

**Week of February 3, 2013**  
***Half-Hearted Interest or Total Commitment?***

**Passage Outline:**

1. **Total Sacrifice** (Luke 9:20-23)
2. **Total Loss** (Luke 9:24-26)
3. **Total Commitment** (Luke 9:57-62)

**What This Lesson Is About:**

Following Jesus calls for total commitment. This lesson focuses on the question, “What is a man benefited if he gains the whole world, yet loses or forfeits himself?” (Luke 9:25). This lesson can help you evaluate your level of dedication to Jesus and choose to follow Him with total commitment.

**1. Total Sacrifice (Luke 9:20-23)**

These focal verses follow Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000 (Luke 9:12-17) and pick up in the middle of His conversation with the disciples about His identity. In response to His question, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” (v. 18), the disciples said, “John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, that one of the ancient prophets has come back” (v. 19). One may get the impression the crowds held Jesus in high esteem, but in reality their responses are woefully inadequate, just as are modern views of Jesus as a great teacher or a miracle worker or a prophet. The motive to follow Jesus comes out of the awareness of His real identity. When Scriptures demand we follow Jesus and love Him and worship Him, these demands are not to follow a mere man. If that were the case, it would be idolatry to worship Jesus.

Thus, when Jesus asked the disciples, “**who do you say that I am?**” Peter correctly stated, “**God’s Messiah!**” Matthew’s Gospel has “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!” (Matt. 16:16). Peter knew Jesus was much more than a prophet, and the critical factor here is that everyone must come to this realization as well.

The question Jesus asked about His identity is still the question of the ages—every person needs to hear the gospel of Christ, that He is the Messiah and God’s Son, and that salvation is available through faith in Him alone. The reason **He strictly warned and instructed them to tell this to no one** was that the Jewish people had a warped understanding of the coming Messiah. They wanted a conqueror like King David, not a sin-bearing suffering servant like Isaiah 53 describes. Jesus would become the Conqueror only after He first became the Suffering Servant. Eventually, Jesus’ death and resurrection clarified the nature of Jesus’ Messiahship in the minds of the disciples. They were then prepared to tell the world about Him (Matt. 28:19-20).

Jesus began to prepare them for these events in verse 22: “**The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.**” This is the kind of Messiah Jesus is: One who would suffer at the hands of His own people and be crucified, executed as a vile criminal by Roman authorities at the behest of Jewish leaders. But since Jesus is **God’s Messiah**, He did not remain in the grave. He did not die for Himself but for sinners. This Messiah has power over life and death. He arose from the dead, and it is the truths of His vicarious death and triumphant resurrection that make Jesus worth living for and dying for. And this is precisely the connection Jesus made for His disciples.

**Two articles “First-Century Jewish Concepts of the Messiah” and “The Son of Man” are relate to this lesson and can be found in the Heavy Preparation Packet.**

Here is what the Messiah, who would die and come back from the dead, demands of those who would be His followers: “**If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.**” Jesus used the typical language of a rabbi and disciples to describe what His followers must do. Rabbis

had disciples who followed them and learned from them, but they never made the kind of additional demands Jesus made here. Jesus set two requisites for being His follower. First, a disciple **must deny himself**, meaning he must renounce his own desires and determine to obey his new Master. Second, he must **take up his cross daily**, a clear reference to death. Crucifixion was a greatly-feared and well-known method of execution in the Roman Empire. Jesus' point is that His disciples must be ready and willing to make the ultimate sacrifice and die for Him—not just on occasion but **daily**.

## 2. Total Loss (Luke 9:24-26)

One of the great paradoxes of the Christian life is that a person saves his life by losing it. Believers gain meaning in life by focusing, not on themselves, but on bringing honor and glory to Christ. Jesus stated it this way: **“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will save it.”** The prophets of old never made statements like this. Not one prophet called on people to give up their lives for him. This is a ridiculous and scandalous statement bordering on blasphemy if the person making it were not divine. But the One who said this is the Messiah, God's very own Son. Thus Jesus could demand such loyalty, just as Yahweh demanded exclusive worship from His people in the Old Testament.

Jesus has a powerful argument for saying every person should give his life to Him. If one refuses to do so, regardless of what he may have gained in this life, all those gains go to waste and his life is lost eternally: **“What is a man benefited if he gains the whole world, yet loses or forfeits himself?”** We tend to think short term instead of long term, temporally instead of eternally. We believe we have all the time in the world to consider matters of death and the afterlife, or we don't think those issues are of great concern anyway. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have no idea when we will breathe our last breath, but where a person will spend eternity is the most important issue one will ever face in this life. Only a fool ignores the eternal and just worries about the temporal—things that won't last beyond his own life, much less forever.

Of all the great conquerors, intellectuals, artists, and the fabulously wealthy business persons the world has ever known, they all have two things in common: (1) they ascended to dizzying heights of success in their fields, and (2) they are all dead, having gained so much but, from all we know, having also forfeited something far greater—their own eternal souls. If one were able to call them back from the dead and ask them if their gains were worth what it cost them, to a person, they would all answer, "NO!"

Jesus' demand for absolute loyalty from every human being is astounding, unless one recognizes who He is. Jesus is God's Son. The Father will honor whatever the Son says about each person on judgment day: **“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory and that of the Father and the holy angels.”** When Christ returns, everyone will stand before Him to be judged (see Matt. 7:21-23; 25:31-46; John 5:22-23), and those who refused to receive Him as Lord and Savior in this life will be rejected by Him in the presence of the Father and the angels in the next.

## 3. Total Commitment (Luke 9:57-62)

Here Luke provides three examples of inadequate commitment to Jesus. The first man was eager but unaware of what following Jesus involves. The second man seems to have been willing but he hesitated because of another commitment. The third man also seems to have been willing but he was detained by family loyalties. All three serve as warnings to those who claim to follow Jesus but do so in a half-hearted manner—or never actually get around to doing it at all.

As Jesus journeyed to Jerusalem, a man approached Jesus. As Jesus was **on the road** with the twelve disciples, **someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go!”** At first glance it seems this man was a good candidate for a true disciple, but Jesus' response indicates otherwise. Luke records elsewhere Jesus' warning about desiring to be His disciple without considering what doing so would mean: **“For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?”**

(14:28). Jesus knew this man, who claimed to be willing to follow Jesus anywhere, did not realize what it could cost to be one of His disciples. So **Jesus told him, “Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.”** Jesus did not live in luxury at any time in His life, and sometimes He had no place to sleep except outside in a tent or even under the stars. This was true of those who followed Him during His earthly ministry, such as the Twelve. Following Him today may cost us opportunities to gain the kind of wealth and comfort that would make our lives much easier. Although there is nothing inherently sinful about wealth, Jesus warned this man and people in other passages (see Matt. 6:19-21; 19:16-26) not to let materialism stand in the way of following and serving Him.

**Read the article “Animal Imagery in the New Testament” located in the Heavy Preparation Packet.**

The second encounter occurred when Jesus said to someone, **“Follow Me,”** the same Greek words Jesus used to call Matthew (Matt. 9:9) and Philip (John 1:43). The man’s response indicates he wanted to delay becoming a disciple for what seems like a legitimate reason: **“Lord,” he said, “first let me go bury my father.”** Once again, at first glance this man seems to have been a good candidate for a disciple since his request seems entirely reasonable. Surely Jesus would not tell someone he could not attend his own father’s funeral, which could be understood as a violation of the Fifth Commandment. But this is almost certainly not the situation.

If this man’s father had just died and the funeral was about to begin or already in progress, why was he out there on the road instead of being with his family? The father was probably still alive, and the man wanted to wait till after his father’s death, possibly to take care of personal affairs and to settle the estate, then he would follow Jesus. But this is not a legitimate excuse for delaying discipleship. **But He told him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and spread the news of the kingdom of God.”** The man should let the spiritually dead, those who care nothing about following Jesus, bury the physically dead. Other family members could take care of funeral arrangements and settle the estate after his father’s death. This man was to **spread the news** of the gospel.

The third encounter happened when a man approached Jesus and said, **“I will follow You, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to those at my house.”** This man wanted to make a trip home to tell his family what he would be doing, but Jesus’ response forbade this: **“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”** The urgency of the moment is to follow Jesus—nothing should stand in the way. Jesus knows how easily we get sidetracked from the best thing—following Him—in favor of doing something that seems perfectly legitimate, even necessary. Jesus must take priority over everything else in our lives. The slightest distraction can cause us to lose our focus on Him altogether. There may have come a time for this man to explain to his family why he followed Jesus, and maybe not, but that was not the important thing at that moment. The real issue for this man was to follow Jesus, follow Him now, follow Him always. So it is for all of us as well.

Word Study: *Deny* (v. 23)

The Greek word translated “deny” and its nearly identical variation with no difference in meaning occur 44 times in the New Testament. The meaning closely parallels that of the English translation. A common antonym means to confess or to acknowledge. Both terms refer to public speech or proclamation, which can be seen quite clearly in the passages where both terms occur (Matt. 10:32-33; Luke 12:8-9; John 1:20; 1 John 2:22-23)—though denials in the mind and through actions, whether positive or negative, are also possible (Luke 9:23; 1 Tim. 5:8; Titus 1:16; 2:12; Heb. 11:24). All four Gospels use the word in reference to Peter’s denials of Jesus (Matt. 26:70,72; Mark 14:68,70; Luke 22:57; John 13:38; 18:25,27). Other passages follow this negative theme of denying Christ or God (Luke 12:9; Acts 3:13-14; 2 Tim. 2:12; Titus 1:16; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 2:22-23; Jude 4). On judgment day Jesus will deny that these people know Him (Matt. 10:32-33; compare Matt. 7:23). But on the positive side, Jesus called on His disciples to deny themselves (Luke 9:23), Paul called on believers to deny ungodliness (Titus 2:12), and Jesus described the faithful as those who refuse to deny Him (Rev. 2:13; 3:8).