

Luke 9:23-26

Good morning church. If you have a Bible, I invite you to go ahead and turn to Luke 9:23-26. I'm hopeful that each of you, both here in person and online, have read through this week's passages in our Bible reading plan. We spent a lot of time in the Gospel of Luke this week, with 3 of our 5 readings from Luke's Gospel, some time in the Gospel of Mark, and 2 incredible stories/chapters in the Gospel of John this week.

And if you spent time in this week's readings – I'm certain you picked up on a common theme that ran throughout much of what we read; highlighted in Luke 9:23-26

READ Luke 9:23-26

²³ Then he said to them all, "If anyone wants to follow after^[d] me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily,^[e] and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it. ²⁵ For what does it benefit someone if he gains the whole world, and yet loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and that of the Father and the holy angels.

PRAY

The Main Idea for today's sermon

Main Idea: Jesus will not take 2nd place.

This theme ran throughout our reading plan this week:

- Later in Luke 9 – almost sounds a little harsh
 - You might be homeless (foxes have holes, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head)
 - First let me go bury...let the dead bury their own dead, but you go spread the news of the Kingdom of God
 - Let me go say goodbye...no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.
- Mark 10 –
 - Parable of the Rich Young Ruler – Commands, not suggestions. Go, sell, give, come, follow.
- Luke 12 –
 - Parable of the Rich Fool building bigger barns (side note, every time you drive by a self storage facility – think about this parable. Forbes projects a CAGR of 135% from 2020-2025. Just sayin. Americans are great at building bigger barns.
 - Humility & Self-Exaltation
- Luke 14 –
 - Bear his own cross
 - Hate family

- Count the cost of building
- Count the cost of going to war

Because Jesus isn't going to take 2nd place in your life. **If you are a Christian, everything in your life flows from your relationship with Jesus**, your following of Jesus, your belief in the Gospel. Everything.

Hear me – we have to get this right. We have to see this, that Jesus isn't going to take 2nd place in your life. Jesus isn't looking for a participation trophy in your life. He's not going to take 2nd place, 3rd place, or **participation trophy place**. He's not looking for a participation trophy in your life. He's either the foundation of your life, or nothing. All or nothing. That's it.

And Luke, drives this point with our primary passage today:

V23 – If anyone wants to follow after me.

- **WANTS** – suggests there's at least an interest in what Jesus is doing. Some people have seen miracles, seen what he's been up to, and there's at least an interest.
- **TO FOLLOW** – Hear what he's not saying – not saying go to church. Not saying walk an aisle. Not saying be on the church setup/tear down, worship team, whatever. He's pointing to a life of FOLLOWING Jesus. A life that starts in a moment, and continues for a lifetime, as we FOLLOW Jesus. **We believe in His WORK (death on the cross in our place) and Follow His WAYS**. Not some religious game, but a person to be believed in and followed.

V23 – Let him deny himself

- When our culture says:
 - Love yourself
 - Pamper yourself
 - Worship yourself
 - Embrace yourself
 - Believe in yourself
 - Find your true self
 - If you can dream it you can be it → spoiler alert no you can't.
- The Gospel says:
 - Deny yourself

And in the very next phrase here, Jesus literally says die to your self when he points them to “take up your cross daily, and follow me.”

- I was reading from a great pastor up in the DC area named, Thabiti Anyabwile this week, and he painted a picture on this verse where some people think of Jesus up front, carrying his cross, and all of us behind in a parade. No chance, he says. We're all behind Jesus, but not in a parade. We're behind him, hunched over, carrying our own crosses.

- Sometimes we hear things like: “oh well I’ve got a really bad boss, or all of my friends have left me, or I’m in a really tough spot right now – but that’s just my cross to bear.” That’s not the point here. The point here is that **Jesus is calling us to DIE TO SELF.** Not just a hard time we’re going through, but to actually die to ourselves.
- Jesus’ original audience would have immediately picture people hanging on a cross – possibly the most torturous form of execution ever imagined. So horrible that Roman citizens were exempted from being killed by crucifixion.
- But see, the call to follow Jesus is a call to die to ourselves. Because Jesus isn’t going to take 2nd place in your life!
- And it’s a call to **KEEP DYING TO YOURSELF.** Both Matthew and Mark record this talk from Jesus. But there’s a detail unique to Luke’s Gospel – the word **DAILY.**
 - Just an important reminder, that killing the self-centered, self-preserving, sin infested person living inside each of us is a daily battle, as we follow Jesus each day.
- **FOLLOW ME** → The necessity of obedience.
 - Obedience – not to earn our position before God. Jesus has earned it for us. But obedience as an outpouring of love for Jesus. John 14:15 – If you love me, you will keep my commands.

V24-25 – The Beautiful Paradox of the Gospel

This beautiful paradox of the Gospel, in that by denying ourselves, by putting to death the selfish little punk that lives inside of me and lives inside of you, we gain everything. We get JESUS. Meaningful, purpose-filled life with Jesus now, and a crown of glory at the end of our earthly lives. As many have said, “**first comes the cross, then comes the crown.**” Saving your life by losing it. Losing it by trying to keep it.

But the key phrase here is “because of me...” Whoever loses his life because of me.

- Self-denial isn’t the goal.
- Like – remember when we had a season of fasting as a church. But the goal wasn’t just to skip a meal or two, the goal was to pursue the Lord through prayer, through His Word, through worship.
- Self-denial for its own sake is purposeless, and a bad idea. But, if Jesus is the goal, it is the path to real meaningful, purposeful life.
- Whoever loses his life because of me...

Remember, Jesus won’t take 2nd place, 3rd place or participation trophy place in your life. Either all or nothing. And the final thing we see in this text for today – if we’re ashamed of him he will be ashamed of us.

READ V26

Ashamed – not a temporary denial or wishy washiness (if that’s even a word) – but rather a rejection of him. If we reject Jesus, if we deny him, he will deny and reject us.

Paul would write in Romans, that he’s not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for in it is the power of God to salvation, for all who would believe, first the Jew then the Gentile.

CLOSING

How is all of this possible? Like, do we just try hard to deny ourselves? I don’t think so. In fact I know we don’t. Because we have to see this in context of the rest of the Scriptures. I think it’s only going to be possible if Jesus has changed us. Given us a new heart – one of flesh, not one of stone (like the prophets spoke of) – where he changes us from the inside. Giving us new desires, new affections, new loves.

It’s only possible if we have turned from our sin, and trust in Jesus. Trust that he is exactly who the Scriptures say that he is. Trust that he paid the penalty for sinners like you and like me. Trust that he offers meaningful life as we deny ourselves, take up our crosses daily, and follow after him. Give him 1st place, because we know that he won’t take anything less.