

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**

Chapter 9- Luke 9:23-26

170- The Characteristics of Saving Faith- Part 4

July 22, 2012

Luke 9:23-26

23 And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

24 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his ¹life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.

25 "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and 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 *the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*

To the Glory of God

Now we are examining exactly what Jesus said here in this Passage and what He *meant* by what He said and we are seeking ways so that as God's children- we may *apply* what Jesus said here to our lives in the 21st Century- so that God may be glorified in us and through us and so that we may be found faithful and busy about the Work of the Lord.

This Passage describes what is called, "Saving Faith"- that kind of faith that is a Sovereign gift from God and that produces true genuine Salvation in those to whom God graciously gives it. And we have been examining the Characteristics of this Saving Faith and so we have been camped out in this Passage for a number of weeks now. And I pray that our time together here has been encouraging and edifying to you and glorifying to God.

And so we have found out some very interesting things. First of all- we have discovered a very simple but profound Truth about Salvation- and that is that:

Salvation and Discipleship are the same thing

Being saved and walking with God are the same thing; Serving Christ and being born again by Christ are the same thing; Bearing Fruit and being Saved are the same thing- they are just two different ways to express the very same Truth. The Bible teaches that a saved person walks with God and those who walk with God for any length of time- are saved. If you are saved- you will serve the Lord and if you serve the Lord- it is because you have been gloriously and wondrously and eternally saved. And so that also means conversely that if you do not serve the Lord- that you are not saved but are only deceived into *thinking* that you are saved.

Now it is true that serving God does not *cause* or *bring about* or *produce* Salvation- we cannot earn a place in Heaven by what we do for ourselves- but a person who has been truly regenerate by the Sovereign Move of God's Spirit *reflects* or *responds* to that Sovereign Salvation by automatically loving God and the things of God and a truly born again soul will *naturally* and *normally* pursue after God and pursue after Truth and pursue after holiness and will desire and seek and labor to live a life in accord with God's Will and God's Word precisely because he has that new Divine nature.

And he can't help it- it isn't his fault- he certainly can't take any credit for it- he is not entitled to any glory for doing so- it is all because God has Sovereignly and miraculously and supernaturally transformed his sinful, rebellious, fallen, and radically ruined nature into one that is Divine. And now all of his loves and wants and desires have changed. And thus all of his choices and the acts of his will reflect those new and holy loves and desires.

That is what Jesus is teaching here in this Passage that our brother just read to us. So the notion that is so popular in the modern Church that *some* saved people go on with the Lord into actually serving Him and following Him and obeying Him- while others- who are equally saved- do not- is a myth- it isn't true; it is a lie; the Bible does not teach it. So Salvation and Discipleship are the same thing and

following Jesus and being saved are the same thing. Or to say it in the words of our text- looking at verse 23,

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

Now we must understand that these Words by Jesus here are not an invitation to some form of higher Christian living for those who voluntarily choose to participate in at some point after they were saved- no, this is Christ's Own Personal description of what true and genuine Biblical Salvation is. These are the Characteristics of what Saving Faith does to every single individual who is so blessed to have God graciously rescue them from the Wrath of God:

- ✓ They will come after Jesus
- ✓ They will deny themselves
- ✓ They will take up their cross
- ✓ They will follow Jesus

In other words- there is no such thing as anyone living continually under the bondage of sin after they are saved. There is no such thing as anyone living in continual defeat over habitual sins after they are saved; no such thing as anyone walking in premeditated and ongoing disobedience and being saved; no such thing as being saved and not hungering and thirsting after Righteousness; no such thing as being saved and not wishing to come after Jesus; no such thing as being saved and not denying the lusts of the flesh; no such thing as being saved and not taking up your cross; no such thing as being saved and not following Jesus.

Now what we must understand is that the dominant view of many people in the modern Church about Salvation is one that is Man- made; it is false; it is unbiblical; it is pagan in its origins and many of the foundational teachings about Salvation that are taught from the pulpits of the American Church are actually the work and the labor and the logic and the teachings of a fourth Century heretic named, Pelagius and are not found anywhere in Scripture.

In fact many of these foundational teachings about Salvation in the modern Church are actually *opposed* to what the Bible *does* say and

they are fighting *against* true and eternal Salvation and are not a help at all- but actually a hindrance to people being truly born again.

The dominant foundational teaching about Salvation in many parts of modern evangelicalism in America- which are taught by very prominent seminaries and many Bible colleges and are regurgitated from many pulpits is that all a person needs to do to be saved is to "*believe in Jesus*" or "*accept Jesus into their hearts*" and then God is eternally stuck with you and then somewhere down the road- if the Spirit moves on you and if you feel the need- you then at some point after Salvation- you "make" Jesus the Lord of your life and that's when you get really serious about obedience and service. But that's not what the Bible teaches at all.

The Theology that teaches that you have to "make" Jesus the Lord of your life after Salvation is as flawed and is as unbiblical as the Theology that teaches that you have to be "filled" with the Holy Spirit after Salvation or that you have to get rid of generational curses after Salvation or that you have to be anointed with a prophetic utterance at some point after Salvation and any other variation of the false and unbiblical notion that Salvation really just gets the ball rolling and if you really want to be obedient or "super powered" or really, really, really used by God- then you need to "do" or "allow" or "have" or "get" something else later- after you are saved.

And the sum total of all the benefit of all of these Man-made and false and unbiblical teachings is that they *belittle* and *diminish* and *limit* the Beauty and the Power and the Glory of true Biblical Sovereign Salvation and all of them put together in all of their glory do *not* add a single inch of spiritual growth to *anyone's* life; they do *not* provide any power or anointing to *anyone*; and they do *not* assist *anyone* at all- because all of these teachings are patently false and they are all the invention of the mind of Man. God did not speak them. And they all serve to lead their followers down the wrong road.

The simple Message here in this Biblical Passage is that Salvation and Discipleship; Salvation and Obedience; are the same thing; Being saved and bearing fruit is the same thing; Being saved and loving Jesus is the same thing; being saved and denying yourself and taking up your cross and following Jesus is the exact same thing. And every time Jesus said things like, "*If you want to follow Me, you have to count the cost, you have to take up the cross, you have to deny yourself, you have to obey*

Me, follow Me, keep My Word." - He was *not* calling people who were already Christians to some higher level of Christian Service or Obedience- He was calling people who were lost and unsaved to repent and be saved.

So we have been digging deep into just what Jesus was talking about when He spoke these words and up till now- we have been concentrating on the first and second Characteristic of Saving Faith and that is:

1st Characteristic of Saving Faith- "We Will Come After Jesus"

Luke 9:23a

And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me...

And we have found out that true belief in Jesus allows us to understand that Jesus is not merely Savior- but that He is also Lord. And so we understand that true Faith in Jesus; true genuine Salvation doesn't stop at giving us the ability and the desire to initially believe in Jesus so that our sins are forgiven- but this Saving Faith enables and empowers us to *keep on believing* to the point where we actually serve the Lord and walk with the Lord and obey the Lord.

Next we looked at the Second Characteristic of Saving Faith that Jesus taught here which is:

2nd Characteristic of Saving Faith- We Must Deny Ourselves

Luke 9:23b:

... If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself...

And from this- we found out a very powerful Truth about us and God and that is:

We cannot glorify God unless we enjoy God

We *cannot* truly bring God Glory and we *do not* truly bring God any Glory unless and until we come to a place where we actually enjoy God; until we delight our- selves in the Lord; and until His

Commandments are no longer grievous to us. And Saving Faith produces that delight in all who are truly saved.

You see, dear friends, we honor God by delighting to do His Will and we glorify the King by finding satisfaction in Him and in loving and serving Him rather than in things that are passing away. If Joy and Peace are found in having earthly and material possessions- then make no mistake about it- it is those things that are the source of our Joy and Peace. And that is why so many today- even in the Church- pray so much and so hard to get material possessions and why they are so sad when they lose those things or when they do not acquire those things.

But we must understand that true and lasting Peace is not simply the absence of a war or a conflict and the fullness of Joy does not come to us because we have all that we desire and all is well with our lives. True and lasting Peace and the fullness of Joy transcends this life and it is better than anything in all of Creation- and I suggest to you that it is true Biblical Salvation that makes Joy and Peace possible.

True genuine Heaven Born Christians should be the happiest and the most content people on earth. That is why it is so liberating to think that denying self is the pathway to Joy and Peace.

So we have spent a number of weeks now on what it actually means for "Jesus to be Lord" and us to "deny ourselves" and so Lord willing- today- we want to move onto the third Characteristic of true Biblical Saving Faith and that is that Saving Faith always and in all cases produces in those who are saved – the desire and the ability to:

"Take up their Cross Daily"

Luke 9:23

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily...

So what does it actually mean for us to "Take up our cross daily"? These words have been examined by great minds and many writings have been produced by people all through the centuries about what Jesus meant here- but I have found that the best way to "exegete the Scriptures"- the best way to "take out of the Scriptures what God the Holy Spirit put into the Scriptures" is to do what the Apostle said to do in **1Corinthians 2:12&13** when he said:

**12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,
13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.**

And so in order for us to understanding exactly what Jesus meant by what he said here in Luke 9- we need to go to another Biblical Passage that God the Holy Spirit also inspired and allow the Bible itself to interpret the Bible. So let's turn to what God the Holy Spirit moved the Apostle Paul to write about this subject in **1Corinthians 2:1-5:**

2 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,

4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Now I wonder if you would agree with the following view of the cross of Christ:

The Crucifixion of Christ was a once-for-all substitution of the Son of God in my place- so that I would not have to suffer- but could enjoy the abundant life that He purchased for me.

This is a very common view today- in practice if not in theory. And it is very near the view that Paul had to contend with- with the sinful and selfish people of the Church at Corinth.

The problem with this view of the cross is that it leaves out a huge fact- namely, the one that Jesus stated back in **Luke 9:23**—

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

When Christ died on the cross for sinners- He not only stood in my place- doing what I never could do (forgiving my sin), but He also showed me what I must do if I would save my life, namely, take up my *own* cross and join him on the Calvary road of death to self.

Christ died to save us from hell- but *not* to save us from the cross. He died so that we could be glorified with Him- but *not* to keep us from being crucified. Jesus said,

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily...

For the Christian- the cross of Christ is not merely a past place of substitution. It is also a *present* place of daily execution to sin and self. Paul says in **Romans 6: 4-7**:

4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection,

6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;

7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

In other words- never let the cross lose its crucifying power in your life! Never let it slip into the dim and misty past as though Christ died for sinners so that you can live for pleasure.

Now understand that the pleasures are coming! Some are already here- like forgiveness of sin and acceptance into the family of God and a measure of holiness through the ongoing process of Sanctification. But just like Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him- so it is with us in this fallen age according to **Hebrews 12:1-11**.

But most of the joy that we will receive is still over the horizon- in Heaven. And so the writer of **Hebrews** says to us in **Hebrews 13:13&14**:

13 So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

14 For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come.

In other words- if you would save your life- you must lose it, and if you would follow Jesus into Salvation- you must take up your cross daily. The great tragedy of much contemporary Christianity is that the cross is safely relegated to the distant past. And what that means to all too many in the modern Church is that Jesus was soaked in Blood so that I can soak in a Jacuzzi. And the bigger the tub- the more we honor the cross. That is the essence of the so-called "Prosperity gospel".

Now what does all this have to do with our text in **1Corinthians 2:1–5 and Luke 9:23?**

What Paul wants to show in this chapter is that the reason there is so much pride and boasting at Corinth is that they are not letting the cross have its crucifying effect in the present. They think they have advanced *beyond* the cross. The cross may have been necessary to get them over their problem of sin- but now they are filled and rich and wise and strong! They are kings- in their own eyes. The weakness of the cross, the foolishness of the cross, the humiliation of the cross—these are long gone!

Listen to Paul's agonizing use of sarcasm and irony about this in **1Corinthians 4:8–11**:

8 You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, *I* wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.

9 For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.

11 To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless;

Now what's he saying? He's saying that they are wrong to think that Jesus died on the cross so that **IN THIS AGE** they might have fullness, wealth, kingly dignity, worldly wisdom and strength. The cross is not a mere event in history; it's a way of life! Take up your cross

DAILY, Jesus said! They weren't taking up their cross daily. They were taking up their scepter daily. They were sitting on their thrones daily. They were leaving in the past what belongs in the present, namely, the cross. And they were trying to bring into the present what belongs in the future, namely, the power and dignity of glorified saints. And the result was that the cross was being emptied of its power to humble, and the inheritance was being contaminated with pride.

And Paul was doing what he could in these early chapters of **1Corinthians** to show us that the Christian life is a life on the cross. The cross is not merely a past place of substitution; it is also a present place of daily execution—the execution of pride, and the execution of boasting in men, and the execution of self-reliance, and the execution of the love of money and status and the praise of men.

Now what Paul does in **1Corinthians 2:1–5** is illustrate from his own experience what he means by the present power of the cross. Let me try to lay out for you the building blocks of these five verses and then look at a few of them more closely.

Paul describes the way he came to Corinth with two negative statements about how he DID NOT come, and two positive statements about how he DID come. In addition he tells us the GROUND of this kind of coming, namely, the cross. And he tells us the GOAL of this kind of coming, namely, that faith might rest in God's power not man's wisdom.

First, notice the two descriptions of how Paul did *not* come to Corinth. The first is in the first verse of **1Corinthians 2**:

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

The second description of how he did not come is in verse 4:

1Corinthians 2:4a
and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom,

And this is exactly what Paul had said in 1:17— he preached the gospel, not with eloquent wisdom. We are going to see today that there was indeed a wisdom in what Paul spoke- but it is not the wisdom of this world. And Paul's style of presenting the gospel was not with

flourishes of eloquence that might win a following of people who just admire oratory.

We know from Paul's letters that he was a profound thinker and that he could use language powerfully. But the point he is making here is that he did not preach the gospel with the hope of appealing to the worldly, unspiritual admiration of those things. He did not want people to respond because of his oratory or his intellect.

That is the description of how Paul did NOT come. Now what are the two descriptions of how he *did* come? The first is in verse 3:

1Corinthians 2:3

I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,

And the second description of how he did come is at the end of verse 4. After saying that his speech and message was *not* in “**persuasive words of wisdom**” he goes on to say that his speech and message were

1Corinthians 2:4b

... in demonstration of the Spirit and of power

So the two descriptions about how Paul did come to Corinth are that he was with them in weakness and fear and trembling, and that his message was in demonstration of the Spirit and power.

Now what was Paul's weakness? In **2Corinthians 10:10**- Paul's opponents were saying this about him:

For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible."

Evidently Paul did not have a very strong, appealing appearance. In fact there seems to have been something wrong with Paul physically that made him chronically weak and unattractive.

Listen to how Paul describes the first time he preached to the churches in Galatia from **Galatians 4:13&14**:

13 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time;

14 and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself.

The reason I think this weakness or ailment or condition was chronic is that Paul describes his thorn in the flesh in **2Corinthians 12** with this same language of weakness. He says in verse 9 that he will all the more gladly exult in his weaknesses because then the power of Christ rests on him. And Jesus says to him, "**My power is made perfect in your weakness.**"

That's just the connection he makes here in our text, isn't it? He says in **1Corinthians 2:3** that he was with them in weakness. And then he says in verse 4 that his words were in the demonstration of the Spirit and power—the same power that he says is made perfect in his weakness.

Paul doesn't try to hide or deny his weaknesses and that makes him despicable to some people. But instead- he exults that God would be willing to use such an earthen vessel so that the powerful effect of his preaching might be clearly of God.

And besides weakness there was this "fear and trembling" mentioned in verse 3. Which at least means this: Paul did not come to Corinth with a cocky air about him. There was no swagger or vanity or ostentation or pomposity. Instead there was meekness and a real trembling because his inadequacy was so great and the stakes were so high and the dangers were so real.

Now if in your mind- right about now- you're thinking- "*Wait a minute, Brother Blair- I thought Christians are supposed to be confident and fearless.*" I beg you to consider these words from a man who knew his share of suffering and opposition- John Calvin. Calvin said,

“The servants of the Lord are not so dull as not to see threatening dangers, nor so insensitive as not to be affected by them. No! and in fact they must be seriously apprehensive for two main reasons: 1) that, humbled in their own eyes, they might learn to lean and rest completely on God alone; and 2) that they might be trained in true self-denial. Paul, therefore, was not without a sense of anxiety, but he controlled it, so that he nonetheless continued to be undaunted in the midst of crises.”¹

¹ Calvin's Commentary on 1Corinthians

Now what does all this have to do with the cross of Christ? That Paul is trembling and fearful; that he is weak and unimpressive; that he avoids flourishes of oratory and intellectual ostentation- what's all that got to do with the cross?

Well, in verse 2- Paul says that the reason he came to Corinth in this way is

For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

Now what does this mean?

It does not mean that the only thing he mentioned in his 18 months in Corinth was the cross- because again in this letter he scolds them for not understanding other things too.

I think what it means is that whatever else Paul knew- whatever else he spoke about; and whatever else he did- he would know it and say it and do it in relation to Christ crucified. And this brings us back to where we started. Paul will not let the cross become a historical relic. He puts it at the center of his everyday work and relationships. He makes tents in the shadow of the cross. He preaches in the shadow of the cross. He disputes with opponents in the shadow of the cross. He eats and drinks and sleeps Christ crucified.

And the effect this has on him is make him a man of broken-hearted love, so out of step with this glory-seeking world that he can only be explained in terms of the Power of God.

Now I didn't say much about the word "**power**" in verses 4 and 5 where Paul says that his message was in "**demonstration of the Spirit and power, that you faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.**"

Many today in the modern Church take the word, "**power**" in these two verses to refer to signs and wonders and healings and miracles. And Paul certainly did all that. But I doubt that is what he means here.

I can't help but think that the primary use of this word in Paul's mind is the power referred to back in **Chapter 1:17**- because it is the closest parallel to this verse,

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

And the word, “**void**” used here is the very same Greek word that was translated as “**power**” in these other verses

And so when Paul says in Chapter 2:4 that he did not come with this kind of eloquence but came in the demonstration of the Spirit and power, he most likely means the power of the cross. Christ crucified is called the "power of God" in Chapter 1:24 and therefore it's called the "power of God" in Chapter 2:5.

What Paul wanted more than anything in his life was to get out of the way of the power of God. The thought that anyone might pin their hope or their faith on his eloquence or his strength was a dreadful thought to Paul. All he wanted was to placard Christ crucified so that the power of the cross could save sinners.

And so what did he do? He died on the cross every day. He died to intellectual show. He died to impressive eloquence. He died to the secular demands of suave, self-assured, powerful, attractive performances.

He was with us in weakness and in much fear and trembling so that our faith—yours and mine, this morning—might rest not in the wisdom of a man, but in the power of God—the power of Christ crucified.

I beg of you today, don't treat the cross like a historical relic of the past. It is the very power of God to change everything in your life. If you would be his disciple, if you would save your life and not lose it, take up this cross daily, count this world to be the Calvary road, not the streets of gold. Then people will see that your treasure is in heaven, and God will get the glory.

Let's pray