

Mark 8:34-9:13 - the Cross & the Glory

by David Guzik

David Guzik's sermon emphasizes the necessity of self-denial and taking up one's cross as the path to experiencing the glory of God through Jesus Christ.

Duration: 37:12

Scripture: Matthew 17:4-5, Matthew 17:9, Mark 9:2-4, Mark 9:7-9, Luke 9:28-30, Luke 9:35-37, 2 Peter 1:17

Topics: "The Cross", "Self Denial"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of taking up one's cross and following Jesus. He criticizes a Christian book that promotes establishing boundaries and taking control of one's life, contrasting it with the idea of carrying a cross. The speaker emphasizes the importance of denying oneself and being willing to suffer and die for the sake of following Jesus. He warns against gaining worldly success at the expense of losing one's soul and highlights the paradox that to find life, one must be willing to lose it. The sermon is based on Mark 8:34-38.

Transcript

Again, we're going to start in Mark chapter 8 this morning. Now really, we're starting at verse 34, but I sort of need to set the stage as we begin this morning because verse 34 really continues on the thought that Jesus began previously. Jesus took his disciples away at a very critical point in time in his ministry to a place called Caesarea Philippi, and there he wanted to know what they thought of him.

Most of the time when we ask that question of people, we're looking for some affirmation, aren't we? We're looking for them to kind of give us some compliments and strokes. You know, do you really like me? That kind of thing. That's not why Jesus asked the question, who do you say that I am to Peter and the rest of the disciples.

He asked it because it was important for them to know. They needed to have an accurate understanding of who Jesus was. And of course, Peter, speaking for all the disciples, declared gloriously that Jesus was the Christ, was the Messiah.

He got that one gloriously right. What followed was sort of one of those good news, bad news kind of things. The good news was that Peter and the rest of the disciples knew that Jesus was in fact the Messiah.

A wonderful, glorious thing. The bad news was that Jesus then told them about how he would go to Jerusalem and be rejected and suffer and die on a cruel cross. That was bad news.

The two things didn't go together in the minds of the disciples. The idea that you could have a Messiah for them, that was just strength and triumph and power and victory. Together with suffering and death, it just didn't go together.

So that was the bad news, at least in their minds. But if I could say, it kind of even got more good and more bad. The first good news and bad news was that Jesus was the Messiah.

That was the good news. The bad news was that he was going to die on the cross. The second good news was that, if you notice at the end right there, in verse 33, excuse me, in verse 31, he says, And it began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again.

Well, then that's good news, isn't it? After three days rise again, then the bad news again is in verse 34. When he had called the people to him, with his disciples also, he said to them, Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Friends, it was bad enough for the disciples to hear that Jesus would suffer and die and be rejected and be executed on a cruel cross.

Now Jesus tells them, you've got to do the same thing. I can imagine that when Jesus said this, the disciples, and not only the disciples, if you notice, it says there in verse 34, he called the people to him as well. Anybody who was standing around, listen, everybody, I want you to hear this.

If you want to come after me, this is what you have to do. You have to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. When Jesus said that, everybody I heard, I'm sure they were astonished.

They blinked their eyes, they opened their mouths. They couldn't believe what he said. Take up your cross.

You see, friends, everybody in that day knew what the cross was. We sort of sanitized it, religified it in our own day, haven't we? We've made the cross something that's all about jewelry or all about sculpture or all about these other things. We don't understand what the cross meant in that day.

In that day, the cross was one thing. It was an unrelenting instrument of death. The cross had no other purpose.

Friends, when you took up a cross, there was one thing you were going to do. You were going to be crucified. It's sort of like in our own day and age, we think of another instrument of execution.

We think of an electric chair. You wouldn't have an electric chair and sit down and read the newspaper in it. That's not what electric chairs are for.

You wouldn't use it as an easy chair there in your living room and watch the television from it. No, electric chairs are for one thing. They're for executing criminals.

And when you sit down in the electric chair, you know you're going to die. It's the same way with somebody who takes up their cross. That's what it is to take up your cross.

You know that you're marching on your way to your death. You have no more power over your life. You have no more control.

That cross controls your life. So friends, the cross wasn't about religious ceremonies. It wasn't about traditions.

It wasn't about spiritual feelings. The cross was a way to execute people. And I don't know how we would receive it today if Jesus came and he spoke to us and he said, Well, if you want to follow me, then walk down death row every day and follow after me.

Taking up your cross, it wasn't a journey. It was a one-way trip. There was no return ticketing.

It was never a round trip. Friends, let's remind ourselves of something else, too. Taking up your cross doesn't refer to enduring some irritation in life.

You know, you have somebody who has a bad knee and it troubles them. Every time the weather gets a little cloudy or it's going to rain, their knee aches. And they say, Well, I guess that's my cross to bear.

Or they have a difficult person in their life. You know, they have somebody that's a problem for them and it always causes them kind of irritation. They say, Well, that's my cross to bear.

No, no. Your cross to bear isn't some irritation in your life. Rather, it means going the way of the cross.

The picture is of a man. He's already condemned and he's required to carry his cross on the place to execution, just as Jesus would do in a few short chapters after this. Friends, I don't know.

I can't speak to the book because I've never read the book. And I don't want to speak about it per se. But I can speak about the promotional material that I saw for a Christian book published by a Christian publishing house and distributed among Christians.

And I read the promotional material for the book. And they said, Well, what this book would do for you. They said, This book would teach you how to establish boundaries in your life and how to take control of your life.

And I thought, Isn't that interesting? Take up your cross and follow me. Now, could you imagine going up to a guy carrying a cross and saying, Brother, let me speak to you about establishing some boundaries in your life. Or, Brother, let me speak to you about taking control of your life.

He would look at you and say, Take control of my life. I have no control of my life. This cross controls my life.

I've given up all control of my life to this cross. It's the overwhelming fact in my life that I'm going to be crucified. Now, friends, Jesus was not calling us to die a martyr's death when he said, Take up your cross and follow me.

Do you know what he was calling us to do? To live a martyr's life. To say, Jesus Christ is my identity. I follow him.

He went the way of the cross. I'll go the way of the cross. I'm a follower of Jesus Christ.

And so if he took up his cross and went to crucifixion, then that's what I'm going to do in my mind and in my heart every day. You say, What does that mean? Jesus will help us to understand what it means. Look again at verse 34 where he says, Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Friends, Jesus wasn't talking about a progression as if denying yourself is the first step and then the next or higher step is taking up the cross. No, Jesus is describing the same thing in different words. To deny yourself is the same thing as to take up your cross.

It's the same idea. Because the cross was not about self-promotion. It wasn't about self-affirmation.

The person who carried a cross knew that they could not save themselves. They had no power in their life. Friends, we need to understand something.

Denying self is not the same thing as self-denial. Some of us are very good at self-denial. We know how to discipline ourselves and to control ourselves in the pursuit of some goal.

Think of an Olympic athlete. You cannot be a successful Olympic athlete unless you practice an awful lot of self-denial. You have to get up early in the morning and train.

You have to eat the right things and you can't eat the wrong things. You have to work very hard in your training. You have to discipline yourself physically, mentally, emotionally.

You have to be an extremely self-disciplined person. You have to practice a lot of self-denial. But if you do it all so that you can stand on the winner's stand and say, Yes, look at me.

I'm a glorious man. Friends, what good is it at all? You practice self-denial, but you haven't denied yourself at all. You've disciplined some of your habits, but just so that your own self can be more exalted than ever.

Friends, do you understand something? Do you understand that we might practice self-denial when for a good purpose we occasionally give up certain things or certain activities, but we deny self when we surrender ourselves to Jesus Christ and determine to obey His will. You say, I'm not in control of my life anymore. This cross is in control of my life.

Jesus Christ is in control of my life. He's my Lord. He's my Master.

Might I say this, that it tells us that denying self means to live as an others-centered person. Jesus was the only one to do this perfectly, but we're supposed to follow in His steps. Isn't that what it says at the end of verse 34? And follow me.

This is following Jesus at its very simplest. It's not very complicated. I'm not saying it's easy, but it's not complicated.

He carried a cross. He walked down death row. And so must those who follow Him.

As I say that, it has the potential of sounding very morbid, doesn't it? This is what the Christian life is all about. Dying to self. Your own death.

Your own extinction. You're nothing and the whole point of it is just for you to be extinguished and only God. No, no, no.

That's not it at all. And Jesus knows that's not it. See, my friends, this is the glorious truth about the way of the cross.

It was true in the life and the ministry of Jesus, and it's true in our own life and in our own experience. As Christians, we must go the way of the cross, but the way of the cross is not the goal. It's the way to the goal.

Friends, the cross wasn't the end. It was just the way to the empty tomb. It was just the way to resurrection life and resurrection power.

And if you stop at the cross, you miss God's purpose. Now, if you never go the way of the cross, you miss God's purpose, but you have to go the way of the cross and then follow it through to the glory of resurrection, because that's the whole point of it. Look at it.

Jesus can explain this, beginning at verse 35. He says, For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. Don't you see that Jesus looks at you, and maybe he holds you on your shoulders here this morning, and he says, I want you to save your life.

And the only way you can save it is by losing it. You see, the goal is God wants you to save your life. God wants you to enjoy the power and the glory and the beauty of resurrection life.

But friends, the only way to do that is to go the way of the cross. He explains more. Look at it here, verse 36.

He says, For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for a soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, and this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man, also will be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. Friends, do you understand that Jesus is saying, you need to come after me, you can't be ashamed of me. You have to be willing to give up everything to follow me, because that's the pathway to life.

It's a paradox, isn't it? One of the powerful paradoxes of the Christian life, that to find your life, you have to lose it. To save your life, you have to give it up. I think of the same analogy with a seed.

You have some wonderful seeds in your hand, beautiful seeds. The boy, they'll grow a lot, and you go, these seeds are so good, I'm going to hang on to them all the time. And you never plant them in the ground.

They'll never grow, will they? Well, you say, well, I want to keep them, I don't want to lose them. I need to keep these seeds right here. Friends, the only way those seeds are ever going to fulfill their purpose, and come to the life God intended them to have, is if you let them die and be buried.

Go ahead, you just bury them under the ground. And then they'll grow up, they'll come to new life. You set the seed free to be what it was always intended to be.

You let it die and be buried. Friends, if you don't do this, you'll be in the terrible situation Jesus spoke about in verse 36, where he said, what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? Well, sure, you're a successful person, but are you going to lose your soul? Well, sure, you've made a lot of money, but will you lose your soul? Well, sure, you have lots of friends, and everybody likes you, but will

you lose your own soul? Wouldn't it be a terrible title to take with you into hell? I'm the richest man who ever went to hell. I'm the most successful man who ever went to hell.

I've got more friends than anybody who ever went into hell. You thought you gained everything, but really you lost it. You lost everything because you didn't have your priorities straight.

See, friends, isn't this the glory of this paradox? The people who lived this way before Jesus are the ones who are really, genuinely happy. Don't you think that Jesus knew every day of his life what it was like to take up his cross and go the way of the cross? He knew it. Do you think Jesus was a happy man or a sad man? Well, the Bible says that he was a man of many sorrows.

Jesus knew pain. He knew sorrow in his life. But you know, Jesus loved God and loved life more than just about anybody you would ever meet in your whole life.

Friends, giving our lives to Jesus all the way and living as an other-centered person, it doesn't take away from our lives, it adds to it. Jesus says, will you do it? Will you follow after me in the way of the cross, or will you be ashamed of me? You know, especially back in the ancient world, when everybody knew perfectly well what the cross was all about, it was very easy to be ashamed of Jesus. How many of us want to follow and declare as our Lord a man who was crucified, executed by the state? I mean, crucifixion was the most shameful way to die.

It would be like saying, well, let me tell you about my Lord. He was executed in the gas chamber. And Jesus said, now you need to identify yourself with me and walk down death row with me.

It's a heavy call, but that's the place of life. Notice here, he wants to show them some of this glory. Look at it.

Chapter 9, verse 1. And he said to them, Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the King of God present with power. Now, at first glance, you read that and you think that Jesus might be talking about his second coming. But no, he's not.

He's talking about a preview of the glory. A preview of the power that comes from laying down our lives by going the way of the cross. And Jesus says, let me give you a preview of that right now.

I'm going to show you some of that glory. I'm going to show you some of that power. And not many days after that, look at it here in verse 2. It happened.

Now, after six days, Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves and he was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. You get out all the bleach you want, all the additives, the best products you can find, you put them all in the washing machine, it wouldn't make them as white and as shining and as clean as Jesus looked when he was transfigured.

Isn't that interesting? First of all, notice that he took Peter, James, and John. Most people think that this means that Peter, James, and John were somehow special favorites of Jesus. You know, he just had a special love relationship with them that maybe he didn't have with the rest of the disciples.

I suppose that's possible, but most people ignore maybe a more obvious solution. That these were the guys most likely to get into trouble if they were left on their own. And so Jesus said, okay, look, the rest of

you guys can stay here.

You three, you come with me. I need to keep you on a short leash. So you come with me.

And so Peter, James, and John were with him there, and he led them up on the high mountain apart by themselves, and Jesus was transfigured before them. Friends, we can get all the wrong idea here if we think that this means that somehow a spotlight was shined upon Jesus. And he became white and bright.

Oh, look at this brilliant lighting. Oh, I've never seen such great lighting. It's beautiful effects.

No, it wasn't at all. The meaning behind this word translated transfigured here is not a light that shines upon somebody from an outward source, but it's a light that shines from the inside out. The radiance that Jesus shone forth with here, it wasn't something that shined on him.

It was something that shined out of him. It was glorious, glistening, beautiful. For this brief time, Jesus took on an appearance more appropriate for the king of glory than for a humble man.

We might look at this and say, this is glorious, this is fantastic. Well, friends, I know it must have appeared fantastic, but I think that the greater miracle was that most of the time Jesus could not go around looking like this. You know what he did in this instance? He sort of pushed the pause button on the cloaking that he had covering the glory that he had most of the time.

I mean, he always had that glory resident within him, but now he just let it shine forth. Friends, this is the eternal son of God, the second member of the Trinity. He walked the ivory palaces of heaven for eternity past, and then he took on himself the form of a man and came in the appearance of a man and took on humanity within himself, and as he walked this earth, most of the time he kept this glory shielded.

But right now he put the pause button on that shielding and let it shine forth. The greater miracle was that most of the time Jesus didn't shine forth this way. But now he does, and as the disciples see it, they're absolutely blown away.

They're so impressed. They're so impressed by this. And I think we have to understand that Jesus is letting this shine forth right now to show his disciples something.

First of all, he wants to show them that he's in control. How could anybody think that a man who is so shining, so glorious, so transfigured before them, that he could be out of control of anything? Jesus is complete control. I'm going to go the way of the cross? Then I know what I'm doing in this.

I know what I'm doing. You don't have to worry, man. Jesus is always showing in a dramatic way that cross-bearers will be glory receivers.

Guys, I'm going the way of the cross, and look at the glory that I have. And the cross is the path to the goal. The goal isn't the cross.

The cross is the path to the goal. The goal is the glory of God as it shines out from Jesus right at this point. Now, it would be enough if Jesus was just transfigured before the disciples, but that's not all.

Look at it here now in verse 4. And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. Well, isn't this remarkable? Jesus is here shining out in this transfigured glory, and Elijah and Moses are there with him. They're having a little bit of a conference.

We don't know exactly what they talked about. It says they were talking. Luke 9 tells us they spoke about what Jesus was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

They were talking about the coming passion, the coming cross-bearing that Jesus would endure. We don't know all what they said. We don't know all that they discussed, but it was glorious.

You know what I also think is remarkable about this is it says that Elijah appeared to them with Moses. Apparently, the disciples knew that it was Moses and Elijah. They knew.

I don't think they were wearing name tags. You know, hi, I'm Moses. I'm Elijah.

These men had never seen Elijah and Moses before. These men had died hundreds, if not thousands of years before the time of the disciples, yet they knew that it was Moses and Elijah. Sometimes people wonder if we're going to know each other in the world beyond.

You know, we know we won't look exactly like we do right now. Something like that, I hope we look a little bit better than we do right now. I mean, how could it be glory in heaven if we don't look a little bit better than we do right now? You know what I mean? We're going to recognize each other.

Well, of course you'll recognize other people in heaven. Look, they recognized Moses and Elijah, and they'd never seen them before. As Charles Spurgeon said in one time talking about this, he said, well, what, do you think you're going to be more dumb in heaven than you are here on earth? Of course you're going to know other people.

Here's the other idea behind it, friends. It's glorious that they knew their names. It's going to be so great in heaven.

We're going to remember everybody's name in heaven. Isn't that fantastic? You're just going to know. You're going to seem to know their name.

I mean, that's glorious knowledge. God, give us some of that right now. You see, here they were.

They saw it, and then now we have one of these wonderful instances where Peter puts his foot in his mouth. Verse five. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good for us to be here.

Let us make three tabernacles, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid. Well, doesn't that get us into trouble most of the time? We talk when we don't know what to say. Oh, Lord, deliver us from that.

Deliver me from that. It's so difficult when you just start talking and you hope the thoughts will come along as you get going, but usually it doesn't, right? And you just talk, and that's what Peter did. Although, shouldn't we say that we shouldn't be too tough on Peter? Oh, we like to make him the whipping boy, and sometimes he appears so evidently that here as we go through the Gospels.

We love Peter, don't we? Don't we love how he was open-hearted and bold and enthusiastic? Don't we see something very lovable about Peter? And yes, we could stand on the sidelines and say, well, look, there's Peter saying something stupid here, but friends, he was the one who proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. We could look at Peter, well, look at what he did over there, but he walked on water, didn't he? I think in my mind, we need more Peters in the church at the present. Yes, sometimes rash, sometimes impulsive, but there's some fire in them.

There's some steam in them, and they keep us going. You know, sometimes it's much, much better to have some Peters that you have to rein in every once in a while than to have other disciples that you have to constantly push and prod and push out front. So yes, yes, Peter stuck his foot in his mouth more than most, but he did more than most as well.

So here we have Peter speaking out, and you see what his great air was, don't you? He said, Lord, let us make three tabernacles, one for you, one for Elijah, and one for Moses. And what was he doing when he said that? He was putting Jesus on equal level as Moses and Elijah. Now, if somebody were to do that for me, to put me on equal footing with Moses and Elijah, I'd be insufferable for months.

My head would be so big that you just couldn't get around it. I mean, I'd take that as, well, how much greater can you compliment somebody than to say, well, you're like Moses, or you're like Elijah. But do you realize that that was a put-down for Jesus? You're bringing Jesus down to call Him the same as Moses, the same as Elijah.

And friends, what Peter said was so foolish because he put Jesus on an equal footing as Moses and Elijah, one tabernacle for each of them. But friends, Jesus isn't just another Elijah. He's not another Moses.

He's not even a greater Moses or a greater Elijah. He is the Son of God Himself. And that's what the Father from heaven establishes here.

Look at it here. Verse 7, And a cloud came and overshadowed them, and a voice came out from the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son. Hear Him.

Peter, don't put Jesus on the same level or even in the same category as Moses and Elijah. Jesus is the beloved Son. He's the Son of God.

He's God the Son. So you don't put Him on the same level as Moses and Elijah. No.

Moses spoke and was used of God. Elijah spoke and was used of God. But Jesus Christ speaks in a completely different way.

Hear Him. Friends, there are thousands of priests, thousands of ministers, thousands of voices of authorities in this world who say, Hear Us. But what does the Father say? He says, Hear Him.

There's a lot of people who clamor for our attention. You've got philosophies and modern theologies and old heresies, and they're all revived, and they cry out, Listen to Us. But what does God say? He says, Hear Him.

Your mailbox is stuffed with it this time of year, isn't it? All those political announcements and the candidates writing and this proposition and that proposition. They scream to you, Listen to Us. Vote for Me.

Vote for our proposition. And friends, what does God say? He says, Well listen, Hear Him. Look to Jesus Christ.

Listen to Him. Don't you see this is the glorious stamp of approval from God the Father in Heaven saying, This is My beloved Son. You listen to Him.

When He talks about going the way of the cross and denying yourself, you listen to Him. When He talks about the need to give up your life so that you gain it, you listen to Him. And when He says He needs to go to Jerusalem and be crucified and that He'll rise again, you listen to Him.

Isn't it beautiful? Well, Jesus speaks to His disciples now in verse 8. And suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one anymore but only Jesus with themselves. And as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one of the things they had seen till the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant.

Well, isn't that funny? You know, the disciples, yes, Jesus, we won't say anything about this until the rising of the dead. But they say, what exactly did He mean by that? Again, it's easy for us to have a joke at the disciples' expense, but then we look in the mirror and we see ourselves, don't we? How easy it is for us to, well, we hear one thing God's saying and then we don't hear the other thing that He's saying. Well, friends, maybe we do the classic thing, and this is so classic.

Classic for me, classic for you. We're so good at hearing sermons for other people. We sit there in the seat and we go, oh, man, I hope my wife is listening to this.

Boy, does she need to hear this. Man, I gotta get this take for so-and-so. Oh, this is it for them.

And suddenly, we've heard that sermon for everybody except ourselves. Friends, do you hear what the Lord says? This is my beloved Son. Hear Him.

Not hear Him for the sake of somebody else. Hear Him for you. For you.

He speaks to you. When He says, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Him, who's He speaking to? Well, to me and to you. Each one of us as individuals.

Now, let's conclude with a look at verses 11, 12, and 13. And they ask Him, saying, why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? Then He answered and told them, Elijah does come first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to Him whatever they wished as it is written to Him.

The coming of Elijah was clearly prophesied in Malachi chapter 4, verses 5 and 6. And so the disciples have a question in their mind. They say, well, listen, Jesus, if you're the Messiah, then how come it says that Elijah's supposed to come first and we haven't seen Elijah? Of course, they might have said, gee, I guess we just saw Elijah on the Transfiguration. Maybe that fulfilled it.

But they didn't think that way. They wanted Jesus to answer this question. Well, Jesus tells them that the Elijah prophecy will indeed be fulfilled.

And though He doesn't go into it right now, He could have detailed how it does appear that Elijah will, in fact, come. It may be in a restored state, in a resurrected state, but He'll be on the earth before Jesus comes again in glory in His second coming. You see, the prophesy of Malachi chapter 4 is really most pointedly relevant to the second coming of Jesus, not His first coming.

But the point is clear. He also says in verse 13 that Elijah has come. And if you read that, you understand who He's talking about.

Elijah came in the person of John the Baptist. Not that John the Baptist was Elijah back from the dead or Elijah reincarnated. No, no, no.

We don't believe that at all. The Bible says that John the Baptist ministered in the spirit and in the office of Elijah. He fulfilled the role of Elijah.

He fulfilled the function of Elijah. And so this prophecy was fulfilled in a partial sense in the first coming of Jesus. It'll be fulfilled in a perfect sense in the second coming of Jesus.

So Jesus answered this question of theirs. Friends, I think we need to come back to the main point here. That Jesus Christ called His disciples to listen to Him and to follow after Him.

You know, my friends, this was a very impressive experience that the disciples had, wasn't it? Of seeing this transfigured Jesus with Elijah on one side and Moses on the other. I mean, what a beautiful, beautiful occasion. It left a lasting impression on these men.

Later on when he wrote the letter of 2 Peter, Peter who was present at this transfiguration, he relates how the voice of God saying, This is My beloved Son, hear Him. It still rang in his ears. Decades and decades after it happened.

It confirmed who Jesus was. But I want you to understand something. As impressive as this experience was, it in itself did not change the lives of the disciples as much as being born again being filled with the Spirit of God did.

Maybe somehow you think what you really need in your life is some spectacular heavenly vision. You know, Lord, if I could just see you the same way that Peter, James and John did when you were transfigured, then I'd believe. Lord, I probably think I'd never sin again if you showed me Jesus transfigured the way that they saw.

Well, just ask yourself this question, friends. Did Peter sin again after this? Well, you better believe he did. Did Peter deny Christ after this experience? And we say, well, how could he deny Jesus after he saw him transfigured in his glory? Friends, some experience like that isn't the key.

No, it's a different kind of experience. It's a personal experience that takes place in your heart as it's drawn close to the heart of Jesus. Friends, being born again by the Spirit of God is the greatest miracle.

And it's the greatest display of the glory of God ever. And it's far better for a man to live near to Jesus and to enjoy the presence of Jesus every day than it would be for you to be overshadowed with a bright cloud and to hear God from heaven speak with His own voice unto you. Will you do it? Will you draw close to Jesus this week? God wants a relationship with you.

A love relationship with you. He wants it with you even more than you want it with Him. And so He's waiting.

He says, won't you draw near to me? Won't you draw close to me and receive my love? Won't you receive the power and the goodness that we have? And friends, sometimes we stay away from it because we know we need to go the way of the cross to find that. And friends, there's the promise of resurrection

power and glory beyond the cross. So let's not be afraid of it.

Lord, you call us to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow you, then we'll do it because we trust in your promise of resurrection power and glory. Let's pray right now and ask God to confirm these things in our hearts. And friends, I can't spend time in a text like this this morning without making a pointed call to see if there's anybody here this morning who wants to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, who wants to come and make themselves a follower.

Do you say, I will follow Jesus in the same way. Maybe it's your morning to do that for the first time. I mean, how could I go over a text like this without offering an invitation like that? Is this your morning to say, Lord, I'm going to deny myself, take up my cross and follow Jesus? I'm going to do it.

Maybe this is the first time for you to do that. I pray that maybe it's true. Everybody here has already entered into that kind of personal trusting relationship with Jesus.

But if you haven't, this is your morning to do it. I'm going to invite you to do that as we pray right now. Father, Lord, won't you speak to our hearts right now? I want you to do this glorious work of confirming in our soul the truth of what you said.

Lord, this isn't something to be just persuaded of in our minds. You need to persuade us of this deep in our spirit. And I pray, Lord, for anybody here this morning who has yet to make this kind of decision for Jesus Christ, has yet to surrender themselves to him as their disciple, as his disciple.

Lord God, won't you help us all, every one of us, to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus. I need to ask, while heads are bowed and eyes are reverently closed in prayer, is there anybody here this morning you'd like to do that? If you do, if you want to make a decision for the first time now to follow Jesus, then tell God that in your heart right now, because really it's a private thing between you and God. It's a personal transaction.

You need to have your own personal relationship with Jesus, and he speaks to you right now, inviting you to come. But if you want to talk to God right now and tell him that you want that, would you please raise your hand so I can see you and pray for you? God bless you, man. And bless you, man.

Anybody else here this morning, you want to make that kind of decision for Jesus Christ. How wonderful it is. You know, he loves you, and he wants to enjoy that kind of love relationship.

Anybody else here this morning? Well, Father, I thank you for these who have come, and they've reached out to you, and I pray for those, Lord, who are reaching out to you in their hearts, even if they didn't do it with their hands. Lord, I pray that you'd do a work in their lives and that you'd confirm them and bless them. I pray, God, that you would show each one of us what it means to yield our lives to Jesus Christ.

Thank you, Lord, that we can come to faith in you right now, today, that you're not far away from us, that you're as close as the yielding of our hearts, the confession of our sin. Lord, do a work in all of us. We want to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow you.

We pray this, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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