



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE WEEK OF NOVEMBER 20-26

Series Title: FOLLOW

Message Title: TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

INTRODUCTION

This week we are continuing our series entitled "Follow". Over the next couple weeks, we will be walking through Jesus' challenge to follow when he said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." This series will provide a deeper dive into the cost of following Christ and the joy that comes from the pursuit.

Before Your Small Group Meeting:

- Watch Pastor Brandon's Message
- Read Luke 9:23-25

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. A simple definition of sacrifice is giving up something important for something more important. Share about an experience when you made a personal sacrifice for something important. What was the result of your sacrifice?
2. As a group, read Luke 9:23-25. When you think of the cross of Jesus, what impressions immediately come to your mind?
3. When Jesus was crucified, he experienced opposition, shame, suffering and ultimately death. Please share about time you may have experienced any of these (perhaps impending death) as a direct result of following Jesus? What was your response?
4. As a group, read 1 Corinthians 1:3-5. Sometimes when you make a sacrifice for Jesus you will experience suffering. Briefly describe how God has brought you comfort in the midst of suffering. Please share how you have comforted others because of the comfort you have received from God.
5. Following Jesus requires sacrifice. What areas in your life are you willing to sacrifice so that you can follow Jesus closer? How can we support you as a group?

RESPOND IN PRAYER

Spend time in prayer thanking Jesus for his sacrifice and asking Him to make you aware of areas in your life which sacrifice needs to be made.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on Luke 9:23-25

23 Luke deletes Mark's mention of the drawing in of the crowd: he may have been sensitive to the problem of the presence of a crowd after the solitude of v 18, or his concern may be rather to draw more tightly together the passion prediction and the call to cross bearing. Luke's "all" still performs the function of the Markan crowd: it assures the reader that this is a general call for discipleship and not one that should be restricted to leaders or any group of special Christians. Mark's aorist εἶπεν, "said," becomes ἔλεγεν, "was saying": Luke is prone to adding the imperfect form of this verb. Luke softens the difficulty of Mark's form of the saying in which *following* apparently becomes a condition for *following* by using a different verb the first time. Luke reduces Mark's compound verb for "let him deny" to the simple form (more often the change is in the other direction, but both kinds of change are evident). Luke adds καθ' ἡμέραν, "daily," to indicate that the call is to an ever renewed state of affairs; it is not a call to a one-time-only decision or a response only to some unique situation.

Taking up the cross refers to the Roman custom of requiring the condemned criminal to carry to the place of execution the cross-bar to be used in the execution (cf. Plutarch, *de sera num. vind.* 9.554b: "Every criminal who is executed carries his own cross"; for further references see Schelkle, *Passion Jesu*, 218-19).

In *Form/Structure/Setting* above, a brief original form of this saying is discussed whose sense might be represented by "If you wish to be my disciple, you must put your head on the chopping block." Jesus' call was to a radical denial of self-interest and concern for one's own natural well-being. Jesus certainly anticipated that identification with himself would work itself out, on occasion, in social ostracism, persecution, and even martyrdom, and the disciple should be ready to meet this set of life-destroying responses head on. The call to "put the rope around one's neck" stands on a par with that to hate one's own family. The "let him deny himself" may be an early explanation, or it may come from the merging of two originally distinct sayings of Jesus (cf. Schulz, *Nachfolgen*, 84; despite all the psychological damage and narrowing of life that has been produced through a [mis]application of this saying, there is no good reason for positing with Schwarz, *NTS* 33 [1987] 257-59, a mistranslation of an Aramaic term, which should have been rendered "let him know [himself]").

In light of Jesus' own passion, at the very least a fresh poignancy and challenge is added to this Dominical saying, and the saying becomes clearly oriented to Jesus' own experience of rejection and death (thus the present link to the passion prediction). Now the call to be a disciple becomes a call to follow Jesus in the way of the cross. Now "to follow him" is not just a Jewish way of talking about being a disciple of a master, but a challenge to have one's whole existence determined by and patterned after a crucified messiah. Now the double reference to following gains its sense: to follow him (i.e., be his disciple) involves following him in the path to death that he chose (this is better than with Fridrichsen, *ConNT* 2 [1936] 1-8; Schulz, *Nachfolgen*, 83, to deny imperatival force to the final verb). One is now called to share in the fate of Jesus.

It is likely that in Mark we should understand that the metaphorical taking up of the cross should have led on naturally to the disciples' sharing with Jesus his fate in Jerusalem, something for which they were not yet ready. This perspective is no longer as evident in the rendering of Luke, who focuses the saying with his added "daily" as identifying a principle of Christian life, to be freshly appropriated each day. This may have the effect of weakening somewhat the degree of orientation to Jesus' own passion, but the closer connection that Luke achieves between vv 21-22 and vv 23-27 and the "daily" fact of continuing to head toward Jerusalem, which will mark the Gospel account from 9:51 onwards, more than counterbalance the loss of precision caused by the addition. Luke has certainly not reduced the demand to an inner spiritual condition: in view is a practical denial of the claims of the inner drive to self-preservation and care for one's own interests, and a readiness for the loss of one's life.

24 Luke drops Mark's "and the gospel": this looks Markan, and is not in Luke's other form of the saying. He adds an emphatic οὗτος, "this one," to the final clause.

In attempting to understand Jesus' original formulation of the saying, Bauer ("Wer sein Leben retten will") suggests that we should liken it to the exhortation of a field commander who cautions his troops to recognize that the one who turns his back to run for his life is the one who gets killed in battle, while the one who stands his ground and faces the danger head on lives to tell the tale (cf. Xenophon, *Anabasis* 3.1.43). Despite obvious attractions, this view does no justice to the real loss of which Jesus speaks.

Dautzenberg (*Sein Leben bewahren*, 57) and Schürmann (543) suggest a context in which external threat to Jesus and his disciple band calls forth a challenge to be ready for martyrdom. This may indeed be correct, given the sense of threat to life that lies behind the fashioning of the antitheses. We should also, however, consider the possibility that the threat to life is not from outside, but is represented by the very challenge of Jesus' teaching itself (Beardslee [JAAR 47 (1979) 67] speaks helpfully of the "saying [as] extremely revealing of the interweaving of self-concern and self-transcendence which has characterized Christian existence from the beginning"). In each case the threat reaches to the very fabric of life itself and may embrace martyrdom. In each case the challenge is to be true to Jesus and to his proclamation of the kingdom of God.

ψυχή is not "the soul" as would be possible in Greek thought, but rather "life" (as in 6:9). For Luke, as for Jesus, life is not bounded by death, because there are resurrection and judgment beyond (cf. Matt 10:28). At the same time, the paradox of the verse is not to be resolved by a simple contrasting of this life and life beyond the grave (as Laufen, *Doppelüberlieferung*, 328-29). E. Schweizer (*TDNT* 9:642) catches something of the thrust with his comment "Jesus is thus telling man that he will achieve full life only when he no longer clings to it but finds it in loss or sacrifice." Grundmann (*Markus*, 228) says, "The one who trusts God, who gives life and saves through death, gains for his life freedom and eternity."

The rest of the verses of this section all link back to v 23 via a series of γάρ, "for," clauses. Here, wishing to save one's life is the opposite of taking up one's cross. The verse assumes a situation in which the possession of life is under threat. In the immediate literary context the threat is the call to cross-bearing. In normal circumstances it is commendable to save life (6:9), but here a choice of fundamental loyalty ("for my sake") is involved, which takes us beyond expediency. In light of v 26 to come, to seek to save one's life is likely to take the form of refusing to be identified with Jesus under the harsh glare of the spotlight of the world's scrutiny (cf. George, *BVC* 83 [1968] 16).

25 Luke retains most of Mark's vocabulary, but entirely changes the syntax: the impersonal construction ὠφελεῖ, "it profits/benefits," is replaced by the passive ὠφελεῖται, "is benefited"; participles replace Mark's infinitives in the continuation of the verse; ἑαυτὸν, "himself," replaces τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ, "his life/soul" (the use of "life" has become quite complex in v 24, so the change of terms here makes it quite clear that the link is to the first and not the second reference to loss of life in v 24); to express the loss, Luke adds a second alternative verb, ἀπολέσας, "having lost" (this creates an immediate link with v 24). Luke does not reproduce Mark 8:37, the closely linked verse that follows in the Markan text. This helps to draw v 25 more immediately into the judgment/answerability framework of v 26 to come. (Matthew is almost as severe in his reformulation, but shares with Luke only the first of the listed changes [and there, Matthew uses a different tense]).

Dautzenberg (*Sein Leben bewahren*, 71-75) has shown that the original unit here, Mark 8:36-37, is to be read in connection with Ps 49 and, thus, is to be understood in terms of a critique of the pursuit of, and confidence in, riches. With the loss of v 37, the connection is no longer as clear, but this understanding fits so appropriately into Luke's interest elsewhere in the snare of riches (see at 6:20, 24) that we may assume that Luke does still have the connection in mind. The Psalm connection also encourages the setting of the loss of self into the context of death, understood in connection with God's judgment (cf. Luke 12:16-21; 16:19-31). To the one who has been secure in his riches, death is a loss of self. A totally different face of death has already surfaced in v 24.

The imagery of gain and loss is from the world of commercial transactions: the true measure of one's situation is determined when the gains and losses have been reckoned. To make the point, the entries on each side of the ledger in this case are taken to the absolute extremes. Wealth creates the illusion of security in life, but the horizon of death reveals the illusory nature of this security.

Once again this verse is linked to the preceding by γάρ, "for." Jesus' call to "put the rope around one's own neck" becomes intelligible both as to its content and as to its good sense from the explanatory clauses in vv 24-26. Looking to one's own well-being and security in the world turns out not to be so important after all. Jesus' call to self-denial leads to life; the accumulation of the good things of this world cannot secure us against its loss.

There is no basis for finding (with Schürmann, 546-47) a distinction between ἀπολέσας, "having lost/ruined," and ζημιωθείς, "having forfeited/suffered loss," as referring, respectively, to condemnation and to suffering loss but being ultimately saved. Luke has simply added the synonym to make the link to v 24 explicit.¹

¹ Nolland, J. (1993). [Luke 9:21-18:34](#) (Vol. 35B, pp. 481-484). Word, Incorporated.