

***“YOU WILL LOSE YOUR LIFE”***  
***LUKE 9:23-27***

Perhaps no advertising campaign has ever been as successful as the one undertaken by the US government in 1917. Initially designed to promote patriotism and enlist men into the military for World War I the campaign has persisted and remained an **iconic slogan** in American culture: “[Uncle Sam] wants you for U.S. Army...”



It **has been noted** that “The impact of the poster was immediate and profound. It wasn’t just a call to arms; it became a symbol of American patriotism, urging citizens to contribute to the war effort in any way they could. The poster’s design, with Uncle Sam dressed in stars and stripes, pointing directly at the viewer, was a masterstroke of persuasive art. It personalized the recruitment message, making each viewer feel individually addressed and responsible for the country’s fate.” This poster and other similar efforts **did the job**: over three million men were conscripted into service and \$24 billion in war bonds were raised.

One of the attributes of that recruiting campaign is that it did not minimize the largeness or hardness of the task to which the American public was being called. The need was made clear. And still the government solicited people to invest their money and their lives in the venture. And they did.

It seems counter-intuitive to say, “Let’s tell people the task is hard and *then* they will invest themselves.” The American government was (unwittingly) following the pattern of Christ, who articulated the hardness of following Him — and then said, “Now follow me.” The call that Jesus gave the Twelve and the crowds in His first century ministry remains the same today. Listen to what Jesus says in **Luke 9:23-27** —

***FOLLOW CHRIST (BELIEVE IN HIM) BECAUSE IT WILL COST YOU EVERYTHING.***  
***AND YOU WILL GAIN FAR MORE.***

Jesus is calling you to faith in Him. You will lose your life. It *will* cost you everything. And it will give you infinitely more. In this passage we see **four declarations** of what it means to believe in Jesus as Savior...

1. **Believing in Jesus Means DENYING Yourself (v. 23)**
2. **Believing in Jesus Means LOSING Your Life (vv. 24-25)**
3. **Believing in Jesus Means Not Being ASHAMED (v. 26)**
4. **Believing in Jesus Means HAVING the Kingdom of God (v. 27)**

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## **1. Believing in Jesus Means DENYING Yourself (v. 23)**

- Luke introduces these words of Jesus with the phrase, **He was saying to them all...** The question is “who is ‘all?’” I.e., who is the audience? The Twelve or more than them?
  - ✓ This account follows the feeding of the 5000 (vv. 12-17) and Jesus’ question about His identity, which Peter answered with “You are the Christ...” (v. 20).
  - ✓ The miracle of the feeding happened in Bethsaida (NE Galilee) while the latter was in Caesarea Philippi in northwestern Israel (cf. Mk. 8:27) — and only with the Twelve. There is nothing in this text to indicate His location; most assume this follows Peter’s testimony (cf. Mt. 16:24ff; Mk. 8:34ff).
  - ✓ Luke *seems* to suggest only the Twelve are present, but Mark says that Jesus **summoned the crowd with His disciples** (Mk. 8:34), so it seems that the **all** in this verse is again a large crowd. It is a broad call to believe; the summons to faith is given to the many (yet — cf. v. 53; Jn. 6:66).
- And He is talking about faith in Him; while Jesus doesn’t use the word “believe” the concept is throughout these verses — **come after...follow** (v. 23), **save** [his life] (v. 24), **loses himself** (v. 25), **when He comes in His glory** (v. 26), and **kingdom of God** (v. 27). It’s all salvation language.
- And it is true for everyone — **if anyone** — *when* anyone comes after Jesus, this is what they will do.
- Jesus is explaining what it means to believe in Him. The question is important because many people want the benefits of Christ without the costs of Christ. They want healing and prosperity and ease and acceptance and comfort and security and guarantees. And they don’t want trouble, suffering, or pain.
- Yet Jesus has just identified that He is the kind of Messiah (**Son of Man**) who will be rejected and killed.
- And these verses affirm that the same may also be true of His followers as well. Jesus’ followers should never expect that they will receive comfort when He received rejection and death.
- *To be a follower of Christ will cost you.* Verse 23 reveals three costs of believing in Jesus; **first, self-denial.**
  - ✓ To **come after** Christ is a parallel to **following Christ** (v. 23b). It means to want Him — to desire a relationship with Him. It is to hunger and thirst for Him (Jn. 6:35).
  - ✓ And when you want Him, you will (**you must** — necessarily) **deny yourself.**
    - To “deny” is to refuse or repudiate or disown something. There is no association with it. (It is a strong word; it is used of Peter’s denials of Jesus (Mt. 26:70-72).
    - Here He is not speaking of denying pleasures like one might do at Lent: “I’m giving up chocolate, or watching baseball, or getting my nails done weekly...”
    - He says one must deny **himself** = I.e., he denies his control over his own life. He is not master; Christ is the Master of His life. It is a decisive, calculated decision to be enslaved to Christ.
    - It is a word that parallels repentance: I cannot save myself, so I turn away from self-righteousness...
    - “To ‘follow’ Christ a person must become apostate from his egocentric self.” [Ellis]
    - Jesus demands total control of our lives; He will not be second to anyone, including myself.

- ✓ **A second cost** of believing in Jesus is that one must **take up his cross daily**.
  - Again this is a definitive command: **take up the cross**, but it is repeated (it's **daily**).
  - This has become a common figure of speech — “\_\_\_\_\_ is just my cross to bear...” That blank is filled in with people (spouses, parents, bosses...) and circumstances (job, financial trouble, illness/injury, living in a particular place/state/country).
  - While those things can be troubling, they aren't a reference to what a **cross** is.
    - ... To carry a cross is to carry the horizontal beam that is placed on top of the upright on which a condemned criminal will be crucified.
    - ... The criminal in his crime has rebelled against the state by refusing to keep the law; in turn, the state condemns him to death and says, “you will submit,” beginning with carrying the implement on which he will die. It is both humiliating and deadly. And a death sentence.
    - ... So when Jesus says His followers will daily take up the cross, He means they will die to self and even be ready to die for Him if called to do so.
    - ... Like the condemned criminal in Rome, the believer also was a rebel against God who now is redeemed and joyfully submits himself to the direction of God (Gal. 2:20; **2 Cor. 4:10; 11:22ff**).
  - And this death to self is not just done once. It's a daily act (which is why generally it doesn't involve martyrdom). Jesus is not “something I did when I was 11.” He is our daily life (Col. 3:4). Jesus is not “added” to our lives; He dominates and controls everything about our lives.
- ✓ **The third cost** to believing in Jesus is that one **follows Him**.
  - This exact command will be used 18x in the NT (**5:27; 18:22**). It means to exactly move behind someone and go in the same direction; one is exactly aligned with the one he follows.
  - It becomes a synonym of faith (**vv. 57-61**) and it is a present inv. — we constantly follow Him, in obeying all the demands He makes and enduring all the consequences of being with Him.
  - *He is always the leader*. He will not always lead you where you want to go and He will not always lead you to the same places as others, but He will always lead you well (**Jn. 21:20-22**).
- This is what it means to believe in Jesus Christ: deny yourself, die to yourself, and follow Him.
  - ✓ It is a call of submission and obedience. It is a humbling call. It is a call to recognize His lordship.
  - ✓ Some of you, like the crowds in that day, are hanging around the edges of Christ's audience. You participate in worship and maybe a home group or Bible study. You're working at cleaning up your life, making your marriage better, being a better employee. But you aren't willing to let Christ be the daily King of your life. You are still trying to be sovereign over your life (and that won't go well).
  - ✓ There is only one way to be connected to Jesus. It is to admit you are a sinner that cannot save himself (**denial**), it is an acknowledgement that you need a new King (**cross**), and that you are willing to submit to Him in all that He says (**follow**). *You must die*.
  - ✓ If you have not yet begun to believe, will you believe today?

## 2. Believing in Jesus Means LOSING Your Life (vv. 24-25)

- Here is the clearest statement Jesus makes about believing in Him: “You will lose your life.”
- It’s a paradoxical but readily understood statement: **whoever wishes to save his life** [soul]...
  - ✓ Do you notice the word **for**? This is the first of three reasons Jesus gives for believing in Him (v. 23). (He also uses **for** in vv. 25-26 to give additional reasons.)
  - ✓ The reason is because he **wishes** [wants] **to save his life**. Remember the movie “It’s a Wonderful Life?” After seeing what life was like had he never lived, George Bailey says, “I want to live again. I want to live again. I want to live again.....Please, God, let me live again.” The person who really wants to live will do anything to save his life — including dying (to himself).
  - ✓ So Jesus says that the person who wants to live will **lose his life for My sake** —Pursuit of life means death (of self). And then He says the same thing in reverse order — **and whoever loses his life...**
    - The key phrase is **for My sake** — it’s not a matter of just “dying” or being “self-sacrificing.” The only kind of death that counts is the death that is **for Christ**. It’s all about prioritizing Him.
    - He is the motivation for our sacrifice, and He is the goal of our sacrifice. We want Him.
    - This is **Phil. 1:21**; **Acts 21:13**. There is no life without following Christ in all things (**Mt. 28:20**).
    - And there is no ultimate satisfaction and joy for the person who lives for self and pleasure.
    - Why live like Paul in 2 Corinthians 11? Why come close to death for serving Christ, like Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:30)? Why endure hardship, like Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5)? Why embrace persecution and suffering, like believers in the last days (2 Tim. 3:1-12)?
    - Because when you do it for Christ, believing in Him, you get Christ. Jesus does the math in v. 25.
- Here is another reason to give up self and believe Christ (**for, v. 25**): there is no ultimate profit in this world.
  - ✓ **What is a man profited** is a financial question — look at the balance sheet of life: what does the profit/loss ledger say?
  - ✓ Jesus is admonishing: “Put everything on a set of balance scales — what will you sacrifice for Christ and what will you gain from Christ?” Or “what will you gain from the world and what will you lose because the world?” The implication is clear — whatever is gained from the world in enjoyment (even if it is “everything”) is only temporal and has no lasting (eternal) satisfaction.
  - ✓ If you bet on the world being ultimate, you will lose everything — and mostly your soul (**12:15-21**).
  - ✓ One hundred and eighty years after the death of Charlemagne, about the year 1000, officials of the Emperor Otho opened the great king’s tomb, where in addition to incredible treasures they saw an amazing sight—the skeletal remains of King Charlemagne seated on a throne, his crown still on his skull, a copy of the Gospels lying in his lap with his bony finger resting on the text, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” [Hughes]
  - ✓ Do the math. What is bottom line? Believing in Christ is the greatest “savings” plan there is; nothing compares. It will be hard (at times), but the benefits are beyond our comprehension.

### 3. Believing in Jesus Means Not Being **ASHAMED** (v. 26)

- Verse 26 provides the third reason (*for*) why it is wise to believe in Christ (v. 23).
  - ✓ The benefit is in the form of a warning: **whoever is ashamed of Me and My words...**
  - ✓ Now I'm sure you recognize what Jesus is doing here, but let's say it explicitly: the one who is unwilling to die to self for the sake of Christ is saying that he is ashamed to identify with Christ.
    - To be **ashamed** is to think something unacceptable and disgraceful so that it is rejected.
    - Jesus is also clear to identify Himself with **His words** — you can't separate the Person of Christ from the words of Christ. You must accept who He is, what He does, and what He says.
    - And Jesus is clear that there are only two kinds of people in the world: those who embrace, believe in, and love Jesus Christ and those who are ashamed of Him. There is no middle ground of "He's kinda ok — I don't care either way..." If one doesn't love Christ, he is ashamed of Christ.
  - ✓ And to be ashamed of Christ means that Christ in turn will be "ashamed" of that person.
    - And Christ's shame comes with the ultimate kind of rejection...
    - Notice, **the Son of Man will be ashamed**. Jesus uses His favorite title for Himself (**Dan. 7:13f**). It is an inference that He is coming as the sovereign who has the right to judge those who are in rebellion against Him — and that He will judge.
    - And notice this contrast: when a man is ashamed of Christ, he won't follow Christ; but when Christ is "ashamed" of a man, He rejects and condemns that man eternally.
  - ✓ When will that happen? **When He comes in His glory** — i.e., when He comes in the full demonstration of His glory (His full unveiled majesty) and sets up His Kingdom (**2 Thess. 1:6-10**).
  - ✓ The clause is also a reminder that even while Christ suffered on earth (**v. 22**), that suffering was not the end of the story; the final part of his story was the full demonstration of His glory.

"Then He, the Glorified One, will decide the eternal destiny of all; and those who have rejected Him through love of the world or of their own honour, their own convenience or anything else, will receive eternal condemnation as their self-chosen portion. From Jesus they can expect nothing but the sorrowful words: 'I never knew you.'" [Geldenhuys]

- Let's turn the phrase around to capture the positive meaning: "whoever has faith in and follows and loves Me, the Son of Man will embrace, and love, and reward when He comes in His glory." So the best thing you can do is follow Christ, embrace Him fully, and cultivate a growing love for Him.
  - ✓ The greatest commandment still applies: "You shall love the Lord your God..." (**10:27**).
  - ✓ And because it is the greatest commandment, then the greatest question is, "Do you love the Lord...?"

"It is the property of covetous persons to love worldly wealth and riches. It is the property of ambitious persons to love worldly honor and dignities. It is the property of voluptuous persons to love sensual pleasures and delights and it is the property of true Christians to love Jesus Christ, whom they have never seen." [Vincent, *The True Christian's Love to the Unseen Christ*.]

#### 4. Believing in Jesus Means **HAVING** the Kingdom of God (v. 27)

- Jesus has been enticing His hearers to follow Him — yes, be aware of and weigh the costs of following Christ (and the danger of rejecting Him), but also weigh the benefits of following Him. There is benefit and value in every hardship endured for the sake of Christ —
  - ✓ You will hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (19:17)
  - ✓ Your reward in Heaven will be great (Mt. 5:12)
  - ✓ The Father will honor you (Jn. 12:26)
  - ✓ You will experience incomparable glory (Rom. 8:18)
  - ✓ Your perishable and mortal body will put on that which is imperishable and immortal (1 Cor. 15:54)
  - ✓ You will know an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (2 Cor. 4:17)
  - ✓ You will have an eternal inheritance (Col. 3:24)
  - ✓ You will receive the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8)
  - ✓ You will see the face of the (currently) unseeable God (1 Jn. 3:2)
- Having laid out what it means to believe in Christ, He finally gives one more encouragement to believe — you will have the Kingdom of God. What is that like? The Scriptures unfold something of it, but here Jesus says, ***some are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.***
  - ✓ What does that mean? There is quite a bit of debate but it seems pretty simple, actually —
  - ✓ Because Jesus said, ***some standing here***, it means it must be something that has now already happened (it would have had to have happened within no more than 40-50 years).
  - ✓ What is it like to see the Kingdom of God? How about seeing what Jesus will be like ***when He comes in His glory*** (v. 26)? If only we could see what that is like — and eight days later, three men did (28ff).
  - ✓ Jesus is simply saying that He will give a glimpse of what He and His kingdom will be like. And He did.
  - ✓ He is persuading them to believe in Him because of the coming Kingdom — and then He showed them.
- When Jesus comes, He will establish a great and eternal Kingdom. Don’t trade a few trinkets and baubles that the world offers now for an immeasurable gift in the future.

**CONCLUSION:** This passage is all about Christ’s explanation of what it means to believe in and follow Him. He is calling people to repent and believe in Him. I’ve already asked, but let me ask again: do you believe? Are you His follower? If not, follow Him. Not all will be easy. He will make demands. But He is better than you can imagine, and He will give you life that is also greater than you can imagine. Will you believe?

**PRAYER** (prep for communion)

**BENEDICTION:**