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The Cross Walk Luke 9:2-26

While attending Truman elementary school I was crosswalk safety patrol guard. I thought it was pretty cool that I had an official badge, white helmet, belt and orange uniform. I got to carry a stick with a red flag. The best part of the job was that I could stop traffic. What power for a 5th grader! 44th street could get pretty busy with morning traffic so the safest place to cross the street was at the crosswalk. Now there were always a few rebels that didn't cross at the crosswalk. There were always those who didn't like to have their style cramped by having to cross at the crosswalk. They didn't like to have to wait behind my flag. They didn't like having a skinny little 5th grader telling them when they could or could not cross the street. There were those who wanted to cross that street anywhere and anytime they well pleased. But the safest place to cross that street was at the cross walk. There was actual protection, an extra set of eyes looking out for your safety and also official legal protection if you decided to cross at the crosswalk.

Our passage this morning in Luke 9:23 begins saying, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." Jesus is speaking these words. He challenges all those who desire to be followers of Him to take up the cross and walk in His steps. Jesus is challenging us to do the crosswalk...for that is the safest place to be. The crosswalk isn't hip, it isn't stylish or free spirit. The crosswalk is certainly not the easiest place to be....but it is the safest. I say the crosswalk is the safest place to be, but if you are wanting safety from bodily or physical harm or comfort it may not be. The crosswalk Jesus is talking about doesn't keep us physically safe, but

it keep us spiritually safe. So that makes the crosswalk the best place to be. Not the easiest, but the best.

Read with me Luke 9:23-26 (READ) This morning we want to ask a couple of questions. What does it look like for me to do the crosswalk in following Jesus? Practically what does it mean for me to carry the cross? And also, why should I choose to do the crosswalk?

In chapter 9 of Luke, Jesus has sent out the disciples on their own to share the good news about God's plan for people. He doesn't send them with an gospel RV, lots of food and a huge ministry bank account. He sends them out with only the good news. Then in the middle of the chapter he shows them an amazing life lesson by feeding 5000 hungry people with just a few loaves and fishes. The disciples are just like us in that we are consumed by the needs, desires and demands of this world. Jesus in effect says to them; "come to me, bring what little you have and I will break it and bless it and multiply your 5 and 2 to be an amazing blessing to others. Each time he multiplies the bread and fish, Jesus is saying, "everything you need I have. I have everything you need."

The disciples may not know it but they have entered into Jesus spiritual boot camp. Jesus is training and growing and testing them. And Jesus is testing us as well. Jesus wants to make sure they know Who He really is? 9:18 he asks, "who do people say that I am?" They list a number of answers. What Jesus wants to know if they understand who Jesus really is. V. 20 'But who do you say that I am.'" Peter gets an "A" for the right answer. "you are the Christ of God." You are the Messiah, the Savior we have all been waiting for. So now Jesus is ready to explain what it looks like, the commitment, the sacrifice to follow Jesus. V.22 "the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected and killed and raised up on the third day." Now we know that to be the gospel. We live post cross, after the resurrection. We see the good that suffering and rejection and death of Jesus did for all the world. But the disciples didn't have the benefit of knowing the end of the story. Jesus is telling them all,

“guys, here is where I am going. If you want to follow me, this is what your following me into. Its not going to be easy. Here is the menu at this restaurant; suffering, rejection, killed. Want to sit down and join my for that meal? Want to come? Here is what it looks like v.23 “If any one wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me.”

Now why would anyone want to do that? If you are like many people in this world you are commitment adverse. No one likes to be held down or responsible or commit. They like the idea of being viewed as committed but they don't want to commit. Many of us today do not like the idea of committing to something especially if it might take a chunk of our hide, take a bite out of our time, take a toll on our families, stretch our marriage, squeeze us financially, pressure that keeps coming at us week after week. We tend to shy from anything that emotionally exhausts us, tired us out, frustrates us, sets ourselves up for rejection and criticism. We will try easy for a while, but we don't like hard. And even if easy means we have to do it for a long time we will bow out. We want to do what we want to do when we want to and where we want to. Commitments close us in and stifle our freedom and flexibility.

So Jesus comes up to us and says, “you want to follow me?” You want to wear the label Christian and actually have it mean something? Well, count the cost because here is what it really looks like; Deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow me.”

So what do those things mean? The first one, “Deny yourself” is a decision. It is a willful choice. To deny myself means that I have chosen to renounce myself as the authority and focus of attention in my life. It means that I refuse the right to call the shots in my life. It means that I am no longer the master of my destiny. I am no longer the captain of my ship. It means I let Jesus do all the steering and driving. Its not that I promise to cry out “Jesus take the wheel” when I'm about ready to crash my life and run it off a cliff hoping he will spare me. To deny myself

means that Jesus is taking the wheel not only when life is stormy and confusing and fearful, but Jesus is taking the wheel on the sunny days, commuting to work, driving the kids to soccer practice, school. Jesus takes the wheel on the way to the grocery store, out on a Friday night, Jesus has complete control of where I am going and what I am doing and thinking and saying.

When I make the conscience choice to deny myself, I no longer have the final say in what I eat, buy, where I go, what I wear, who I spend time with. My hopes, my dreams, my thoughts. All must be run by the REAL master of my soul. I Cor. 6:20 says "...you are not your own, but you are bought with a price therefore glorify God in your body." We no longer have the final say.

In the parallel passage in Matthew 16, Matthew adds that when Jesus says he is going to suffer, be rejected and killed, Peter says "No Lord. This will never happen to you." Interesting oxymoron, "No" and "Lord". They don't belong in the same sentence. How is it possible to say no to the One who truly is Lord? That is like telling your drill sergeant at boot camp, "I'd rather not" when he yells attention. When the Lord says jump you don't say, "I'm not very good at jumping, I feel awkward jumping, I'd rather not jump." No if Jesus is truly Lord you ask Him, "how high?"

It's really hard for us to deny ourselves because we seem to be so wired to cater and cottle ourselves. We are very self-centered people and will even try to disguise it as essential even healthy for our personal freedom. "I need to do this for me", "I deserve to be happy and live a little". "I'm burned out and stressed and need some space to recover." "God made me oversexed and one partner is not enough for me." "Hey, I'm just looking, just fantasizing, I'm not hurting anyone." Our worlds values tend to applaud those who have broken free and independent and calling their own shots. Jesus comes along and calls out for us to do the very opposite. Deny yourself.

That doesn't mean that all things we do for self are wrong. No, that is not the point. God wants us to do many things for ourselves. We feed, clothe, rest, pleasure, work, exercise ourselves. We need these things. The point is that whatever we do is not for our own glory but in whatever we do we do for the glory of God. We are not the one who makes the final decision, God is. We deny ourselves by renouncing our right to captain our ship. That is really, really hard to do.

Are you good at denying yourself? Certainly we perform all sorts of "selfless" acts each day toward others. Dad's work to provide for the family. Mom cook and care and clean. Kids contribute to the household by doing chores and getting along. We help a neighbor stuck in the ditch. Take over a meal. We do a favor for a friend on his project. Yet...often we do all these things with the unstated expectation that others will reciprocate in kind. Its like depositing into our kindness bank. When we have a need we expect them to help us out. Scratch my back and I'll scratch your back when you need it. So how do we react when others don't respond with the same help, similar thank-you, assistance, listening ear, kindness? When the other person doesn't respond in the way you hoped, how do you feel now? Are we truly denying ourselves or are we simply investing in a sophisticated "good-deeds" bank expecting a return for our kind deposits? Everyone likes being called a servant until they start getting treated like one.

Jesus our example denied himself. In Philippians chapter 2 it tells us that when Jesus came to earth he emptied himself of many of His God-sized powers. He voluntarily set them aside, choosing not to use them. Now why would God deny himself of anything? I know many people who would love to have the chance to always get their way every time. But what does God get out of denying himself? He wanted to model for us a denial of self and dependence on the father. He wanted us to imitate Him. Remember what Jesus said in the garden just before He was betrayed by one of His own disciples, just before He would be taken

to a cross. He prayed this, "Lord, not my will but Thine be done." Jesus was our example to follow.

If we are going to follow Jesus, not only must we deny ourselves, which is a willful decision. We all must take some action; "take up our cross daily". What does it mean to take up our cross? Well put yourselves in the disciples sandals. When they heard Jesus say, "take up your cross" They heard, "Take up your electric chair, take up your lethal injection." They did not have the benefit of our post-cross perspective. They didn't know the theological significance of the cross. They didn't know the cross was a means to salvation for the entire world. They simply knew the cross as being the most horrific torturous death inflicted by the Romans against those who would dare to break their law and go against them. You can see why Peter might say, "No, Lord" this can't be right. You are the Messiah. You are going to deliver us. You're not going down. This can't be the way.

Jesus calls us to take up our cross. Not His. Ours. The cross for Jesus meant death. For us it can't mean physical death because Jesus tells us to do it daily. It's impossible to physically die more than once. But we must die to self daily. We must repeatedly die to our self-centered focus and live a life of sacrifice. The cross is where Jesus loved sacrificially. The cross was a point of commitment. The cross was Jesus mission from God. Ours may not mean martyrdom, but what has God called us to do for Him? Deny ourselves and our will and melt our desires into His.

Practically what does it look like for us to walk in light of the cross? To take up our cross daily? What does it look like to do the cross walk? I like what a friend of mine, Rick Reed wrote, "***Whenever Jesus will, crosses our will...we will choose His will despite the cost.***" That is what it means to be in the cross walk.

What that looks like is this; When you get up in the morning. You haven't had your coffee and you're grumpy. You are feeling pretty ticked

off at the world and are ready to snap at anyone that dares speak to you. You are just waiting for someone to annoy you because you want to let loose the anger that is churning inside. Your desire, your will, if left to yourself is to take someone out with your words. But....then you take the crosswalk. You remember to deny yourself and remember your choice that you are not your own, you are bought with a price, you are no longer the authority and focus of the world, your mouth and mind are not yours. You decide to deny self's anger and choose instead to live out God's Word. Col 4:6 "Let your speech always be with grace...so that you may know how to respond to each person." You are doing the crosswalk.

To do the crosswalk we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, daily, repeatedly and then follow Him. To follow is not a noun, it is a verb. Follow is an action word. That word follow in Greek is Akaluw. It is a military term that means to fall in line. It means saying "yes, sir". It means Yes, Lord". We follow Jesus. How? He is no longer here in person. We certainly can follow His example and we also can follow His truths, His principles laid out for us in the Bible. We have an example follow. We have an action to take; take up our cross. And we have a willful decision to make, "deny yourself." What that means is we are faced with a choice to take the crosswalk whenever Jesus will, crosses our will, ... we decide to choose his will despite the cost.

That means that when somebody does something to hurt you and they never bother to say "I'm sorry", never bother to admit how much they hurt you, rejected you, discounted you, ignored you, caused you pain, abandoned you, left you hanging, took advantage of their position. And your will, your self really, really, really wants to hold onto a grudge. You find yourself standing at an intersection of decision, you are at the crosswalk. When you decide to take the crosswalk, you remember how much you have forgiven. You see that your will has crossed against Gods will and instead of choosing your will, you choose his will despite the cost. You walk across the intersection of life remembering Ephesians

4:32 “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted forgiving each other, just as ***God in Christ has forgiven you.***”

There is a cost in choosing the crosswalk. We have to die to our own plans. There may be the cost of rejection as the world tries to press us into its mold. Friends may pull back because we follow Jesus. Students you may not get invited to certain parties. You may be excluded from some juicy conversations. It may cause conflict in your family. You may be rejected, but understand when you choose the crosswalk you will also will also be walking on the safest ground. Not the easiest. Not the most comfortable, but the safest place if you don't want life to run you over.

Why should I choose to take the cross walk? It sounds really hard. Look at verses 24, 25 and 26. Jesus gives three reasons, three motivations for us to take the crosswalk. V.24 “For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it.” Taking the crosswalk will keep us from living in the worlds wisdom. Last week we learned that the word “world” refers to the values, priorities and attitudes that say there is no God, if there is He doesn't matter because He does not change what happens here on the earth. There is nothing besides the world that I see. That is worldly thinking. So because of that the world thinking says ‘save your life, or in other words, “look out for number one”. Promote yourself no one else will. Step on whoever you can to get to the top. The ends justify the means. Why? Because if there is nothing beyond this world, that makes a lot of sense. But God says no. Choose the cross walk. Don't pump yourself up, humble yourself and God will lift you up. It makes no sense if this world is all there is. But Is 55 says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways. For as high as the heavens are above the earth so are my ways about your ways.” Jim Elliott took the crosswalk literally and was martyred by the Auca Indians while telling them the good news of Jesus. Our own missionary Scotty Warten was arrested somewhere in Jordan or Iraq, his family doesn't know where he

is. He is taking the crosswalk. Some might say he a fool for putting himself in such danger? Jim Elliott would say, “he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Why should I choose the crosswalk? V.24 it keeps you from living with the worlds wisdom and v.25 it keep you from living by the worlds values. “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses himself, his soul?” The world says “store up, save, get all you can”. Money will insulate yourself from this worlds problems. God says don’t value stuff and undervalue your soul. World wisdom says, if you have stuff, protect, hoard, save up that that will protect you. God says, if you have it give it away and you will multiply blessing on others and yourself. Matt 6:33 “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these other things will be added unto you.”

Why should I take the crosswalk? Look at verse 26 It keeps me from living for the worlds approval. “If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words...” Whose eyes are you looking to for approval. Are you more concerned what people think of you, or more concerned with what God thinks of you? Do you ever find yourself ashamed and quiet when spiritual topics come up at the lunch room? Are you ashamed to speak the name of Jesus or hold up His values in the classroom at school? Family reunions? Soccer games? When we deny ourselves as the main attention, when we begin living out a life of sacrifice to God taking up our cross. When we follow Jesus and His example, we begin to take the crosswalk in all areas of our life and it protects us from living with the worlds wisdom and the worlds values and living for the worlds approval. That’s crosswalk is the safest place to be...not the easiest...but the safest for if we are walking in the crosswalk we won’t be run over spiritually because we are walking in the Spirit, feeding the Spirit and not the flesh.

Do you find yourself standing at an intersection this morning? Perhaps your marriage didn’t turn out the way you hoped it would. Many of your friends are telling you to “get out” it would be so much easier.

He's a jerk. She's a louse. She's not nice. He's no longer prince charming. It's hard. So your standing at the intersection. Will you do the crosswalk? Will you deny yourself, your desires and ask God what He would want you to do? It may be God wants you to leave but it may be He wants you to stay even when it's hard. Do you take the crosswalk and choose to view your mate as a gift from God even though it's a hard gift to receive right now? Do you choose to look for the good instead of focusing on all the bad?

Some of us are at other intersections this morning: Been passed over for a promotion. You are not where you thought you'd be at this time in life. Will you take the crosswalk and affirm that God is the One who places and displaces? Perhaps you are being tempted by the lust of the flesh or lust of eyes and your will says you need that in order to be happy. Will you strap that cross to your shoulders and walk across the intersection? When you have the cross on your shoulders you aren't looking around at the trinkets the world has to offer. Will you choose to do the crosswalk today?

(Many thanks to Rick Reed for his work on this passage and idea of the "crosswalk" in his sermon preached at Metropolitan Bible church)