



STORIES OF LIFE!

The Gospel of Luke

A Story of Thorns and Crosses!

Luke 9:23-26

Message #30 of 50 – S809

Sermon given on September 16, 2018



Sunday Morning Service

Pastor Rick Lancaster

A Story of Thorns and Crosses!

Luke 9:23-26

Opening Comments

- Turn to **Luke 9**
- We continue a study through the Gospel of Luke – **The Stories of Life**
- Some twenty years ago I had an encounter with God that changed the course of my life onto the one I am living today
- And as hard as it sometimes is, I wouldn't change it for the whole world
- And the Scripture we are going to look at today came to life in that encounter and God helped me to see it with fresh eyes this week
- It is my prayer that you have just such an encounter with God today
- **Pray**

Teaching

- **A Story of Thorns and Crosses!**
- Last week the text included Peter's declaration that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah – the Christ – the Savior of the world
- Jesus responded with words that made no sense to the disciples
- **Luke 9:22**
- Today's text begins in verse 23, but we must remember that the context of verse 23 is verse 22
- **Luke 9:23**
- Jesus is describing what it truly means to be a real disciple of Jesus Christ
- Keep your finger in **Luke 9** and turn to **Isaiah 6**
- At some point early in my walk with Jesus I sensed God speaking into my life in a way that was so clear that I could swear I heard His voice speaking to me
- What I heard was similar to what Isaiah heard, though the encounter was not quite so spectacular
- **Isaiah 6:1-8a**
- Isaiah has this radical throne-room experience

- He hears the question from the Lord, and, for him, there can be only one answer
 - **Isaiah 6:8b**
 - Turn back to **Luke 9**
 - For me the question I sensed God asking was, ‘Who will serve Me?’
 - Even as immature as my faith was at the time, I sensed the right answer was, ‘I will! Here I am, I will serve You!’
 - Now, don’t misunderstand, that was not because I am such an awesome Christian, I’m not! It was a work of God’s Spirit in me
 - God put something in me and I responded to it **Psalm 37:4**
Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.
 - Jesus said, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me...and follow Me.’
 - This is not just about being a Christian – there are millions of Christians in churches all around the world who are not following Jesus
- Just being a Christian doesn’t mean you are following Jesus!**
- This world doesn’t need more Christians – it needs more Christ-followers – more world-changing Christ-followers
 - More Christ-followers will result in more Christians
 - Let’s move on to verse 24 – we will come back to 23
 - **Luke 9:24**
 - There is a contrast in desires – to come after Me (Jesus) or to ‘save his life’ – You can’t satisfy both desires **Matthew 6:24**
No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.
 - ‘mammon’ is wealth or possessions – you could just as easily substitute comfort, safety, security, position, relationship
 - Jesus goes on to say that even if you fulfill every desire of your heart, it won’t be worth it
 - **Luke 9:25**
 - You could become richer than Bill Gates, more famous than Beyoncé, or more powerful than the President – it’s just not worth it
 - Because it says something about your attitude toward Jesus and His Word
 - **Luke 9:26**

- These words are for Christians – if you claim Christ as your Lord and Savior – He has put the Holy Spirit inside you
- He is the one who gives you the desires of God’s heart
- But God is a gentleman, He will not override your desires
- He gives us the choice
- Son of Man is Jesus – before He died on the cross, which he said would happen in verse 22, He said He was coming back again
- We are in that waiting period – waiting for Jesus to come back in glory
- Will we be ashamed when He comes back?
- The idea of standing before Jesus ashamed makes me sick in the stomach
- Go back to verse 23
- According to Google, there are 2.2 billion Christians in the world
- Sadly, only a small percentage of them are Christ-followers
- What is the difference – it is right here in verse 23
- It has to begin with desire – if you don’t desire to follow Jesus – none of the rest of the verse will make sense
- If you have the Holy Spirit in you, pray and ask Him to stir up that desire
- If you do that, He will lead you to three things
- First – **To deny self**
- This one is so hard – we live in a self-centered, narcissistic world
- I came across a couple of statistics – every day 93 million selfies are posted to Instagram
- More people die while taking selfies than from shark attacks
- So, what does it mean to deny yourself
- It is not about depriving yourself of something you need **Galatians 2:20**

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

- To deny yourself is yield total authority of your life over to Christ
- Because Jesus loved me to the point of dying on the cross for my sins, He can have my life – all of it – because I trust that He will use it to glorify God, bless others, and grow my faith

- Every day – more of Him – less of me!
 - The second thing the Spirit will lead you to – **Take up your cross**
 - This is one that gets mis-quoted fairly regularly
 - Someone will come to me and tell about some difficulty in their life, and will end up saying with resignation in their voice, ‘This is my cross to bear’
 - The problem, that is not a cross – a better analogy is it is a thorn
 - In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul talked about having a thorn in the flesh
 - He wanted God to take it away – God said, ‘No!’
 - We have to be careful not to confuse thorns and crosses
 - Thorns come into all people’s lives
 - We might also call them storms, trial, tribulations, temptations
 - It might be anger, fear, grief, loneliness, disappointment, or despair
 - It might be illness, injury, or bad relationships
 - Your husband or rebellious teenager is a not a cross you have to bear
 - What is a cross?
 - First – the cross is a picture of death, of dying for something
 - Then – to take up the cross is a picture of life – only the living can pick up their cross
 - It is easier to understand if we look at Jesus’ cross
 - What was He living for – what did He die for? Jesus’ cross was our sins
 - He lived and died to make a way for us to be forgiven for our sins so that we could be reconciled to God **Romans 6:10**
- For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God.**
- What is your cross? What cross has Jesus asked you to bear?
 - This is where this gets exciting!
 - How do we discover our cross?
 - Maybe you have heard someone say that God has put a burden on their heart – that could be a clue
 - Regularly, someone will come to me and say something like the church ought to be doing something; ministering to the homeless, outreach, evangelism, door-to-door invitations to church

- What have they just done? They carried their cross to me and tried to give it to me – I already have a cross – this church is my cross – I have devoted my life to follow Christ in this church and I will pour out my whole life to do it – I can't carry theirs too
- If you have a desire to follow Jesus as a true disciple, and have yielded your life over to Him – start looking around at the world, or at the church, or at your neighborhood – just start looking with God's eyes
- If you do, you will see something that you can devote your life to
- I think of Pastor Brandon Ingraham – his cross is the lost people of Indonesia – has given his whole life to that
- Maybe yours will be broken marriages, dysfunctional families, single mothers, drug addicts, the homeless – there is probably already a burden on your heart – that could be your cross
- You start seeking God with your whole heart, and he will show you the cross He wants you to pick up
- If you don't pick up your cross, you will end up tripping over it your whole life
- Brings us to the third and final thing – **Follow Me!**
- Being a Christ follower takes commitment
- Daily, we need to deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and choose to follow Jesus with our whole being
- Is it hard to be a Christ-follower? – You bet! It sometimes feels impossible, but God is always there!
- Is it worth it? Oh yes, it is the only way to experience true fulfillment in this life
- And God promises treasures and rewards in heaven in case that isn't enough to get you moving in that direction
- The world doesn't need more Christians – it needs more Christ-followers – Let the Holy Spirit stir up a desire to follow Jesus, deny yourself, putting God first in everything and find your cross and pick it up and pour your life into loving God and others in faith
- If you need discerning what your cross is, talk to one of the elders
- **Pray!**