



## Part 2: Dying to Self for New Life

Luke 9:18-26

*To die to self and take up your cross daily means the long surrender towards God's life.*

Lent: 40 days prior to Easter used to prepare our hearts for the hope and glory of Jesus' resurrection. It is like smelling salts to awaken us from our stupor and reorient us to the love of God through the cross in response to our sin and brokenness.

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Luke 9:23 – radical words, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

### **What does it mean to deny yourself and take up your cross daily?**

- The heart posture behind these words is God speaking to us towards the fullness of life in Him (John 10:10). It is not a guilt trip towards legalism or more stuff to do for Jesus.

"I awaken to the strange truth that all new life comes out of the dark places, and hasn't it always been? Out of darkness God spoke forth the teeming life. That wheat round and ripe across these fields, they swelled as hope embryos in womb of the black earth. Out of the dark, tender life unfurled. Out of my own inner pitch, six human beings emerged, new life and fresh. All new life labors out of the very bowels of darkness. That fullest life itself dawns from nothing but Calvary darkness and tomb-cave black into the radiance of Easter morning. Out of the darkness of the cross, the world transfigures into new life." – Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts*

Deny yourself, take up your cross daily (What it is NOT)

- It is not a call to masochism where we delight and seek suffering. God does not want us to seek suffering just to get

closer to God. This world is broken, and we are broken and will soon enough experience suffering.

- It is not merit-based self-denial
  - Thaipusam: Hindu festival where they stick needles in their face and bodies as a way to do penance for wrong in their life or earn favor with the Gods.
  - Flagellants (1300 - 1400s): A Christian sect that would whip their backs in penance.
  - Fasting from food or abstinence from caffeine, alcohol or social media – if it is about getting points with God, we are missing the point. We fast so that in our hunger and self-denial we turn to God. Getting points is turning towards ourselves.

Deny yourself, take up your cross daily (What it is)

***To die to self and take up your cross daily means the long surrender towards God's life.***

Luke 9: 18-26 (Context)

- In Luke 9:1-2, Jesus sends out the twelve and gave them power and authority to drive out demons and to cure diseases and proclaim the kingdom of God.
- In Luke 9:11, Jesus speaks to the crowds and disciples about the Kingdom of God.
- Disciples' perspective: kingdoms were a geopolitical reign of power.
  - 930 B.C. – Israel split into two kingdoms – Kingdom of Israel (north) and Judah (south)
  - 722 B.C. – Kingdom of Israel conquer by the Assyrian empire
  - 586 B.C. – Kingdom of Judah – conquered by the Babylonian empire
  - 538 B.C. – Achaemenid Empire (Cyrus the Great)/Persian (Iranian) Empire defeated Babylonians
  - 332 B.C. – Kingdom of Macedonia (Alexander the Great) conquered the Achaemenid Empire
  - 165 B.C. – Maccabean Revolt (Jewish Rebellion) – Hasmonean Kingdom
  - 64 B.C. – Roman Republic conquered Judea
- The Disciples are thinking of a geopolitical reign of power. They were already seeing evidence of this power through driving out demons and healing people.

As Jesus was enacting the Kingdom of God and teaching about the ways of the kingdom, he says in verse 18, “Who do the crowds say I am?”

The disciples responded, “John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets of long ago.” And then Jesus asked the disciples the same question and Peter responds, “God's Messiah.”

Peter is right, he figured it out. Jesus is the promised savior of the Jewish people. But did Peter really understand. Jesus goes on and says something shocking and bewildering in verse 22. He speaks of His crucifixion. Jesus is not using kingdom language of reign and power but surrender and death.

These words don't register with the disciples and Peter because we know that later when Jesus is captured, Peter cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest with a sword. He was ready for a geopolitical reign of power (John 18).

- I wonder if we also miss the depth of these words as we live for ourselves and our kingdoms.

Deny yourself and take up your cross

- Shocking imagery: the Roman custom of making a condemned man carry their crossbar to the place of execution. It often meant that the person had forfeited their estate and were denied burial.
- Modern paraphrase, *The Message*, says, "Then he told them what they could expect for themselves: 'Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat—I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, *my way*, to finding yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?'"

This is a good paraphrase but misses the depth of the call to death.

- This imagery is speaking of us walking to our death. The message of the Kingdom of God, the message of God's hope, love, and salvation is that for us to experience life in Him, we need to die. Our culture says to find life, you need to find yourself, God says to experience life to the full you need to deny yourself and take up your cross daily.
- Culture of "project self" – Sovereign Self – Secular Humanism: this is where the individual replaces God as the center of reality and the ultimate goal of life is happiness and pleasure as determined by the individual self.
- In verses 24-25, it talks about where project self leads us: losing our lives and forfeiting our very self.

"I wish that everyone could get rich and famous and have everything they ever dreamed of so that they would know that's not the answer." – Jim Carrey

- In contrast to "project self", God offers to us life to the full through death. But it is not our death that gives us life. It is actually Jesus' death that gives us life; we just die with Him.

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who love me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

- Take up your cross daily.

Garden of Gethsemane: "He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.'" Luke 22:41-42

We start our life with Christ in a posture of surrender, and we continue our life with Christ in a posture of surrender.

"Life will get you on your knees or God will. So, it is probably better to just get on your knees."