

Luke 9:21-27; II Tim. 2:10-13; Following After Jesus I. Denying Self II. Taking up your Cross III. Following Him
 Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, being a follower of Jesus is a radical calling. One the demands a total
 commitment- one that must be considered very seriously. Children- do you like playing the game- follow the
 leader? How do you play it? You go where your leader goes- doing what they do- right. The harder it is to
 follow- the more people who drop out. Well- today Jesus is going to call us to follow after Him! When Jesus
 spoke to His disciples at the beginning of His ministry, He called them to follow after Him. So they left their
 nets or their money table- and followed after Him. But today we find that Jesus says to us all- if anyone would
 come after me. It is not supposed to be easy to follow after Jesus. The fact is- being a Christian is often
 viewed like choosing your drink for dinner- it does not really matter- you can choose whatever you want. Our
 communities are filled with casual Christians- with little to no commitment and little consideration of the
 demand this brings. But as Jesus said in Luke 14- consider the cost. Choosing to follow Christ is one that
 brings a big price tag. Like building a tower Jesus said- consider if you are all in- that you are fully committed
 to this project- or else your work will not be complete. Well- today we are going to see that Jesus has called
 us to follow in His footsteps- to go where He went- to suffer as He did. We don't like to think about suffering-
 but Jesus makes it clear- the cross always comes before the crown! If you claim that Jesus is the Christ- that
 He is your savior- then be prepared- know what to expect! V. 23 is our text- with this theme: Jesus calls all His
 people to follow after Him.

I. Denying Self

We start by seeing that this following after Jesus means that we will have to deny ourselves. To properly
 follow- your actions must be dictated by someone else. Just like the in the game- follow the leader- the leader
 sets the agenda- everyone else does what the leader says. Well- our leader's life is the example for us to
 follow- but to follow we have to deny our own ideas and urges. The word- deny- hear means to forget the
 self- to have no connection or concern for your own being. It is a strong word- to forget that you even exist-
 to have no care for your own plans. To disown yourself. Just like Christ did- as Phil. 2 says- Jesus did not

consider equality with God something to be grasped- but made Himself low- taking on the form of a servant- considering the needs of others before His own. Jesus denied Himself- so we are called to deny ourselves. Here we acknowledge that we do not have personal control of the direction of our lives. You are not your own. My plans- my ideas are rejected. Not my will- but Your will be done. Denying self means that we change our ideas of what it means to prosper- what is the goal here? No longer the pursuit of individual liberty and happiness! We need to reinterpret gain- as v. 25 continues- if you try to gain the world you will lose everything- but if you deny yourself you end up gaining everything! We forfeit ourselves- so that we might gain life! This word- denial- is interesting in this context. Peter has just confessed the truth- but this same Peter will soon deny Christ because it was costly to profess the truth! That is the opposite here- as v. 26 continues- if you are ashamed of Christ- if you deny Him He will deny You! But if you deny yourself- He will acknowledge and embrace you! This is a radical change of direction and focus- not my happiness or pleasure- but rather I deny my own desires. We know that when we follow Jesus- He was denied and forsaken. So our desire for acceptance by men- for the easy and lavish life without pain or pressure- must be put off!

II. Taking up your Cross

But the claim of Christ upon us is pressed even further- not only deny yourself but take up your cross. Here we must note that Jesus said- take up your cross- not take up His cross! There is a world of difference between the cross Christ carried- and the cross we carry. The cross that Jesus carried was the one that purchased our atonement- you cannot make attain redemption by the cross that you bear! That work of salvation is complete- Jesus bore that cross one and for all! He suffered the wrath and curse of God in our place- that cross was literally carried up to Golgotha. Jesus has already referenced His impending death in v. 22. Rather- Jesus says- take up your cross. Lift up- bear- carry- take it along with you. This cross is not just a burden- not just an inconvenience- but a cross! Many say today- that's just my cross to bear- in reference to something insignificant like bad hair or pimples. No- the cross we carry is much more significant- not some light or trite thing! The cross is an agent of death- A Christian is one who is constantly dying! We are on the

road to a final end! The Jews knew what the cross meant- it was a one-way journey to certain death! That is how we should view ourselves in this world- that is how we should relate to the passing things. The cross is the crucible- daily our sins are being burned and our impurity cleanses. Taking our cross means we know that this world will hate us- despise us- and even put some of us to death! I have been crucified with Christ- I no longer live! I am dead to myself- dead to this world and all its passing pleasures. If you want to save your life- as v. 24 says- then you must die! Only in losing your life will you save it! This is hard- I like being liked! I want people to like me- I want an easy life with little or no pain. I want things to go my way according to my plan- but Jesus says- die to yourself! Your struggle against sin- against the tyranny of the self- is not easy! Take up the instrument of death- daily as v. 23 says. Daily- every day- this is your calling! Every morning we say- today I carry my cross- this sinful flesh is on the way to the grave! From the ring of the morning alarm clock- to the closed eyes at the end of the day- the cross is before our eyes. Daily- until our days are done! This is not an eternal calling- only while we are in this sinful world in the old man. An end is in sight! Take your cross up daily- all the days of your natural life- not just a Sunday thing- not just when you get older- but each day reminding yourself- I no longer live for myself! You have to be willing to die to follow Christ! For the disciples in specific- almost all of them becoming martyrs- but for us all in general. The Christian life is one of constant death- the narrow road is hard! There is both a self- execution; and an expected hatred by the world- that forms our cross! Some of you know what this cross looks like- trying to follow and obey when the flesh and society recoils. The cross is heavy and pressing. Die to self- live for Him! If you take not your cross- you are not worthy of Him He says in Mt. 10. The daily weight of the cross reminds us- we are not home yet! This is a choice and command- we are called to take it up and carry it.

III. Following Him

So far we have seen the call to deny the self- to take up your cross daily- and finally we come to the following after Christ. This call to follow is the call of a disciple- to join Him and identify with Him! To walk where He has been- to accompany His people. A disciple follows their master- and conforms to His image. We could

say- choose you this day whom you will follow. Following Him means that His word is our anthem- His light our path. We know that His life was one of suffering- so we expect this ourselves. They hated Him- they will hate us! He is content with nothing less than our all! Following Jesus will cost us. As I mentioned Luke 14 earlier- Jesus says- you must hate your own family- even hating your ow life! Bear your cross and come after me! If you are desiring to build a tower, won't you count the cost? Won't you consider if you have enough money to finish the project? Well- following Me is very costly Jesus says! It will cost you everything! But in losing everything- you will end up gaining it all! The Christian life is just too costly for many people- they loose too much so they walk away! But to those who preserver, there is great gain! Whoever does not renounce all cannot be my disciple! These are hard words- demanding much of us! You are not your own! Your life and times are in His hands- He is free to do with you as He pleases!

To conclude, this following after Jesus does not end with the cross. No- as we read from II Tim. 2- if we die with Him we will also live with Him! If we endure, we will also reign with Him! Those who follow Him below- will follow Him above! As we found out in the introduction, whomever we follow determines where we end up! V. 27 speaks of the glory of the Kingdom of God. But that glory will come only after the cross! If you sacrifice your life- following after Jesus- you will end up gaining your life and finding eternal riches and glory! If you lose your life- you save it! This is contrary to everything the world teaches- but that is how Jesus works! The cross comes before the crown! Today we live with the theology of suffering! Only in losing all- forsaking any trust in self or this world for lasting pleasure- do we find! Jesus calls all His people to follow after Him. So forsake everything- count all as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Phil. 3- I consider everything rubbish in order to gain Christ and in Him righteousness which comes through faith! Jesus reveals that the way to glory is through suffering. For Him- His cross would purchase our salvation as He suffered and died. For those who would follow Him- these too must go where He went.