

Luke Chapter 9 v 18 - 27

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[0 : 00] So let's read from verse 18. If you've got one of the church Bibles, one of the red church Bibles, that's page 1039. Page 1039. Luke 9 verse 18. Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, who do the crowds say I am? They replied, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, still others that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life. But what about you? He asked. Who do you say I am? Peter answered, God's Messiah. Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. And he said, the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law. He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Then he said to them all, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. Whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit their very self?

Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the son of man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the father and of the holy angels. Truly I tell you, some of you who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God. Please would you turn then back to Luke and chapter 9 and to those verses that we read just a few moments ago. Particularly I want us to concentrate this morning on verses 23 and following. What comes to your mind when you hear these words?

Are you sitting comfortably? That's it. Then I'll begin. That just separated the young from the old. Okay, let's just put it that way.

If you just thought, what is he on about? Then you are probably under 50 or maybe under 60 even. But if you're a bit older, then you'll remember.

[2 : 31] Listen with mother. Listen with mother. Or in my day it was watch with mother. And it would begin with this question. Are you sitting comfortably? Good. Then we'll begin.

You know, when people think about the Bible, they think that it should be something like a listen with mother program. The Bible should always be something we can listen to in comfort. It should make us feel comfortable.

It should make us feel at ease. And so that means that whenever we come to parts in the Bible that make us feel uncomfortable, then we simply ignore them, reject them, discard them.

Jesus' words were virtually always uncomfortable words. And these words in Luke in chapter 9, verses 23 and following are probably some of the most uncomfortable words that Jesus spoke and that are recorded for us.

But these words cannot be ignored. These words of Jesus must not be rejected. They must not be discarded. How we respond to these words of the Lord Jesus have the most severe and the most eternal consequences for our lives.

[3 : 59] They are life and death words. They are heaven and hell words. They are truths upon which hang the everlasting destiny of humanity.

And more precisely this morning, hang your eternal destiny. So what are these words?

We can liken them perhaps in one sense as well to not only uncomfortable words but inconvenient truths. They're not things that we want to hear.

They're not things that we find easy. They are hard words. Words spoken to Jesus' disciples immediately after they had discovered the most amazing secret.

Immediately after something wonderful was revealed to them, thereby Peter, who we know in Matthew's account we're told that Lord God had spoken to him and shown him that Jesus was the long-anticipated, much-promised Messiah.

[5 : 10] It's very hard for us to imagine just what that meant to those disciples and ultimately to the people of Jesus' day for Jesus to be the Messiah. The closest that we might get to a Messiah in our day is someone who has the answers to all the pressing problems of our time.

Someone who's got the answers to Brexit and NHS waiting lists. Who's got the problems, who can solve the problem of knife crime in our streets and homegrown terrorism.

Somebody who's going to sort everything out. That's what the Messiah was to them. But of course much, much more besides is wrapped up in the hopes of the people about the Messiah.

And their immediate elation perhaps at recognizing and realizing that Jesus was the Messiah was immediately dashed in one sense by Jesus' words about the conditions by which he would fulfill his messianic mission.

The conditions by which he would bring about these blessings that they were longing for. For he said to them, The Son of Man must suffer many things.

[6 : 24] Be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed. Now we know at that time for the disciples they just couldn't take that in. And so Jesus had to repeat that truth again and again and again.

And even after he suffered and died, they still fully couldn't comprehend how this could be the way of God's salvation. But that is the case.

The way of salvation, the way of blessing, the way of the restoration of the world by God to himself has to come through loss of life and death.

And therefore really it shouldn't be all that surprising to hear that those who want to share in that salvation, that reconciliation, that restoration, must also themselves lose their lives.

A disciple has to go the same way as the teacher. There's no alternative route. But by the way of the cross for both the saviour and the saved.

[7 : 35] Both the Lord and his people. Christianity is not easy. Now we recognise that in life, in everything, there's a cost to be paid.

We recognise that if somebody wants to do well in a career, they've got to work hard. They've got to make sacrifices. They've got to put aside things that they may want to do. If somebody wants to do well in their exams, A-levels, or even for GCSEs, or for their degrees at university, they can't do it without a cost involved.

Everything in life costs. Nothing comes freely. And though we recognise and rejoice in the truth that our Lord Jesus Christ has paid in full the complete price forever for our forgiveness and reconciliation with God, by his death upon the cross, we cannot receive his gifts unless we also meet his demands.

It's not easy. And here are his demands. Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. Whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit their very self, or as other translations, their very soul?

[9 : 21] Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. This isn't the small print of God's covenant, as it were.

This isn't something that you find sort of on the 26th page of the agreement of the gospel that God gives us in his word. This isn't something which is only to be discovered later on.

When you're already signed up. This is the whole agreement. This is the bold print. This is what Jesus prints at the top. If you want to be my disciple, you've got to deny yourself.

He never hid how hard it was to get to heaven. Just as we'll go and find out later on, even in this gospel of Luke, Luke chapter 13, verse 24.

Just listen to what he says there. Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.

[10 : 23] He's talking about heaven, eternal life, salvation, and then more famously, of course, his words concerning those who have possessions. Luke 18, verse 25. Indeed, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus never pretended that you can just sort of saunter into heaven. That somehow things are just easy peasy for people to become Christians and to enter into eternal life.

It's always been the same. From the outset, he has laid down, and here he lays down the non-negotiable cost of eternal life.

Non-negotiable. And the first thing he tells us is this. You must die. Pardon me?

That's the plain meaning, surely, of verse 23, isn't it? Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. What is the cross?

[11:27] The cross is the instrument of execution in the Roman world. It is a place of death. You must die. Anybody who wants to be a disciple of Jesus must die.

It's a conscious choice. Now, we know that there are those, and we've been praying for those who, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, have had to and will physically die.

That's not what Jesus is saying here. He's not saying, you must be willing to die for me. He's talking about, you must die now. Daily. He's not just saying, if you follow me, there's a chance down the road, one day perhaps, you'll be called upon to be a martyr.

No, he's saying, today, in your life, you must consciously choose to deny yourself, to give up what you want, and die.

Now, there are millions of people, millions of people who are on a diet, who make a choice to deny themselves, don't they? They deny themselves cream cakes, and all the lovely things that we enjoy to eat.

[12:42] They're the hope that they will improve their appearance. They deny themselves. And indeed, through again, every part of life, there's a denial that goes on. People deny themselves certain freedoms, they can go to work each day, a job that they hate and despise, but they do it, so they might earn money to provide for their family.

And so it goes on, through all of life, wherever we look, there are demands upon us, that we must put certain aspects of our lives, to death, for the sake of something else.

But the disciple of Jesus Christ takes this to a whole new level. It's not simply a matter of denying the cream cake, or denying freedom of time, it is denying self, everything that we are, and want, and long for.

And making all of that secondary, to what Jesus wants. To take up the cross is to count yourself, completely dead to self.

Again, the way of the master, is the way of the servant. The way of the teacher, is the way of the pupil. Romans chapter 6, is all about the reality, that we have died with Christ, that we might live for God.

[14:08] Romans 6 verse 11, count yourselves, consider yourselves, look upon yourselves, with this view, count yourselves dead, to sin, but alive to God, in Christ Jesus.

Here's the first thing then, are you willing, to die? You must, Jesus says, want to be a disciple, you want to be saved, want to go to heaven, want to be right with God, you've got to die.

Well what does that mean, what does that mean, in real life, in daily life? Well verse 24, because really the rest of these verses, is an explanation, of verse 23.

You must not only die, but you must lose. Or one says, put it this way, you must be a loser. You must be a loser. Verse 24, whoever wants to save their life, will lose it.

Whoever loses their life for me, will save it. That's essentially what happens, isn't it, when we die? We lose all the things, that are ours in this world.

[15:14] We lose all the, all the possessions, that we have in this world. You can't take it with you, and so on. We lose all things, when we die. They're all taken from us.

And to become a disciple, of the Lord Jesus Christ, means to lose, everything, for Jesus.

To lose, everything, for Jesus. Whoever loses their life, for me, notice he says that. Not talking about, just losing your life, as many people have done, sadly, for all sorts of reasons, in all sorts of ways.

Some of them, very, very noble, we might say, when they, when a soldier loses his life, in the, in his duty, and in warfare, and so on. And we must lose our lives.

We must lose everything. That, that doesn't make sense, does it? How can you, be saved by losing? How can you win, if I can put that way, by losing?

[16:21] Seems to be madness. But let's think about it, a bit deeper. Every time a man, and a woman, marry, they are giving up, their individual lives, for one another.

They are losers. Think about the vows, that they make, to one another. With my body, I honor you. All that I am, I give to you.

So what's happening, in that marriage, two people are, losing themselves, to one another. They are saying, everything that I have, is yours. All that I am, is yours. I'm no longer my own.

They are losing, their individuality. It's a willing surrender, of your life, to another person. That's what marriage, is meant to be. Why would you do, such a crazy thing?

Giving up, doing what you want, to do what, we want. Or to do what, they want. Because you're confident, that the person, you are giving yourself to, losing yourself to, loves you.

[17 : 30] Confident, that they, love you. The Bible, speaks of marriage, as being, a picture, of what it means, to be a disciple of Jesus, of being a Christian.

Here's Ephesians 5. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ, loved the church, and gave himself, up for her. You see, if we understood, really, what the Bible teaches, about marriage, there'd be none of this nonsense, about feminism, there'd be none of this nonsense, about submission, there'd be none of this nonsense, about husbands, overbearing, their wives.

Because it is, losing yourself, to the other person, knowing that they love you. But that's exactly, what it is to be a Christian.

You must lose, yourself. And following up for that, it means you must give up.

You've got to die, you've got to lose, you've got to give up. You've got to let go, on that grip of your life, and let Jesus take hold.

[18 : 52] For it's the only way, that he can save you. What good is it for you, or for someone, if they gain the whole world, yet lose, or forfeit their very self?

In other words, you've got to give up, the whole world. You've got to let go, of the things that you hold, most dearly, and tightly to, because otherwise, you'll lose, your very soul itself.

Do you know how they, catch monkeys? I think I've used this illustration before, and I think some of you know it. When they want to catch a monkey, what they do is, they get a banana, they put it in a cage, with very thin, sort of bars between, and they tie it, onto a post.

And all they do then, is wait. Wait for a monkey, to come along, and the monkey sees, or smells the banana, looks inside, he says, oh I'm going to have that banana, and he puts his hand, which is just wide enough, for him to put his arm through, to take hold the banana, but once he gets the banana, he's got a clenched fist, and he can't get his arm out.

But he is not willing, to let go of that banana, and not, come heaven or hell, I'm not letting go of that banana, that's my banana, I want that banana, and he'll pull, and pull, and he will never let go, of that banana, and all they've got to do, is come along, and catch him.

[20 : 15] We are not monkeys, even if people would like, to think that we were, we're not, we never have been, and we never will be, but we certainly behave, like monkeys, we put our hands through, we take hold, of the things of this world, and we say, I'm not going to let go, of that for anything, I'm not going to let go, of that for Jesus, I'm not going to let go, of that, that desire, for popularity, I'm not going to let go, of that career, I'm not going to let go, of those riches, I'm not going to let go, of all the things, that I'm told, that I should aspire to, and long for, and seek after, I'm going to keep hold of them, even though it's going to cost me, my very soul.

Are we stupid, or what? But that's what Jesus says, what's the point? And yet, here we are, again and again, daily, our young people, and ourselves, are pushed, and told, and there's this wonderful, message proclaimed, be rich, and you'll be happy, get this position, and career, you'll be happy, become popular, and famous, and a celebrity, you'll be happy, and you'll have all these things, and what do we find, again and again, and again, that those people, who have all those things, are taking their own lives, why are they taking, their own lives, is they're so happy, these great people, of celebrity, and wealth, and popularity, and fame, and yet, for some reason, nobody has stopped, and said, let go of the banana, I wonder about you, this morning, what is it, that you're holding on to, that you won't let go, maybe your pride, it may be your, sin, that habit, that way of living, that relationship, whatever it is, it's just a banana, that's holding you back, from the freedom, from the salvation, from the life, that Jesus came, and purchased, so how do I let go, of the banana, how, you said I must die, you said that I must lose, you said that I must give up, how can I do that, how can I let go, of the, thing that I'm holding on to, that's keeping me trapped, and encaged, and, ultimately will lead, to my death, so one last thing, you must, love, you must love, love, you must love Christ, you must love him, as your God, as your master, as your saviour, as your king, you must give him, the rightful place, that is his, he is the one, who created, and made you, he's the one, who rightfully, is the God, of your life, that you've denied him, his place, for so long, and now, you need to, love him, and look to him, as the king, of your life, not because you fear him, but

because he loves you, that's the whole point, isn't it, surely, verse 22, the son of man, must suffer, why must he suffer, because unless he suffers, you will remain, in your sin, he must be killed, why must he be killed, because otherwise, you must bear the punishment, yourself, for your sin, why must he be cut off, from God, and rejected, by the nation, because otherwise, you, yourself, will be rejected, by God, and cut off, from life, everlasting, you see, if we do not love, the Lord Jesus, then we're ashamed, of him, verse 26, whoever is ashamed, of me, and my words, which means, you don't know him, for who he really is, that means, you don't recognize him, as the king, of your life, you don't have faith, or trust in him, you're ashamed, to acknowledge yourself, as one with him, as him, as your king, and Lord, and savior, you're ashamed, of his words, and you won't listen to them, and you won't obey them, and you won't follow them, but if you love them, if you love somebody, you will love them, not only privately, but publicly, you will love them, openly, in the open air, as well as behind closed doors, you will love them, before all people, so that all people, see that you love them, and you won't cower, and pretend, that you're not in love, with them, or that you don't know them, and if you love them, you'll listen to their words, and what they have to say, because you know, that their words, are words of love, if you love Christ, then you will obey his words, because his words, are words of love, and they are always,

ultimately, firstly, and primarily, for your good, that's why in John, in chapter 14, Jesus said, anyone who loves me, will obey my teaching, but then he goes on, to say this, my father will love them, and we will come to them, and make our home with them, do you see the process, as we love Christ, and obey him, the father, adds that blessing, adds the good things, he comes and makes his home, with us, he adds to us, he blesses us, you must die, you must lose, you must let go, and you must love, there's an alternative, of course, you can seek, to live your life, for yourself, and not deny yourself, you can seek, to fulfill your own pleasures, and desires, and do what you want to do, for all the days, of your life, you can seek, to make your life, the pinnacle, of everything, you can seek, to gain the whole world, and think that by adding to it, again and again, somehow one day, you'll get to a place, where ultimately, your life will be fulfilled, and satisfied, you can do that, but let me say this to you, if you do that, then you shall certainly, eternally, die, die, you'll die, you'll die, an eternal death, you'll lose, eternal life, you'll let go, of the one thing, that could have saved you, that one thing, that could have given to you, that which you need, more than anything else, which is Jesus Christ, and his salvation, you'll have let go, of that love, that has paid for you, with his own precious blood, you will have, what you desire, your own way, you wanted to live, separate from God, you'll live, spend all eternity, separate from God, you've not wanted, to receive the love of God, then you shall never know, the love of God, through all eternity, eternity, is it really a choice, is it madness then, to die, to lose, to give up, isn't it the most sane, sensible, reasonable, thing in the world, to do, to come to Christ, who died for you, and die for him, the one who denied himself, though he was the very son of God, and took up his cross, to deny yourself, and take up your cross, the one who lost, his life, in this world, and much more, that we cannot comprehend, but who brought salvation, for you, and for everyone, who will be his disciple, there was a man, who gave his life, for the Lord Jesus, he was a number, of five different men, who were in the, jungles of the Amazon, in the 1950s,

Jim Elliot, before that time, he wrote, these very poignant, words, it is no fool, who gives up, what he cannot keep, to gain, what he cannot lose, it is no fool, to give up, what he cannot keep, to gain, what he cannot lose, are you a fool, are you a monkey, are you just, so addicted, to bananas, that you won't give them up, the things in your life, that you have held on to, and have not let go, now I need to turn that, from those of you, who are not Christians, to those who are Christians, this morning, is this the way, that you and I, have been living, each day, you're not left off the hook, because one day, in the past, you denied yourself, and made Jesus, the king of your heart, notice Jesus says, you must take up, the cross daily, you've got to die daily, you've got to lose daily, you've got to give up daily, you've got to love him, more than anything else daily, what about you and me, those who know, what Jesus paid for us, those who know the cost, are we still, holding on, are we still taking hold, of those things in our lives, saying no this is mine Lord Jesus, not yours, I'll die to that, I'll give up my Sunday morning, and I'll give up that hour or so, or 40 minutes, or whatever it may be, for me to pray, and to read your word, but you can't have the rest, you can't have my car, you can't have my house, you can't have, my interests, my hobbies, my desires, you can't have those things, because they are, the things that I live for, the things that I love, dear Christian friend, let me say to you, Jesus' words, are as clear to you, as they are to the unbeliever, in fact Jesus speaks to disciples, disciples, and I want to put this, even more strongly, I'm sorry, that

this is uncomfortable, but if you have lived, your life, without daily denying, yourself, then the real question is, are you a disciple at all, you may have prayed the prayer, you may have gone, halfway down the road, you may say, well look, 95% of my life, yes, is committed, but there are these things, and I won't let go of them, and I can't let go of them, and I want them, the question is, are you really a disciple of Jesus, have you taken up that cross daily, have you daily said,

[31 : 38] Lord Jesus, my life is yours, to do with as you will, because I know that entrusting my life, into your hands, is the very best thing, that I can do, the only thing I can do, I know that if I entrust my life, to myself, I've seen the mess, I've seen the wake, and the fall out from that, perhaps it's for you, dear Christian friends, this morning, a time for you, to take stock seriously, and to recommit yourself, to Christ, say Lord Jesus, today, I want to recommit myself to you, I want to say today Lord Jesus, my life is yours, as far as I'm concerned, for you to live, is Christ, to die is gain, I want us just to spend a few moments, responding to God's word, in the quietness of our hearts, if you're not a Christian, then it's your chance, if you are a believer, but you know, that things are not, as they should be, then it's your chance, let's do that quietly,

Amen,