

Reversed Values

by David Jackman

Jesus teaches that true discipleship requires self-denial, suffering, and a willingness to lose one's life in order to gain eternal life and live according to his teachings.

Duration: 38:55

Scripture: Luke 9:22-27, Luke 9:32

Topics: "Values"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having an eternal perspective and not being consumed by worldly desires. He quotes Jim Elliot's famous statement that 'he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose,' highlighting the value of the kingdom of God. The speaker encourages listeners to follow Jesus with glad obedience and live holy lives that glorify God. He then turns to Luke 9:23-27, where Jesus teaches about the cost of discipleship, emphasizing the need to deny oneself, take up the cross daily, and follow Jesus. The speaker concludes by urging believers to consider the true riches of eternity and not be deceived by the temporary allure of the world.

Transcript

There are evenings like this when two messages in one service seem, in a way which I believe God himself controls, to dovetail together. And I want to share with you this evening some very practical thoughts from the Gospel of Luke about what it means to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus. And the message that we've just heard on practical scriptural holiness is so much the foundation of this passage as well.

So let's turn in Luke's Gospel to chapter 9 and we'll read just the short section from verse 23 to verse 27, bearing in mind all that we've heard of the motivation and the means that God grants to us that we might live holy lives following in the footsteps of Christ. Then Jesus said to them all, that is, to his disciples, verse 23, If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God. Those are the words of Jesus as they're translated in the New International Version.

Let me read to you an alternative text from today's English perversion. If anyone wants to live life to the full, he must put himself first, feather his own nest, and look after his own interests. For whatever you give away you lose, but what you get you keep.

What good is it for you to waste your life and resources on other people if you don't make it yourself? You can't take it with you when you go, so enjoy as much of it as you can while you can. Put yourself first, after all no one else is going to, and who cares about tomorrow? I want to call this little study this evening, Reversed Values, because what I have just read to you is the way that we all naturally think and act. And to follow the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ in these verses in Luke's Gospel is literally to turn the world upside down.

That is our own internal world. Before we can ever be accused of turning the world outside us upside down, as those early disciples were, there has to be a radical change of values in the very centre of our being. And we as Christian people are all caught between those two ways of living, those two worlds.

We know from the Scriptures that we are destined for the world to come, that our citizenship is in heaven, but we have to live our lives in this world, and we are called not to withdraw from it, but to live in the world as citizens of heaven. Holy lives. And when the church is a holy church, the world becomes a hungry world.

Sometimes Christians have thought they will resolve the paradox or the tension by withdrawing from the world, but as Martin Luther remarked, it's much easier to get the monk out of the world than it is to get the world out of the monk. And that's why we so much need this teaching of Jesus that we have before us this evening. I want to look at it with you for these few moments under three headings.

First, two definitions of discipleship. Then, two explanations of discipleship. And lastly, two encouragements to discipleship.

In verse 23, first of all, two definitions of discipleship. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Now that is very demanding when we stop to think about it.

And you ask yourself, why would anyone want to become a learner, a disciple of Jesus on terms like that? Daily denial and faithful following. And yet for nearly 2,000 years he has been drawing millions of people from every culture across the world to follow him. And today, this very night, there are more Christians in the world than there have ever been at any time in its history.

There is an extraordinary magnetism about this unremitting call to be all out for Jesus Christ. On the one hand in the Gospels, we find the warmest and the most gracious of invitations. If you are thirsty, come to the water.

He who drinks of me will never thirst again. Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. The most glorious invitations of love to the loveless shown that they might lovingly be.

The open arms of Christ welcoming all who will come to him, the whosoever will. But at the same time, he never disguised the demands of the cross. He never lowered his standards in order to win people to follow him.

He never, as has often been said, he never hid his scars to make disciples. And in the preceding verse, verse 22, Jesus has just been showing these disciples who confessed him to be the Christ that the son of man must suffer. There's the word again that we saw in Peter, must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law.

And he must be killed. And on the third day, he must be raised to life. What sort of Christ is he? He's one who must suffer, must die and must be raised.

That's a very different agenda from what the disciples had expected. And he turns to them and says, and if you're going to follow in my footsteps, you have to go that route too. Daily denial.

That means saying no to myself at every point in my life and saying yes to the Lord Jesus, even when that cuts right across what I want to do. Whenever there's a choice in my life between going God's way or my own way, if I'm going to be a real disciple, there is no choice. I must follow in his footsteps.

That's the essence of Christian discipleship. And there's no other way to be a follower of Jesus. We're not given an option, it's an imperative.

He must deny himself. And to make the point as widely as possible to these disciples who are just becoming aware of what it means that he is the Christ, he uses the stark and horrifying picture to them of the condemned criminal carrying the instrument of his execution across out to the place where he is to die. Deny himself and take up his cross.

Now a man who was carrying a cross had no future. He had no plans of his own. He was under the control of the Roman authorities who were crucifying him.

He could not escape. He had no control over his own life. There was only one destination, and that was his death.

And Jesus says, that is what I require from those who are going to follow me as my disciples. Can you imagine the impact that must have had on those twelve men? They've just heard this tremendous assertion of Peter, you're the Christ. They've been working up to that for months after months as they ask themselves through the gospel, who is this Jesus? And eventually Peter says, we believe that you really are the son of God.

And immediately Jesus starts to say to them, well then if that is true, it means a cross for you. It means denying yourself. We don't preach very much like that in evangelistic context these days, do we? We rather preach that Jesus will so change our lives that we will find fulfillment and all that we ever wanted, that we want to be in control of what we do and our plans and if we give them to God, he will bless them and use them.

But that doesn't really build disciples. That's why our churches are so weak. Because so many people have come, as it were, into the kingdom of heaven, or they think they've come into the kingdom of heaven, saying yes, I want everything that Jesus can give me.

I need his friendship, I need his power, I want his love. But Jesus, don't let your will cross my will. I'm not prepared to actually say no to myself.

And as soon as the demands of discipleship begin to impinge on our lives, we start to say, well I didn't come in for this. We reveal that we weren't really disciples. Daily denial.

And secondly, faithful following. He must take up his cross daily and follow me. That is, walking the path that I open up before him, obeying my instructions.

But again, you see, there is an encouragement that disciples are walking in the master's footsteps. And that he never calls us to go where he has not gone first. He's always with us, to lead us, and to guide us, and to direct us.

So there is this powerful charisma of the Lord Jesus that shows us what we recognize as the life that we have always longed to live. Don't you feel that often within you? That there is in Christ the fullness in which we can discover our true humanity. That as we follow him, as we begin to see what he does truly offer us, even though it involves the cross and saying no to self, nevertheless he offers to us the fullness of life that we were always looking for.

And that hunger for God that is built into every one of us, because as we've been reminded tonight, we were made in his image, that hunger for God is being satisfied by the Christ who says, now come and follow me. Following Jesus means a pilgrim existence. It means that there's a rootlessness to our lives in this world.

It means that there's always a willingness to get up and move on. I met a man the other day who showed me a lovely house that he's just built. He's at the end of a very successful career, just looking forward to his retirement.

And he said to me, as he showed me around this beautiful house, he said, now this is something that my wife and I have been looking forward to for years. He's a Christian man. And he said, nobody's going to get me out of it.

And I thought, well, is that really right? What if the Lord says, I want you to get up and move on? It's a radical business being a disciple. When Jesus said, follow me, to James and John, that was the end of the Zebedee Fishing Company. When Jesus came to Matthew at his tax collector's desk and said, follow me, that was the end of the tax business.

He even held a dinner party to introduce his colleagues to his new master. But you see, these followers of Jesus, these disciples, are never presented in the New Testament as heroes. The emphasis is never, look what they gave up, what fantastic people they are.

The emphasis in the Gospels is always, how sensible they were. How logical. How sensible this Christian discipleship really is.

Because if you have seen in Jesus Christ that he truly is the Son of God, who loved you and gave himself on that cross for your sins. And if you have recognized that the kingdom of heaven is the pearl of great price, the pearl of all pearls, for which you will gladly sell all the rest, then that is not an irrational extremism. It is the sanest, logical response.

To say, Lord, I want to follow you, whatever that may mean, and wherever you will take me. And as we've been so powerfully reminded this evening, being a disciple of Jesus is not becoming an oddity, a freak, an eccentric, some sort of religious extremist. There is a balance and a sanity and a dignity and a fulfillment

about a life that walks in the footsteps of this Lord Jesus.

Two definitions of discipleship. Deny yourself and follow me. Secondly, he gives to us in verses 24 and 26, two explanations of discipleship.

Verse 24, for whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life, for me, will save it. Now that's one of the key principles of the kingdom of heaven, which totally reverses the world's values. Here then is the first explanation.

It is through death that we come to life. Through death that we come to life. We all want to save our lives in terms of the vocabulary Jesus uses in this verse, because our life is precious, it's quickly passing, we want to conserve it, and we want to make the most of it.

And that is not wrong at all. Verse 24 encourages us to save our life. What is wrong is the method that we adopt.

The normal method that the world advocates is to hold on to our lives, to be in control of it, to determine what we want to do, and to sort it out the way we want it to go. But Jesus says from an eternal perspective that is abnormal living. The way really to save our lives is to lose them for Jesus.

And what does that actually mean? Well what he's saying surely is this, that if you live for yourself, if your aim in life is to secure for yourself the particular goals that you may have, happiness, prestige, success, wealth, whatever you think life is really about, if that is your goal, says Jesus, then you are doomed to disappointment and to failure. For however much you may achieve that, you will never find real joy, you will never experience what life was given you actually to be all about. You will never find that fullness because you will simply be committing spiritual suicide.

Malcolm Muggeridge talks rightly about our need to, as he says, to be liberated from the tiny prison cell of our own inflated egos. He says we need something, we need someone bigger and better to live for. And the person who lays their life at the feet of Jesus Christ, who lives for his honour and obeying his word, who seeks his glory first, who wants above everything else to be found as a son or a daughter of God, living under the authority of their Lord, that person, have you noticed it, spontaneously, almost automatically finds real joy and real life fulfillment.

Because the more we give our lives away to Jesus, the more we discover true life, here and hereafter. The more we die to self, the more we live to Christ. Now the second explanation helps us to understand further, because you see it shows us that this is not easy, and that it doesn't go unnoticed or unchallenged.

And there's another part to the explanation, or a second explanation, in verse 26. If anyone is ashamed of me and of my word, says Jesus, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. So the root of discipleship not only leads through death to life, through saying no to self in order to find fulfillment in Christ, but secondly it leads through suffering to glory.

Again you see it's a matter of following Jesus. He is about to pass through the death of the cross to the eternal life of the resurrection. And he is calling his disciples to die to sin and to self in order to live to God in Christ.

And before he himself came to that crown of glory, he passed through the valley of suffering in order to enter into the glory of heaven. There was no crown for Jesus without the cross. Now he says there are no exemption clauses for my disciples, but the Lord Jesus knows that our great temptation is to be ashamed of his word and what he teaches us in this world.

He knows that because of the pressure of the world in which we live and because of its false values that infect our thinking day after day, the great temptation will be to deny him, the great temptation will be to deny him and not to deny ourselves. And we're all tempted to do that, aren't we? Frequently. Indeed, which of us doesn't frequently fall? And which of us does not need to come back to this gracious but demanding Lord and say to him, Lord, I have fallen again.

I have not gone your way. I need your forgiveness. And if we don't repent and ask for that forgiveness, then we may go on saying no to Jesus in our lives until it becomes almost a lifestyle that we think we're following Christ, but it's all on our terms and not on his.

It's through the suffering that we reach the glory. And sometimes we suffer because we love the world and ourselves too much. And so we go the world's way.

We love the in crowd because we don't want them to laugh at us and we don't want them to reject us and we keep it a little bit quiet that we're really Christians and in our hearts there is a shame, a fear. And Christ says to us there is a day coming when the world will see the Christ that it has rejected, when he will appear in glory and in power. And when those who have been ashamed of him, he will be ashamed of.

You see, you can't follow two masters. You can't be divided in your loyalty. While we know this so well in theory, let God's Spirit speak to our hearts tonight and show us those areas of our lives because it's true of all of us.

We need to see the areas of our lives in which we are trying to compromise, in which we are trying to take back the control into our hands. The areas where we say, yes Lord, well you can do all this in my life but don't touch that, not that part of me, not that favorite area, not that sin, not that particular ambition that I have, not that goal that I'm working. Now it's through death to life.

And sometimes through suffering in the sense of giving up our fondest ambitions and saying Lord, your will be done, that brings us to glory. But you see, the teaching finishes with two wonderful encouragements to discipleship. Jesus never gives us these solemn words simply to discourage or to depress us or to make us negative in our thinking.

He's always full of loving incentives to encourage us along the path because He knows how weak we are and He knows how hard we fight. And so He asks us the question of verse 25, what good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit his very self? Do you see how again He pushes us to the long term view, to the eternal perspective and He says, now let this encourage you to go out and follow me. Think about the true riches.

The world is shouting, now is everything that matters. I want it now. I'll have it now.

I'll live for today. And Jesus is saying in verse 25, now will quickly pass but eternity lasts forever. And if we glimpse that, if that far horizon which is the great reality in the New Testament that we modern people have obscured from so much of our thinking, if that far horizon is actually once glimpsed as being the ultimate value in our lives, then we shall live distinctively differently now in this world.

He doesn't write off the world, He made it. He loves the people in His world. His heart aches for the lost world.

But Jesus was never conditioned by the world. He challenged its emphasis on gratifying our own appetites and on simply grabbing for ourselves more and more of the things that we don't really need. Or inflating our own reputation and puffing ourselves up by pretending that we're bigger than we really are.

And He says if that's the way you live your life, at the end you'll have nothing. Nothing. You'll lose it all.

And as Christians we know that, and yet how much we need Christ's encouragement not to go that way, don't we? How many Christians are actually on the same treadmill as the worldly people all around us? We live for the same things. We have the same sort of desires, the same sorts of ambitions. How many of us allow our lives to be circumscribed by the things of this world and we almost lose sight of the fact that there is an eternity ahead of us.

That there is a glorious reality called heaven. That that is where we belong. That is where we are going.

And that He says to us as we've heard so eloquently tonight, be holy. Because I'm holy. Oh we know deep down that the world can only offer us fool's gold.

But my friends we need encouragement, don't we? We need to encourage one another. We need to say to one another and to be able to be open enough to love one another enough to say, my brother, what good is it if you gain everything that you're after? Why have you allowed these things to distract you from the most important thing of all which is following the Lord Jesus? That nerves us to fight the temptations of the evil one. The envy of what other people have.

The jealousy of other people's gifts. The pride that bolsters us up and puts others down. All of those things are just plain everyday worldliness.

And what do you get if you gain the whole world and lose your soul? See when we talk about worldliness it's not the cultural trivia that we tend to criticise other Christians over. It's not what they do and don't do in terms of their leisure time or the way they spend their Sundays and things like that that are the essence of worldliness. It is the presence of attitudes in our heart that are totally this world centred.

Jealousy. And pride. And loving the approval of others.

And wanting at all costs to get our own way. And when we're like that it shows how little we understand the true riches. The riches of the kingdom.

What good is it? If you gained the whole world and lost your own soul. Now it's a great encouragement to discipleship. Consider the true riches.

And then lastly he says in verse 27. Consider the lasting kingdom. I tell you the truth some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.

Now what did Jesus mean by that? Well the disciples probably didn't understand it at that time. And the commentators probably haven't understood it ever since. Did he mean the rule of Christ in the formation of the church? Is that what he meant? That you will see the kingdom coming in the new body of believers? Well perhaps so.

Some people think he meant the kingdom rule of God in the judgment on Jerusalem as it was destroyed. And the Jews were scattered in AD 70. But I think probably what he meant is explained in the very next verse by Luke.

About eight days after. Jesus took three of the disciples. Some of those who were standing there.

And went up onto a mountain to pray. And as he was praying the appearance of his face changed. And his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.

They saw the kingdom in his glory. Not in his full glory but in as much of that glory as they could bear. They saw, says verse 32, his glory.

And Moses and Elijah standing with him. And they never forgot it. When you had a glimpse of the glory of the king.

And you know that there is an everlasting kingdom that will never be destroyed. You'll never forget it. And you will not allow anything in this world to come between you and the king.

You'll not allow anyone to come between following his footsteps for your life. And you obediently seeking to live a life that is holy and glorifying. So why do we not worship the king now? Why do we not align our lives with the things that matter most? Why do we not in a fresh way tonight as the Holy Spirit has been speaking to us through God's word.

Determine that we will in his grace and by his strength overturn the world's false values. And we will be real disciples. And by that grace we will seek to be holy as he is holy.

Do you remember those amazing words of Jim Elliott? The young man who was martyred in the 50's by the Alka Indians in Ecuador. Words that I often come back to that always challenge me. Jim Elliott wrote in his diary shortly before he died.

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. That's the value of the kingdom. And may God help us not to be fools.

But to be wise and to follow him. With glad obedience. That we might be holy.

And that our lives might glorify his name. Let's pray for one another. Our gracious father we thank you again for the enormous privilege that you have given us.

Of having these words of our saviour recorded in our own language. Translated in our bibles. Available to us.

Thank you for those glorious truths that Peter taught through that first letter. And for this gospel of Luke that has come to us tonight. Thank you for these two passages that so powerfully work together.

To challenge our superficiality and our half heartedness. And Lord we confess to you. Personally I confess to you.

How far short of the standards we fall. And how frequently we fail and how our values are often quite wrong. And Lord our prayer tonight is that you would have mercy on us.

And that as by your spirit you show us those particular areas in each of our lives that you want to touch and to change. We might turn from sin. Turn from half heartedness.

Turn from compromise. And we might seek Lord that we might know firstly your cleansing. And then the infilling of your Holy Spirit in all the fullness of your grace.

That we might live lives that are well pleasing to you. Help us Lord that we may grow in holiness. Make us good disciples of the Lord Jesus.

And so fill our hearts and minds with the heavenly realities. And with the eternal glory. That everything else may seem in its proper perspective.

As comparatively insignificant. That I might know him. And the power of his resurrection.

Teach us Lord to follow your footsteps through death to life through suffering to glory. And may our lives be something that brings pleasure and joy to your heart. As we worship you for all your great love and grace.

In Jesus name. Amen.

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