

September 13, 2015
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Communion
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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HIS CROSS IS MY CROSS

(Part 1)

Luke 9:23

I consider myself to be a fan of the Atlanta Braves. This is not a good year to be a Braves' fan. They have the next to the worst record in all of Major League Baseball. Only the Philadelphia Phillies are worse—and they are not must worse. Be that as it may, I am not losing any sleep over the matter. No, I am not going to shift my loyalty to another team. But in the end, it does not cost me anything to be a fan of losers.

What if my livelihood was dependant on a successful baseball team? What if my loyalty to a sports team, or an employer, or a political party actually cost me something? More to the point, what if being a Baptist suddenly meant that I could go to prison like non-conformists did in the seventeenth century? What if holding to premillennialism meant that I could be executed? Frankly, I think I could give serious consideration to the need to be a Baptist if it meant I would go to prison for being one. I'm really not willing to die for my preferred eschatological position.

What if being a Christian, a follower of Christ came with serious threats? Would I stop being an obvious, testifying Christian if it meant I would lose my job? Would I change my belief about identification with Christ if doing so meant I would go to prison or be executed? Jesus taught that none of those things move His true followers because we have already passed the sentence of death upon ourselves. Identifying with Jesus Christ is identification with His death on the cross. His cross is our cross so that denial of self is simply expected.

Over the next few weeks as we gather at the Lord's Table, I would like for us to consider together Jesus' teaching about His cross which is my cross. We will consider 1) A critical proposition (v.23), 2) The reason for the proposition (v.24-25), and 3) The warning attached to the proposition. This week let's consider . . .

A Critical Proposition (v.23).

The implication of Jesus' words in our text is that some people might follow Him. *And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me" (v.23a)*. The little word *if* indicates that some folks consider the invitation. Specifically, Jesus offered the invitation to follow Him. He said it to "**all.**" Who are the all? It is likely this took place in the context of Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi. That same story is found in all of the Synoptic Gospels (Luke 8:18-20; Mark 8:27-38; Matthew 16:13-28). Though the circumstances took place outside Jewish territory, still there was a crowd present at some point. Jesus called the crowd to Himself (Mark 8:34). In that setting, He gave the invitation to all to come after Him. Jesus still offers the invitation.

This is not an invitation to be impressed with Jesus – though Jesus is impressive and many people were (and still are) impressed with Him. This is not an invitation to admire Jesus – though it is very easy for us to admire Him who was perfect righteousness personified. It is not an invitation for people to become religious – though that is generally what most people conclude. Nor did Jesus invite people to abandon normal responsibilities in order to pursue an aesthetic monasticism. All of these errors have been and still are substituted for what Jesus invited people to do.

This was a call to discipleship, which most people in Jesus' day would have understood. Since the time of the Greek peripatetic philosophers, people in that region would have observed and understood disciples following teachers. Those people understood that a genuine disciple forsook everything in order to learn about the teacher with the end goal of becoming just like the teacher.

Therefore, Jesus' invitation to follow Him is the invitation to become like Him. That is not something that we can do in our human strength or wisdom. Sinners become like Jesus only when we confess our sinful condition and our specific sins against our Holy Creator.

We follow Jesus only after the miracle of regeneration gives us a new and understanding heart. At that moment, we are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit with the result that we understand the Word of God, the teaching of Jesus. To many people that sounds like a good idea.

Jesus' wording of the invitation indicates that He was aware that some people think they would like to follow Christ. There are many examples of such would-be followers in the Gospel accounts. We know about the rich young ruler (Luke 18:22) who came to Jesus. He said that he truly desired to inherit eternal life. It seems obvious that he came and asked Jesus about the matter because he believed this "teacher" had the answers. As we know too well, things didn't work out the way he expected and he went away sorrowing. No following in that case.

Then there was a nameless man who met Jesus along the road. In light of where this story appears chronologically, it is apparent that Jesus and the disciples were returning to Galilee from Caesarea Philippi. The man came to Jesus and expressed the desire to follow wherever Jesus went (Luke 9:57-58). Jesus responded to the man's request by telling him that He didn't have a place to live. The challenge was, "Do you want to face such austerity?" The text implies the man chose not to follow.

Another man expressed the desire to follow Jesus (Luke 9:59-60). The only requirement he had was that he wanted to follow according to his plan. Jesus told the man that this wasn't going to work out. Still another said he would follow Jesus (Luke 9:61-62). He just wanted to go home and spend time with his family first. Jesus told the man that following Him required more commitment than that. Yes, Jesus told people stuff like that. He said that His followers would have to be more loyal to Him than we are to our own families (Matthew 10:34-39).

If we get the idea that following Jesus is costly, we're getting the right idea. In order to follow Jesus, the follower has to deny himself (v.23b). In that simple command lies the truth that there is a cost to be paid by those who would follow Jesus. As in the examples we gave, the people who thought they wanted to follow Jesus were not willing to make the necessary sacrifices. They didn't follow.

Likewise Jesus illustrated the cost like this: "*For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost,*

whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace" (Luke 14:28-32). He was simply saying that anyone who desires to follow Him must seriously consider the cost.

In simple terms, the cost of following Jesus is death to self. The Greek word for *deny* means to disdain, refuse, or reject. That is how the word is used when we read about Moses' decision to refuse to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Hebrews 11:24). A most painful use of the word in all four Gospels is Peter's boast that he would never reject, refuse, claim no association with Jesus (but he did). In the text before us, the word is aorist tense, which means that at a point in time we realize the cost of following Jesus and we put ourselves, our desires, our plans, our purposes, our hopes and wishes, our ambitions on the cross.

That is what Paul meant when he wrote, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me* (Galatians 2:20). That is what Jesus meant when He described regenerated (blessed) people, people who possess the Kingdom of God, as people who are *poor in spirit* (Matthew 5:3). To be poor in spirit is to realize that we have nothing to offer God in order to gain salvation. It is to acknowledge that we are beggars in our spirit and wholly dependant upon His grace and mercy.

That is what repentance looks like. There are three different Greek words used in the Greek New Testament to describe repentance of sin. *Metanoeo* means to change the way we think. For the person who comes to Christ in faith it means that we stop thinking about self as lord and begin to think of Christ as Lord and Master. It means that I stop thinking that I am okay and begin thinking that I need God's mercy. The second word is *metamellomai* which refers to the emotional aspect of repentance, the sorrow, the grief and guilt that

comes with acknowledging sin. The third word is *epistrefo* which means to turn around and go the other way.

Just on the evidence of these three words, it is doubtful that the vast majority of Americans who profess to be Christians, followers of Christ, have ever repented of their sins. Hopefully you are not one of those. Hopefully you have repented of sin in order to follow Jesus. Sure it is costly, but the sacrifice of Christ to pay for our sins was more costly. But have you discovered that you still struggle with sin? Yes, because we still are alive in a body of flesh which is responsive to the sin nature, we must be reminded daily that we have died to self at the point of salvation. Paul concluded that he died every day (1 Cor. 15:31).

The reality of this death should be obvious in that Jesus taught that His follower must be identified by His cross. The person who would follow Jesus must deny himself *and take up his cross daily and follow me (v.23c)*. Taking up our cross is not the same as acquiescing to a particular or personal burden. Often we hear people say that a particular problem they have in life is their cross to bear. In a sense that is true, but that is not what Jesus referred to in this lesson. Jesus taught that my cross is complete identification with Jesus' cross. The disciples had probably seen "cross" executions before and understood the extreme suffering connected with it. They had yet to learn how they would be associated with the cross of Jesus.

Jesus' cross experience sets the standard for our taking up our cross. Roman's took crucifixion to an apex of punishment and execution. The criminal who was seen bearing his cross out of the city was not coming back—Period! In His crucifixion, Jesus suffered shame and humiliation as wicked men lied about Him, maligned Him, and mocked Him. Was the physical suffering any worse? By all human assessment, this was the end for the teacher from Galilee. In utter humiliation He hung on the cross naked, tattered, condemned for all to see.

Anyone who will follow Jesus must be identified by that picture. There is nothing of which we can be proud. We cannot assess ourselves as wiser than others, more perceptive than others, or more spiritual than those poor sinners who don't get it. When we come to Jesus with the desire to be His disciple, to become like Him, we stand

at the foot of His cross and declare, "I'm with Him and He is with me."

Identification with Jesus' cross is more than hypothetical standing by. When we identify with the cross of Christ, we discover that is a shameful thing. Even God's law stated that the criminal who hung on the tree was cursed (Deut. 21:22-23). Good men, men useful to society were never crucified in any culture. Only the most wicked of criminals were crucified. Who would stand with such a malevolent criminal? Oh, but Jesus was innocent. We know that. But try to convince a world of sinners that they made a mistake by crucifying Jesus. His cross is still shameful.

Identifying with Christ's cross is embarrassing. Tell a well read, well studied, well situated American citizen that he needs to trust fully in the blood Jesus of Nazareth shed on the cross in order to be saved from eternal punishment in hell and see how he responds. He will very likely be offended at you for telling him he is a sinner. He will take offense because you implied that he is not able to win God's favor by his own efforts. Or she will consider you to be a backward, uneducated fool. At the very least, many people will pity you for standing with Jesus at His cross when you could stand with any number of well-liked, exalted and honored religious leaders from history with the same results. A common response to identifying with Christ is, "You believe the Bible? Ha, ha, ha! No educated person believes that stuff!"

Identifying with the cross of Christ can even be dangerous. Even in America, you might lose your job for identifying with the cross of Christ. You might lose your family as they would rather not be associated with a religious nut. You might be ostracized, marginalized, or shunned by neighbors and co-workers. It is even becoming a possibility in formerly Christian America that you might be fined, lose you home, or go to jail for standing with Christ on the cross. Will you continue to follow?

The history of the true Church is replete with examples of Christ's followers paying a great price to follow Him. Our culture is on the cusp of this reality. When normalcy sets in and it truly does become costly to identify with Jesus, how many professing Christians will prove that they have indeed denied themselves, taken up identification with Christ's cross, and followed Him? Because of His

sacrifice for us, He is altogether just and right to require such a price of us.