

If any man will come after me

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- [0 : 00] It is turned now to words you will find in the Gospel according to Luke chapter 9 verse 23. Luke's Gospel chapter 9 verse 23. And he said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.
- Now there are many instances in the Gospels in which Jesus gave advice and counsel to people who came to him at different stages of his ministry, with questions, with problems, with opinions that they held.
- And the answer, the advice that our Lord gave to such people, could I feel form the basis of profitable series of studies on Sabbath evenings.
- And that, God willing, is my purpose. And I begin that series tonight with the counsel that the Lord addressed to his own disciples.
- [2 : 07] Counsel within which he couched the terms which embrace the conditions of discipleship for all those who are followers and will be followers of the Lord to the end of time.
- There are three things that he tells him are indispensable for any follower of his. And these are self-denial, cross-bearing and following himself.
- The advice was given at a time when he was speaking and teaching his disciples quite clearly about his approaching sufferings and death.
- The thought of the thought of the life of their master was repugnant to his followers.
- And Peter immediately remonstrates with them and says in very strong language indeed, Lord, whoever is going to suffer and whoever is going to die, it will not be you.
- [3 : 24] And it was an answer to that protestation that Jesus addressed these words to him and to the rest of his disciples.
- If any man will follow me or will come after me, let him deny himself, pick up his cross daily and follow me.
- He was thereby showing his disciples that the way of sufferings and the cross to the crown for him was also to be the way for them.
- But as he was in this world the saviour of sinners, thereby necessitating for him suffering and the cross, so all who were to follow him as their saviour would have to understand the meaning of sufferings and the cross in their own lives.
- So he lays this down as an inescapable condition or conditions of discipleship. And I should like very briefly with you tonight to look at these three thoughts that our Lord brings before us here.
- [4 : 48] First of all then, self-denial. The first thing we have to deal with here is to answer the question or perhaps even to define what self-denial means.
- Now I suppose that for you and for me, the thought of self-denial conjures up immediately the idea of giving up something in one's life.
- Perhaps parting with some dear possession. Some particular pursuit that you may like very much and that you may have found profitable in many respects.

For some it's a giving up of a particular type of food or perhaps a cutting down of all food. It may be the giving up of some particular habit.

Some aim or plan or ambition that you have in your life for yourself. You see, when we think of self-denial, we think in terms of giving up something.

[6 : 00] Paul, for example, right in the Corinthians, speaks of the way some people think of self-denial in the strongest possible terms. Though I give my body to be burnt.

That was the ultimate sacrifice. That was giving oneself up in the interest of some cause or other. And yet giving it up without, as he puts it, love.

And that kind of thing is profitless. Now, it is true that there are many things that disciples or prospective followers of Jesus Christ have to give up.

There are many paths in life that are far too broad for the Christian to travel. He must not, in terms of the New Testament, he must not conform to the ways of this world.

And that which he finds in his life leads him to forget God. He must shun. Whatever it is that comes between the disciple and his Lord must, of necessity, be given up.

[7 : 13] Whatever it is, it must be put to one side in the interests of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, there are therefore many things which Christians must surrender if they are to be worthy of the name Christian in this life.

You can't deny this. Any person who gives a fair trial to what the Bible says to her, and who accepts the plain teaching of the whole of Scripture, with a particular emphasis of the New Testament, cannot escape this.

That there are many things that a Christian must surrender if he is to be a genuine follower of his Lord. But even when you think in terms of things which the Lord has placed his finger on in your life, and things which the Lord has said were made to turn against you, and things which you know therefore you must give up in his interest and for his sake, even when you think in terms of these things, and there are many things, you haven't really come to the root meaning of self-denial.

You see, self-denial doesn't begin with giving up things. It begins with giving up something far deeper than that, far greater, and in that sense far more difficult.

It is in short the giving up of self. Let him deny himself. Now, you notice that.

[9 : 00] It isn't that he is to deny himself things. That is true. But before that becomes meaningful in the life of the Christian, he must first of all deny himself.

You see, it is possible. Let me put it like this. It is possible for people by the strength of their own will, by the force of their own will, and by sheer self-determination.

It is possible for people to struggle on and to fight and to give up things in this life.

I mentioned the giving up of habits, the denying of yourself of food. Now, that can be very difficult. And you've got to exercise tremendous self-control. You've got to discipline yourself to give up these things.

A person struggling with the problem of drink, he knows that he has to give this up. He must. In his own interest, in his family's interest, he must give it up. But there's no royal route to giving it up.

[10 : 06] He must knuckle down to it and discipline himself and refuse to succumb to the temptation. But you see, you can be engaged in that kind of activity, that kind of life, the giving up of things like that without necessarily being a Christian.

That's a point I want to make. Giving up things, that doesn't make a person a Christian. Christianity begins somewhere else.

Not with the giving up of this thing or that thing. It begins with the giving up of yourself. Now, Jesus makes that very clear.

Whosoever, he says in the next verse, whosoever will save his life shall lose it. But whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. You see, giving up, denying is the same as losing.

You see, you're giving up something. You're forgoing, you're giving it to go by. You've, you've agreed, you've come to the decision, to the conclusion, that you must, in the interest of something else, lose this particular thing.

[11 : 17] And this is what Jesus says. Whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. This now is the definition of self-denial.

It is the giving up of yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the abandoning of myself to him, renouncing my own self-righteousness and his interests, renouncing all other ways of salvation that I entertained up to now.

It is renouncing the idea that I will save myself by my own efforts, my prayers, my Bible reading, my church going, the company I keep, the things that I do, the places I go, to the type of person I am, the thoughts I have and the practice I have.

It is giving up all these things as the ground of my salvation and coming simply to the Lord Jesus Christ and saying to him, Lord, I cannot save myself.

I've tried, I've tried and I've tried. I give myself to thee to be saved. And what the Lord Jesus here says is this, no person can be a disciple of his unless he begins there.

[12 : 45] That is the starting point of discipleship. Giving myself up to him. Beginning, I begin there to consider another.

I begin there to believe in another. To trust in another. To obey in another. To obey another. To bring my will and subjection to the will of another.

My will becomes his. My heart becomes his. My desire becomes his. My plan becomes his. And that is the essence of self-denial.

And then, you see, things flow out from that. It is as a result of giving myself to him that I discover that he then lays his finger on so many areas in my life and he says, see that, see this, see the next thing.

If you are truly mine, these things must go in my interest. But notice the order. It isn't things first and Jesus next.

[13 : 55] It is the Lord Jesus Christ first. And the things that he lays his finger on, these things then have to go.

And so, when Jesus says here, if any man will come after me, let him first of all deny himself. He means that he, the Lord, is to exercise control over my life.

And I suggest to you that there is nothing in life more difficult than that. because what you and I want to do is to exercise control over our own lives.

It's to go our own way, to do our own thing in our own time. It's that kind of mentality that expresses itself in these words, I don't care what anybody else thinks. But you see, my friend, that's not the language of the disciple of Jesus Christ.

Because he has to care about what other people think because Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ, is in control, or at least supposedly, in control of his life.

[15 : 10] And he submits his will to his. Not me, but thee. Not mine, but thine. Not self, but Christ.

That is the meaning of self-denier. And then he goes on to speak secondly about something which, in the opinion of some people at least, may illustrate very graphically what self-denial is going to mean in the life of the follower of Jesus.

And the second thing he emphasizes is this. Let him take up his cross daily. And I want to suggest to you that here we may have a very, very clear picture or illustration of what self-denial means.

You see, you find the Lord very often doing this kind of thing. He uses a term and then he goes on to explain what he means by the use of it.

If he had applied this teaching to the rich young man, the rich young ruler will come across this teaching later on. If he had applied it, he would have said to him, as he did say to him, in your case, my friend, it means you've got to give up everything that you have and give it to the poor.

[16 : 38] In the case of the disciples here, he had spoken, he had told them that it meant losing their life or giving up their life in his interest. You see, he placed his finger on something and he says, it means this.

Self-denial means this. Now, in one sense, at least, that may be the meaning here of taking up your cross daily. But you'll see in a minute that giving up things can be very difficult in the same way as giving up self can be difficult.

Giving up self to Christ is impossible apart from the enabling power of his grace. It is by grace that you give yourself to the Lord.

And if you may be here tonight, let me say this to you, if you may be here tonight, perhaps knowing for some time the challenge of the gospel in your life and recognising that you must give yourself up to the Lord and the interests of the Lord Jesus Christ and finding it difficult.

Let me remind you of this. You cannot do it in your own strength. And this is where the glory of the gospel comes to light. He gives grace that enables you to give yourself to him.

[17 : 57] It is by his grace that you do it. But I want to suggest to you that the words take up your cross daily suggests one or two things to us that may help us to understand the meaning of self-denial.

It tells us where self-denial begins. It is at the place of the cross. It tells us something about the pain of self-denial.

The pain of the cross. It tells us something of the perpetuity of self-denial. It is the taking up of the cross daily.

There are these three things at least that I want to speak to you about with reference to taking up the cross daily together with the practice of cross-bearing.

First of all the place of the cross. Now if you were going to define the word cross or the term cross as you were going to define self-denial where would you begin?

[19 : 05] What do you think of in terms of the cross? Well there are two things I think that the New Testament gives us to understand about the cross. It was first of all the instrument of burden.

Very often those who were to be crucified shouldered their own cross to the place of crucifixion. This happened to the thieves and to Jesus and you remember that Jesus staggered under the burden and they took out, they laid the cross on one who was called Simon of Cyrene, a coloured man.

It was the cross associated with a burden that people have to bear and I think this is very often the way that some people think about it. You may be here tonight and you may know of a cross that you have in your own life you may be for all I know staggering under the burden of that cross even at this time.

No one knows anything about it but yourself. There's this cross that you have to shoulder along life's way. The burden that you have to bear.

But I think it would be really wrong of us to think in terms of the cross solely as an instrument of burden. It is far more than that. Again it is far deeper than that. It was an instrument of suffering unto death preeminently.

[20 : 26] This is the meaning of the cross in the New Testament. When you speak of the cross of Jesus you aren't thinking primarily of the burden that he bore but of the sufferings that he endured unto death.

That is always the meaning the prime meaning of the term cross in the life of Jesus Christ. Sufferings painful sufferings unto death.

Now when Jesus says if any man will be my disciple let him deny himself and take up his cross daily he is emphasizing the very same thing in the life of that individual that this is a painful experience for him every day of his life.

That there is suffering involved suffering unto death and the best place and the only place for him to begin with that life of cross bearing and suffering and painful endurance unto death is at the cross of Jesus Christ Christ.

In other words this is where self is nailed to the cross and the cross to which it is nailed is the cross of Jesus Christ.

[21 : 57] Never mind for a minute the cross that you have to bear shoulder in your own life. Forget about the bird that you have that perhaps no one else knows of. Forget about the pain that is in your heart tonight because of some particular thing that goes on maybe within the four walls of your own home.

You forget about that for a minute and recognize this that discipleship for you must begin at the cross of Jesus Christ.

That you have to come there to begin your Christian life. That you have to come there with every problem you have yourself with every bird that you have to bear and shoulder with everything that perplexes you.

You have to come with that to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. You see you come to another that is the beginning of self-denying as I said and you come to him who suffered and died for sinners such as you.

You come to the one who himself renounced his own standing. You come to the one who himself knew the meaning of loneliness and pain and agony and suffering and distress.

[23 : 29] You come to him in all your lostness and in all your emptiness and all your hopelessness and all your inability to cope with the situation and the circumstance in which you find yourself and all your hopeless inadequacy you come to the cross of Jesus Christ and you come there that you may identify yourself with him that you may love him who died on the cross that you may receive him and accept him and acquiesce in all that he had to endure unto the cross for sinners such as you and as me.

you see this is what Jesus said to the disciples he told them I am going to suffer unto death that I may obtain the crown and if any man will come after me if any man will be my disciple he must suffer unto death on the way to the crown and the way to the crown of glory begins at the cross of Calvary let him take up his cross there is no other place of blessing there is no other place that you can come to there is no other one to whom you can come he as someone put it he exchanged places with us and entered into our condemnation and we must come to him as Paul put it I am crucified with Christ and I live because

I am crucified with Christ we come to him that's the first place the place of the cross and then we have to associate ourselves and identify ourselves secondly with the pain involved in the cross there was pain for Jesus the writer of the Hebrews puts it like this he endured the cross despising the shame and don't let us forget that there were two ways in which the sufferings of the cross were present in the life of Jesus extensively and intensively or outwardly and inwardly he suffered the pain physically externally in the same way as the thieves did as he was near the cross these aren't the sufferings that the new testament really highlights in the life of Jesus rather the new testament speaks of the intensiveness of the sufferings of our lord on the cross the things that he felt inwardly because he was there on the cross and because of what he was doing the pain of being despised by those whom he came to deliver the pain of being embarrassed by the taunts and the jokes and the vilification of those who surrounded him at the cross the pain of being isolated from everybody else he tried the wine press alone and of the host of the people there was no one worse the pain of looking to his right hand and discovering there was no one there to help the pain of looking to his left hand and making the discovery that all refuge failed the pain of lifting his soul heavenward and discovering that there was no one there why hast thou forsaken me the pain of being alone and of standing alone of being isolated as he was nailed there to the cross now our lord was sensible of all these things he felt all these things and if any man would be my disciple let him take up his cross daily let him recognize that he too will be identified with all these things in his life because of me says Jesus let him recognize the loneliness the loneliness to which he is exposing himself by taking up my cross the embarrassment that is associated with taking up my cross the taunts and the jokes that will be that will be poured out upon you because you're a disciple of the lord he's guys you all know what it is you know what it is we all know what it is you people who may be here tonight

Christians in school you're going to your class you're going to the school area itself and the moment you appear because you're a believer those who are unbelievers congregate together what do they talk what are they laughing about maybe you maybe you because you're a Christian someone goes to work in a shop a Christian the rest are non-Christian they gather together the moment you walk in the door at 9 in the morning why say something funny so they think about the cause of the lord Jesus Christ same on the shop no matter where you always get this well if any man would be my disciple let him take up his cross he'll always be like that and it always seems to go on and this was the thing about the cross it was a painful exit from life it lasted so long it could last for days the agony of it all for days and you know there were times in the experience of the church of God in the old testament when they felt as though the sufferings in the name of God were going on for all time we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter this seems to go on all our lives in psalm 44 even there's a picture given us of the church in heaven in the book of revelation which she cries even in heaven she cries to the lord lord how long how long how long is thy church going to suffer in this world and you'll find as a Christian that the longer you go on the pain and the agony doesn't become less it only becomes more the problems and the difficulties the taunting the despising the embarrassment the shame doesn't become less it seems to increase with each passing day well you remember the advice of our lord if any man will come after me let him take up his cross daily and there he speaks thirdly of the perpetuity of the cross daily it was a case remember in one passage of the gospels where this advice is given the writer says that

Peter said to the lord lord he said remember we've given up things to follow you we've given up father and mother we've given up our homes and they aren't literally they aren't and Jesus says to him I tell you this Peter no matter what a person gives up in this life he will discover that he has to give it up every day of his life but then of course there are compensations there are compensations there are blessings following and there is certainly life everlasting to come you see it is a case of giving up something daily there is in other words a price to be paid for following Jesus Christ and this is an ongoing process in the army of our Lord and I want to put like this to you would you not agree with me that in the first flush of conversion when you're so full of the presence and the love and the power of God in your life everything is so new it's so easy then to take up this challenge Lord take up the cross of course I will of course I will you're so determined you're so full of zeal and vigor and life and purpose for the Lord you are prepared to do anything and you take it up with alacrity with enthusiasm then you discover as someone put it that this square bashing never ends you discover that there's no end to this discipline to this training you discover that you have to endure the pain and the agony you discover that you have to put death you have to put self to death day by day you have to put self importance to death and self satisfaction and self advancement and self dependence self interest and self exaltation you have to lose your life for his sake you have to sacrifice many things in his interest and for his kingdom and you discover that that which was so easy one day is becoming so difficult now just because it is this ongoing process daily and there never seems to be an end to it perhaps at this stage just now world

[33 : 42] I could lay some emphasis on the practice of cross bearing let him take up his cross state notice what he says notice how he puts it let him who is my follower take up the cross daily let him do it no one else can do it for you you've got to do it yourself there's a deliberate act on your part it is a voluntary act on your part it is a necessary act on your part and you cannot avoid it you just cannot avoid it you can't you can't you can't turn your head away from it you can't close your eyes to it but the moment you do it you're not being a follower of Jesus Christ in truth these are situations and things that you have to grapple with these are decisions that you have to make these are struggles that you have to engage in there are visitations in your life that you have to be concerned with and you have to contend with whatever it is that crosses your path in the life of faith you my friend have to take it up and shoulder it

I don't like using the term that some people say there are to be Gethsemanes in the life of the Christians that there were in the life of Jesus I don't like that term I know what they mean there can only be one Gethsemane there only one there is only one Calvary and one Golgotha only no one will ever enter into the deepest meaning of our Lord's experience when he cried in Gethsemane if it be thy will not my will but thine be done but at least you and I have to experience this and you and I have to contend with this not my will but thine be done and I tell you my friend it's not easy it's not easy and I think that's why he uses this word daily it is something that you have to do every day of your life and if you neglect doing it today

I'll put it in the past tense if you neglected doing this in one area in your life yesterday you've made the discovery that it is far more difficult for you now to do it today far more difficult and maybe there's no one on earth who knows the agony of the decision that you have to make as you know it yourself no cross someone said is heavier to bear and more painful than the one which is inward and unseen by anybody but yourself difficult you know all the pain and the agony of cross bearing the difficulty of discipleship the difficulty of discipleship and there's no royal route to living this life you see there is no small booklet that you carry in your pocket and when you've got a problem you open and you turn to the index and you look up under this index the problem that you have and you see now what's the answer to this problem what's the what are the rules and the guidelines and you turn up to page 15 and you see these are the rules and the guidelines well I'll do this that's not the way it goes my friend you have to make these decisions as you come to them yourself in the interests of Jesus

Christ let him take up his cross daily and follow let me give you one or two examples of the kind of thing I mean perhaps it may surprise you that I would take this line with it in speaking about the practice of cross spirit let us look at one or two things that are absolutely essential in the life of a Christian prayer Bible reading Christian fellowship Christian witness Christian giving dealing with the time that God has placed at your disposal the interest that he's given you in this life the talents that he has bestowed upon you the past times and the recreations that are perfectly legitimate in the light of God's word for you to engage in let us look at these are eight or nine things I mentioned that are in the life of every single Christian that ought to be in the life of every single Christian and I want just to home in on one or two of them to show you the difficulty of self denying and cross bearing prayer prayer perhaps some people here tonight are finding life difficult just because they're discovering that prayer is becoming difficult for them and maybe you're tempted to think that because prayer is becoming difficult you are not a

Christian let me say this to you prayer demands discipline of you as every other area in your life demands discipline and it means this it may mean that you will have to start getting up a wee bit earlier to pray to the Lord oh yes it may mean that that alarm clock has to be switched back 15 minutes to get up earlier now of course in January and the kind of weather we're having terribly difficult to get up early to do anything far less pray but you see when it comes to prayer the things of God isn't it strange these things may be more difficult than any other things because they are alien to the nature of man you see you want to do your own thing and prayer at quarter to seven in the morning or quarter past six isn't probably the first thing that you would think of in your life perhaps a time has come for you to grapple with this problem perhaps you've neglected something that never used to be neglected in your life there was a time when you gave far more time to pray than you do now well you have to grapple with it you've got to do something about it nobody's going to come and knock on your door and say to you look I know six easy ways to pray there are six easy steps you can engage and if you do them you'll find that it's dead easy to pray the Bible doesn't let you believe like that doesn't let you think like that the Bible tells you you've got to give yourself time it's your time you have to set apart not someone else's it's your bed you've got to get out of in the morning to pray it's your needs you've got to go on it's your comforts that are going to be difficult to deal with when it's cold and you find it difficult to concentrate in your mind and the things of

[41 : 04] God to gather in your thoughts together you've got to grapple with these situations not someone else putting it as simply as one can do you not think my friend that your life would be far better tonight if you were to do this this may be the challenge that Christ is bringing before you when he reminds you of the meaning of discipleship oh yes it's easy enough to profess faith in Christ in a sense easy enough to come to means of grace easy enough to conduct worship fleetingly briefly quickly for three minutes at the beginning of the day and at the end of the day you know and I know that that's not discipleship it's not good enough demands same with reading the Bible study you don't know the Lord as well as you ought that's your complaint you're not growing your knowledge well maybe not but why can that be the reason why are you neglecting the study of this time is so important isn't it you and I are so busy now we need another 24 hours of the day and if we had them

I don't know if we would give any more time to the Lord than we're doing oh yes more time to ourselves and to our own interests but what about his interests there's prayer then there's Bible study Christian fellowship Christian witness it's not easy as I was speaking this morning Christian giving that's another area of our life that our Lord lays his finger on and demands that you and I deny ourselves and take up the cross and follow him remember how Francis Woodley Avricle put it take my life let it be consecrated Lord for thee take my moments take my days take my hands my feet my voice my lips take my silver my gold my intellect take my will and make it thine it shall be no longer mine take my heart it is thine own it shall be thy royal throne take my love my

Lord I pour at thy feet its treasure store take myself and I shall be ever only all for thee that's it it's giving absolutely everything in your life in the interest of the Lord to the Lord Jesus Christ denying self taking up the cross daily going through the pain barrier struggling grappling with all the difficulties that are involved but recognizing this these are his demands upon me and I didn't deny them and I didn't obey them recognizing as I said that there's no easy answer no royal route we've got to get down to it but as he puts it here we've got to take up the cross and we mustn't hesitate if we have to know the joy of walking with the Lord because that joy is linked inseparably with self denial and cross bearing and one other thought as someone put it your

Lord's life was dominated by the shadow of a cross and that wasn't easy for him you see some people talk as though Christianity were dead easy discipleship you can strum along and sing along and whistle along the road all the day nor I care in the world that's discipleship it may be but it's not the discipleship of the Bible and it's not the discipleship of Jesus oh no the discipleship that the Lord demanded is difficult not ease of flesh and blood remember what he said to Peter Peter he says when you were young you went wherever you wanted yourself when thou was young thou curedest thyself and thou wentest with thou wouldest that is you did more or less as you liked but as you grew you will discover this that another shall cure and carry thee whither thou wouldest not as he said signifying what death he was going to glorify

God with in other words Peter the longer you go on the more you are coming under the influence and the authority of one who is going to lead you along our way and if you had your way that's not the way you would go but that's the way that he wants you to go and the way that the Lord wants you to go tonight as a follower of his is the way of self denial and the way of cross bearing and it's not easy and you may be here tonight rebelling against the spirit and the will of God keeping up your heels and wanting to go another way wanting to do your own thing I plead with you in the name of Jesus Christ remember the path that he calls you into and the way that he directs you to and in one word and conclusion he gives you this encouragement he uses so often in the words that he addressed to his prospective followers take up the cross and follow me you see my friend that's your encouragement and that's your help and your comfort tonight you're not there alone he is with you but he is only with you as you go in his path that's the point you have only the promise of his presence as you walk in the path of obedience and if you are disobedient to the will of the

[47 : 24] Lord you will deny yourself the most precious thing you can have in this life the presence of the Lord with you follow me and you remember that and you remember that if you are challenged tonight with Christ and you in the gospel you remember that that with all the things that you know you have to give up together first of all with yourself with all these things remember you'll have the best compensation of all Christ's presence with you along life's way is it not worth it listening to the demands that he places before you again tonight is it not worth abandoning all these things that you may have him and if you have him you need fear no evil let us pray bless to us the word of thy grace and apply it with conviction and with power and meaning to our hearts and the prayer should be thine forever in Christ amen