when Jesus says in that first part, "Whoever would save his life will lose it," he directs that warning to a fallen humanity that is full of idolaters. Yes, idols take different forms, family, money, career, but ultimately, here, he's, he's identifying the heart of idolatry, which places the self at the center. Jesus is warning us against a man-centered religion, which is by nature idolatrous.

Again, notice how Jesus is speaking to the energy and the impulse, here, of idolatry, which is desire. It's the word that's translated in the ESV as, would, in that verse, "Whoever would save his life." It's the word, would, in the NAS; It's in the New American Translation it's the word, wish, "Whoever wishes to save his life." In the King James Version, it's, will, "Whoever will save." In the NIV it's, want, "Whoever wants to save."

All those translations are really trying to capture the sense of that Greek verb *theló*, pointing to desire, to the will, revealing the heart of what somebody wants. The verb *theló* is in the present tense, here, which means that Jesus is talking about something that's animating, something that's a motivating principle of a person's life and worship. He is driven along by an abiding, internal desire that is continuous and habitual. It's, it's always wanting, longing, that comes to actually define the person. He becomes characterized by that desire. Oh, there goes the football guy. Oh, there goes the shopping lady. Oh, there goes the, Oh he's all about family. It characterizes him. It's the age-old principle: You become like what you worship.

You find that all over Scripture, but very clear in Psalm 115, if you write that down, Psalm 115. That's repeated again in Psalm 135:15-18. Listen to these verses, "The idols of the nations," Wait a minute, we're the nations, right, we're in America. We're not here in this country. We're the nations. So the idols of the nations like us, like America, "are silver and gold," We're paper of green. The idols of the nations are money;

they are, "the work of human hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes, but they don't see; they have ears, but don't hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths." And get this, here's the principle. "Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them."

As I said, you see this all the time. Those for whom football is an idol, you've heard these guys. They're doing all the fantasy football and, I mean, they're walking stats reports. They, they know, they're talking trade deadlines, player profiles, and all the rest. Nothing of lasting value. Good minds devoted to futility. Worship shopping? You become a living, breathing fashion catalog. You're like an animated, breathing mannequin. Worship family, and your convictions will erode. Your beliefs will be replaced by all of their beliefs. You'll find yourself silenced at the dinner table, wearied by chasing all of their interests and pursuits and agendas until you just give up and just embrace it and go with it.

Worship money? You'll become just as cold and dead and lifeless as money, and, yes, you'll eventually turn green.



Worship your career? You'll become a walking promotion piece. You'll become company propaganda. Or perhaps you're not even that. Maybe you're just turned into a human tool, a walking slave, all for the purpose of building the company.

If you sweep all that away, get to the bottom line of idolatry, to worship yourself. Because that's what's at the heart of all this: self-worship. Well, then you become a self-lover, giving rise to unnatural passions for yourself and for your own pleasure. It becomes distorted and perverted, and our world is abounding in this. It's like Paul explains in Romans 1. You'll eventually follow that inevitable path of idolatry as God hands you over and hands you over, receiving the due penalty for your idolatry. We see this all around us, don't we?

In the moral, immoral revolution we see around us, as people are so in love with themselves that, yes, they even love a mirror image of themselves. And God has given them over to homosexuality, which is the due penalty of their error. It's the consequential expression of self-love. God's handed this whole country to those sins. As I said, it's the inevitable result of

many, many years, decades upon decades upon decades, of what may be more harmless idolatry: football, shopping, family, money, career.

That's what Jesus is confronting right here: the heart of idolatry that people so want to protect, and preserve, and save. They want to save their life; they want to preserve self-interest. Philip Ryken describes them this way, "People who want to save their lives in this sense believe their satisfaction security are up to them. Thus they pursue their careers with blind ambition, working so hard that there is little time left for anything else, even the people they claim to care about. Or they organize their lives around entertainments, the pleasures they like to pursue. They want to get what they want to get out of life, and so they keep their lives pretty much to themselves.

"They're not willing to make any costly, interpersonal investments in the Kingdom of God. They call themselves Christians, but they are not willing to suffer for the cause of Christ. They never go anywhere difficult or dangerous with the Gospel. They rarely, if ever, have conversations with people

that might expose their own spiritual commitments. Then, at the first sign of hardship or persecution, their instinct for self-preservation takes over, and they pull back inside their comfort zone." End quote.

That's spoken like a pastor who knows people. We'd do well to pay attention, here, to Jesus' warning, "Whoever would save his life," whoever wants to hold on to, and preserve, and keep his precious idols, that one will lose it. When it says, "Whoever wants to save his life," you know the word that's used for, save? It's the same word that's used for salvation: *sozo*. I mean, they are so interested in saving, in rescuing, preserving what they want, it's like salvation to them. And it's self-salvation. It's works-righteousness, just perverted in the wrong direction. That person who wants to save his precious idols, preserve his self-interest, that person's going to lose it. He's going to lose, he's gonna lose what is so precious to him. A very strong verb, here, *apollymi*. It means, to lose by ruination, to lose because of destruction.

Asaph pictures a people who live this way, enamored with idolatry as usual, and coming into sudden destruction. Psalm 73:19 says, "How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!" Jot this down in your notes, read it later, Revelation 18. Read about the sudden destruction of the idolatrous system of commerce in this world, how quickly it's gone, and how people mourn over that.

Jesus described the same thing when he warned about the return of the Son of Man, how people are content in their lives, they're pursuing self-interest. And it's just like those who scoffed at Noah when he was building an ark to prepare for coming judgment. Jesus said, "For as in the days of Noah, before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day when Noah entered the ark," and then what? "And they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away." And he says this, "So will be the coming of the Son of Man."

So many people hear this verse preached and they understand the meaning of it. It's very plain. They understand the

implications. But they don't heed the warning. They just continue on as if they can hold both things in their hands, God and mammon, God and wealth, God and ambition, God and family, God and career, God and anything else that drives their hearts. They think they can hold on to their idols and worship God, too. This is tragic! Keep on living as they've always lived, ignoring what Jesus says. Those who do that, they're gonna suffer loss of the very thing that they so valued as precious.

And I've got to wonder, do these people, many of them professing Christians, sadly, maybe some people here, do they not believe Jesus? Because that's the issue. It's an issue of faith; it's an issue of trust. Do you believe the one speaking to you? Do we not take him seriously? I'm afraid many, many fail to examine themselves carefully in light of Jesus' warning. They reflect on their lives and their hearts far too superficially. They think that God just approves of them just as they are. You've heard that, right? Come as you are. God demands no changes of your life. Just come as you are!

No, God demands the end of you. Come as you are, but when you get there and you gotta go through the gate, it's the end of you. It's the end of your life. The other side of the gate, it's, oh, pick up a cross beam, put that on your shoulders while the world scoffs, and scorns, and laughs, and mocks, and taunts, and rejects, and condemns. You take that to your place of death every single day. People here think, we think too superficially about these things, don't we? We hear it, we walk out, we forget it.

We think that, I'm fine the way I am. God likes me just as I am, and it really helps my self-esteem to believe that. It's the indictment God gives in Psalm 50 verse 21, "You thought that I was just like you." And God says, I am not like you. I am not at all like you. I am a holy and jealous God. Let such a one heed Jesus' warning. If anyone wants, if anyone desires, insists upon saving his own life, preserving his own way, his own desire, protecting his own interests, doing what he wants to do anyway, regardless of Jesus' words, listen, Jesus says he will lose what he so cherishes, namely his life, his soul, his treasured independence, his self-will, gone!

Okay, well, that's the warning. Jesus intends, here, to stop us in our tracks, to get us to consider, reflect deeply on our very, very short lives. He wants to motivate us, here, to self-denial. But let's keep reading and look at the second half of the verse because here he's motivating us more positively, with a promise, "Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

Notice the contrast between the first and second part of the verse, between the one who merely *wants* to save his life, but he's not able to. That guy's chasing the wind; he's pursuing a mirage. His desires are never fulfilled because idolatry is empty and futile and without weight and meaning. By contrast, though, there's the other guy, who not just wants to lose his life, that keeps in the ethereal, that keeps it in the, in the mystical. He doesn't just want it; he does it. He loses his life, that's the contrast. It's not just in his head. It's not just a set of desires. It's not something he procrastinates in.

It's something he actually does. He lives this way. He lives denying self. He lives as a matter of course, losing his

life. Why does he set self aside? Why does he deny himself, to say, no, to his own desires, and ambitions and pursuits? One reason, and it's right there in the verse, "on account of me." For the sake of Jesus. There it is! Self-denied, self-crucified, self-set-aside—to make room in the heart, all room in the heart, for the all-surpassing glory, the divine beauty of God's only Son, Jesus Christ our Savior.

I've been reading, lately, and profoundly enjoying a particular, short but rich, little book by Henry Scougal called, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. As the title implies, he's reflecting on the self-emptied soul, which was made to love and worship God. The one who denies the self, who sets the self aside, he makes room in his heart for life itself, from the Author of life who inhabits his heart. Listen to this from Scougal, "The love of God is a delightful and affectionate sense of the divine perfections, which makes the soul resign and sacrifice itself wholly unto him, desiring above all things to please him, and delighting in nothing so much as in fellowship and communion with him, and being ready to do or suffer anything for his sake or at his pleasure." End quote.

GRACE CHURCH



It's a delightful, affectionate sense that we have of the divine perfections. Men, do you know why it's so important that we meet every other Saturday and study the attributes of God? Because we want our souls delighted and our love inflamed for the perfections of our God. That's why we meet. We want that passion to burn brightly within us and drive us to worship.

You know what that creates for our families? A self-emptying, self-denying man, who's actually worth something around the house. A man who will teach, and lead, and stand in the gap, and face the enemies, and protect, and provide, and preserve, and instruct, and love his family. If you're not there, you're not, you're just missing out, you guys.

What Scougal described, there? That's how Jesus lived and walked on this earth. He's completely enraptured by and enthralled with the glory of God in the beauty and the holiness of his perfections. Jesus lived that way. So listen carefully to this: If we, like Jesus did, if we lose our life for God's sake, for Christ's sake, then we also will, like Jesus did, even

though he died upon that cross, and even though he was buried in that tomb for three day, we too, will live like Jesus lives.

And likewise, we, too, will save our lives. That logic is bomb-proof. It's bullet-proof. Here's the kind of life that lives in the soul, that's fixed on Christ, that's inflame with the love of God. As Scougal put it, "When once the soul is fixed on that supreme and all-sufficient good, it finds so much perfection and goodness as doth not only answer and satisfy its affection, but master and overpower it, too."

Look, remember the principle of worship? We mentioned it earlier in connection with idolatry. When the heart, though, is not fixed on idols, worthless idol, empty idols, but when the heart is fixed on devotion to God, loving him and worshiping him, then, too, the worshipper becomes like what he worships. Same principle applies. When the life and the love of God is alive in the soul of man, his heart is enlarged because the object of his worship is large. God is infinite and immense and eternal.

This is the reason Solomon noted in Ecclesiastes 3:11 that "God has put eternity into the heart of man." Why? So that he will not be satisfied with anything that is not eternal, be satisfied in nothing less than God himself. Scougal again says this, "Behold on what sure foundation his happiness is built whose soul is possessed with divine love, whose will is transformed into the will of God, and whose great desire is that his Maker should be pleased. Oh, the peace, the rest, the satisfaction that attendeth such a temper of mind! What an infinite pleasure must it needs be thus, as it were, to lose ourselves in him," that's the self-denial principle. "To lose ourselves in him and, being swallowed up in the overcoming sense of his goodness, to offer ourselves a living sacrifice, always ascending unto him in flames of love." It's a reference to burning up a sacrifice on the altar. It's us!

Having heard that and going back to Luke 9:23, doesn't Jesus' call to discipleship now make perfect sense? "If anyone would come after me," if anyone wants that, "let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." Why? Because the end of you means all of him. And so, Christian wife, when you are so delighted and full of the love of God, even if you

are to suffer the tyranny of a husband who is disobedient to the Word, you are pleased to win that unbelieving or disobedient man over without a word, letting him see "the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit." Why are you willing to do that?

Because it is enough for you. No matter what happens with your husband, it is enough for you that your attitude and your behavior in God's sight is very precious. You're satisfied with that because you're satisfied in God.

Christian husband, when your heart is devoted to God, and your mind is overcome with joy and satisfaction in reflections on the glory of his divine perfections, you are eager to die to self, to give yourself up for your wife and your children. Your soul belongs to God, and you resign and sacrifice yourself wholly unto him, desiring above all things to please him, which means it's easy to turn off the ball game to have a conversation with your wife, who loves you, who wants your attention and your affection.

You see the practical connection? This is not pie-in-the-sky meditation on a mountain top. This is practical living,

driven by the love of God. I could go on, talk about you, Christian student, or you, Christian worker, or you, Christian sufferer. When your heart is captivated by God's glory, and the life of God is growing in you by the Holy Spirit, in obedience to Christ and his Word, it becomes such a minor, trivial little thing to set yourself aside, to refuse to consider yourself as you live to please God in your schooling, in your work, or, especially, in your suffering, in your affliction, and your trial and sorrow.

Why do we do all that? Why do we follow? Why are we so willing to lose ourselves, to refuse to consider ourselves? On account of him. It's because of Christ. It's because he's precious to us. Because we're satisfied in him. We care for nothing else except to know and love Jesus Christ, and to please God the Father, and to walk in lock-step obedience with the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us. That's all we want. That's all we want.

One more quote from Scougal. I can't resist. "The severities of a holy life and that constant watch which we are

obligated to keep over our hearts and our ways are very troublesome to those who are only ruled and acted on by an external law, and have no law in their minds or their hearts inclining them to the performance of their duty. But where divine love possesseth the soul, it stands as a sentinel to keep out everything that may offend the Beloved, and doth disdainfully repulse those temptations which assault it. It complieth cheerfully, not only with explicit commands," but get this, "with the most secret notices of the Beloved's pleasure, those warnings of conscience that come across the mind when we consider this or that thing, the most secret notices of the Beloved's pleasure. And that heart is ingenious in discovering what will be most grateful and acceptable unto Him. It makes mortification and self-denial change their harsh and dreadful names and become easy, sweet, and delightful things."

Is that how you think of mortification? Is that how you think of self-denial, as sweet, and easy, and delightful to you? So why do we follow? Because we believe Jesus, because we love him, because we desire God above all else. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." We believe him when he tells him

that. It's that simple. When we believe him, denying self, losing our life for Christ's sake, we find the life of God filling our souls. That's the trade-off. Self for God and we're good.

Here's a second reason for obeying Christ's call to discipleship. You're looking at your notes and looking at the time and saying, he's only on point two. Look, point three is going to come next week, okay. Just want you to listen attentively and not anxiously, all right. So here's a second reason for obeying Christ's call to discipleship. Why do we follow? Because Jesus told us, number two, release the world to gain your soul. Release the world to gain your soul. Let go of the world, and you'll gain your soul. That's a bargain! That is a bargain, verse 25. Jesus said back in verse 23, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him take up his cross daily." We embrace the rejection and condemnation of the world as Jesus did, which comes from following the will of God, like Jesus did. Why was he crucified? Because he was obedient to the point of death, even death of the cross. That's why.

So why do we do that? Why do we take up our cross? Answer in verse 25 is this, "What does it profit a man if he gains the world and loses or forfeits himself?" The commitment to follow Jesus, it has implications on our relationship to the world. Discipleship means the end of our former ambitions, and pursuits, and desires, and dreams. God is not about making my dream a reality. This isn't the Dream Center. We don't dream for what the world dreams of. We don't share the same mentality as the rest of the world around us, the world's pastimes, and leisure, and love of money, and lust for baser pleasures, or even sinful pleasures, all in the incessant pursuit of personal liberty, personal autonomy. Look, by following Christ, we set all that aside. We give it up to gain Christ, who is our soul's reward.

Notice how Jesus puts this verse here in financial terms. I think that's brilliant because that's how people think, in financial terms, profit and loss, commerce. That's how he puts it, here. It's the verb *kerdaino*, to gain, to get a gain, to make a profit. Jesus speaks in terms, here, of profit and loss. Joel Green writes, He's, "He," Jesus, "is concerned with here to talk about possessions, whose potential for strangling the faith

that he has already mentioned back in Luke 8:14, and Jesus thus uses the language of business dealings. At one level, to highlight again the threat of possessions, at another level, more direct level, as a symbol of the disposition of the self, which always is calculating in terms of profit and loss. 'What would get me...?'"

Look, don't let the world, don't let the stuff of the world, Luke 8:14, like "the cares and the riches and the pleasures of life," we've already gone through all that, but don't let those things choke out the Word of God. Why? Because the Word of God is the only voice calling you away from all that. If you choke out that voice, you've silenced God. So Jesus comes in verse 25, he's presenting, here, a very different kind of accounting. This is a heavenly metric that comes from a divine perspective.

Listen, don't lose sight of the fact that Jesus, he came down to us from heaven, which means he has seen the heavenly treasures for himself. He knows the infinite, and eternal, and all-glorious God, and what that God has in himself. He knows the

treasuries are vast and infinite, more glorious than anything that we puny-mind human beings can imagine here on earth.

And from that heavenly perspective, Jesus says, don't take the devil's bargain! Don't do it! Don't trade your soul for the fading and fleeting treasures of this world because if you do, you've lost it all. You've lost the only means of receiving any of that joy and satisfaction, namely yourself. To lose yourself, the same verb as in verse 24, *apollymi*, to lose by ruination or due to destruction. But also, he adds another word there, forfeited yourself. The verb for, forfeited, means, to suffer damage, or injury, or irreparable harm come to yourself. Why is that? Because this entire world is passing away. It's fleeting; it's dying.

You know, that's why God, I think, one of the reasons God gave us the seasons, so every year we can watch the life, growth, flowering, and death, of everything on earth, to imbed within our minds that this world doesn't last. Don't bank on it; don't put too much into it. "The world is passing away," 1 John 2:17, "along with its desires."

So if you invest yourself into the structures of the world, the businesses of the world, the governments of the world, all the community activities of the world, the societies, the sports, the entertainments of this world, they are all of them passing away. They're dead already and dying and rotting, never to be seen again. "But whoever does the will of God," John tells us, "abides forever."

So beloved, don't be a fool. This world was not created to fulfill us. It wasn't created to satisfy us. God created this world to serve our physical needs and instruct our spiritual eyes. The goodness of God in caring for us with the earth and its fulness, that's always the lesson in helping us to see the lovingkindness of our creator. It's so easy to get our eyes off of him, isn't it? And to look longingly at the stuff that he's made. There's stuff that looks like gold and silver. There's stuff that looks like food. There's stuff that looks like...stuff.

And it's all just atoms, it's just interestingly arranged differently. Atoms arranged as food, atoms arranged as gold,

atoms arranged as your spouse. I'm, you know, I'm not saying don't love your spouse. I'm just saying, I don't idolize that spouse. The point is that the world is here to serve a greater purpose of caring for our needs so that we might look to God and worship him.

One of the key turning points in the testimony of Bishop J. C. Ryle, he's a nineteenth-century Anglican pastor, it's when his father, who was a wealthy banker, it's when he lost everything. John Charles Ryle was a young man back then. He'd just graduated from Oxford, and he anticipated a long and very celebrated career in the English Parliament. But as a very young Christian, God taught him a monumental lesson about the temporary, fleeting nature of money, of wealth.

Ryle wrote in his autobiography of that financial devastation as a violent blow that inflicted ruin upon their family. He said, "We got up one summer's morning with all the world before us as usual, and went to bed that same evening completely and entirely ruined." It made a very profound impact on him. It changed the course of his entire family because it

was so sudden. And the effects were immediate. The family had to liquidate everything to pay their debts. The estate, the home, all the property, it's all being sold off right underneath them. That meant all the household servants and their families were suddenly turned out.

A lot of people looked to that home, that Ryle home, for their livelihood. So it not just affected their family; it affected a number of families. And he said, quote, "That whole, the whole circumstances of that time were just about as painful as could be conceived, and at the end of thirty-two years," which is the time of writing his autobiography, "at the end of thirty-two years are as vividly before my mind as if they were yesterday." It lasted with him. It hurt deeply.

I've never had household servants. I've never had to suffer the loss of great wealth, but I know people who have. And I do think there is a profound pain and difficulty for those who have, and suddenly lose everything, than for those who've never had and are always clawing their way up the ladder. There's a deeper pain because it's, they knew what it was like.

And yet praise be to God that God did this in Ryle's life, and that Ryle could endure that misery in order to write these words about Luke 9:24-25, "The possession of the whole world and all it contains would never make a person happy. Its pleasures are false and deceptive. Its riches' rank and honors have no power to satisfy the heart. So long as we do not have them, they glitter and sparkle and seem desirable. The moment we have them, we find that they are empty baubles and cannot make us content. And worst of all, when we possess all the world's good things we could possibly desire, we cannot keep them. Death enters and separates us from our property forever. Naked we came into the world, and we will leave it naked."

Understand that J. C. Ryle, he didn't come to that by adopting some form of stoicism to deal with the loss of his father's fortune. He felt all this deeply and acutely, and he felt it for the rest of his life. His feelings were not detached in some cloud, mystical religion. His faith was robust and practical. He walked around in it.

He wrote this, "I believe that God never expects us to feel no suffering or pain when it pleases him to visit us with affliction. Submission to God's will is perfectly compatible with intense and keen suffering under the chastisements of that will. Troubles, in fact, not felt are no troubles at all. To feel trouble deeply and yet submit to it patiently is that which is required of a Christian. A man may submit cheerfully to a severe surgical operation in the full belief that it is his duty to submit and that the operation is the likeliest way to secure health, but it does not follow that he does not feel the operation most keenly, even at the moment that he is most submissive. It was a wise saying of holy Baxter, when he was dying of a painful disease, 'I groan, but I do not grumble.'"

Listen, beloved, this world that we live in, it is under a curse and by pursuing the world, and chasing the world, and trying to gain the world, and be something or be someone in this world, you are chasing the wind and pining after death. "All that is in the world," 1 John 2:16, "is lust, sinful desire, self-centered longing. It's the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." None of that is of God. It foams forth from the decay of a dead and rotting world.

And so "if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." So those who love the world are not Christians. There can be no happy truce between the world and God. Jesus laid down that principle, Luke 16:13, we'll eventually get there, "No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other." That's the principle. But the immediate application, there, "You cannot serve God and money." Well, we could add other applications to the same principle. You can't serve God and self. You can't serve God and your career. You can't serve God and stuff. You can't serve God and ambition, and reputation, and leisure, and food, and entertainment, and money, and sensual desire, and fill in the blank. All that stuff is what the world is made of.

And as James says so clearly, "Friendship with the world is enmity with God. Whoever, therefore, wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." God is a jealous God. He tells us that from the very beginning, in the Ten Commandments. "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or an idol. You shall not

bow down to them and serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am" what? "A jealous God."

In fact, the "Holy Spirit, whom God made to dwell in us," James 4:5 says, "he envies intensely." That Holy Spirit, it lives within us is so intensely jealous of our heart's affections, he wants to see our hearts enraptured with Christ, totally devoted to God, undyingly loyal to him. Why? Because our life devoted to God is our joy; it's our soul's satisfaction and happiness. That is the jealousy of divine love. He wants what's best for us. So that means you can't serve him with part of your heart and serve yourself with the rest of it. He will have all of you, or none of you. That's the, jel, jealousy of divine love.

Christ says, "Let go of the world and all that's in it. Embrace me. You will gain your soul." How is that possible? Because through Christ we are made partakers of the divine nature. Through Christ we're united to him because he is in union with God. We're united to him and united to God, "for you

have died," Colossians 3:3 says, "and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

If you're in union with the creator and the sustainer of the universe, you're in union, then, with the source of all being. You're in union with the source and giver of all life. You're in union with the self-sustaining God. We could put this in terms of the, Green New Deal. God is the only sustainable source of renewable energy in the universe. We should send that to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, right? She needs to understand this and put it in her Green New Deal. Self-sustainable energy! Life from God!

So why do we follow? Because Jesus has called us. We want to follow. He says to us all, "Anyone who will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose, and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses, or forfeits himself?" I hope you're hearing that because that's either-or language. It's black and white.

No middle ground, here. There's no room, here, for mediocrity, for passivity, for half-hearted, good-enough Christianity because that's false Christianity. Jesus is calling, here, for radical, whole-hearted commitment. He's calling for profound engagement in the Christian life in the worship of God and in the church for which Jesus Christ died.

One man who lived this way was an American missionary named Jim Elliott. You guys have heard the story, I'm sure. He died in 1956 evangelizing the Auca people of Ecuador. Remember this saying, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose"? You know, his death proved that he believed that. I can say without fear of contradiction Jim Elliott today believes that he made a good exchange. He traded the prospect of a long and prosperous life in wealthy America and embraced, instead, a short and violent death in impoverished Ecuador.

And if he could stand before you today, he'd make the same trade a thousand times and tell you to do the same and follow

him, because that short life of Jim Elliott is still bearing fruit. Only God, the omniscient God can count its measure. Jim Elliott died in 1956 when he was only 28 years old, same age, by the way, as Henry Scougal, when he died of tuberculosis at 28, 300 years earlier, roughly. He died in, 16, 1678. When Scougal was just 27 years old, he wrote the words that I've been quoting to you, and he wrote the words of this prayer, which we'll use now to close. Bow with me and pray along with me as we follow the model of this prayer of young Henry Scougal.

"And now, O most gracious God, Father and fountain of mercy and goodness, who has blessed us with the knowledge of our happiness and the way that leadeth unto it, open our eyes, O God, and teach us out of Thy law. Bless us with an exact and tender sense of our duty and a knowledge to discern perverse things. O, that our ways were directed to keep Thy statutes; then we shall not be ashamed when we have respect unto to all Thy commandments. Possess our hearts with a generous and holy disdain of all those poor enjoyments which this world holdeth out to allure us, that they may never be able to entice our affections or betray us unto any sin. Turn our eyes from beholding vanity. Quicken Thou us in Thy law.

"Fill our souls with such a deep sense and full persuasion of those great truths which Thou hast revealed in the Gospel as may influence and regulate our whole conversation, and that the life which we may live henceforth in the flesh we may live through faith in the Son of God. O, that the infinite perfections of Thy blessed nature and the astonishing expressions of Thy goodness and love may conquer and overpower our hearts, that they may be constantly rising toward Thee in flames of the most devout affection, enlarging themselves in severe and cordial love toward all the world for Thy sake, that we may cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in Thy fear, without which we can never hope to behold and enjoy Thee. Finally, O God, lead us in Thy truth and teach us, for Thou art the God of our salvation. Guide us with Thy counsel, and afterward receive us into glory for the merits and intercession of Thy beloved Son, our Savior. Amen."