

SERMON

Sermon: The Cost of Discipleship Today

Full sermon manuscript on Luke 9:23-26 and the radical demands of following Jesus in a culture of comfort and self-actualization

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Equipping pastors and leaders to serve with excellence, integrity, and lasting Kingdom impact.

Sermon Overview and Context

Primary Texts: Luke 9:23-26 | Luke 14:25-33 | Matthew 10:37-39

Preaching Hook

We have developed a version of Christianity in the West that is almost entirely comfortable. It asks for an hour of our Sunday, a portion of our income, a set of beliefs that does not require us to change our fundamental life orientation, and a social community that is not significantly different from a friendly civic organization. And then we wonder why the church is losing its young people, why nominal Christianity is collapsing, why the people who most desperately need the Gospel are most allergic to the version of it they have encountered. The reason may be that we have been offering a discipleship that costs nothing, and the Gospel that Jesus actually preached costs everything.

Count the Cost -- Jesus Actively Discouraged Impulsive Commitment

Luke 14:25-33 contains one of the most counter-intuitive passages in the Gospels. Large crowds are following Jesus, and his response is not to encourage them. He turns and tells them that unless they hate their families and carry their cross, they cannot be his disciple. He then tells two parables about people who began something they could not finish -- a builder who did not count the cost of his tower, a king who did not assess his forces before going to war -- and uses them as warnings against impulsive commitment to a kingdom whose demands they have not seriously considered. Jesus is not trying to build a large following. He is trying to build a genuine one.

"Luke 9:23-26"

-- Primary Text

Take Up Your Cross -- The Death That Leads to Life

For Jesus's original audience, "taking up your cross" was not a metaphor for inconvenience. The cross was a specific instrument of Roman execution. When a condemned criminal was given his cross to carry, it meant one thing: he was walking to his own death. Jesus's instruction to "take up your cross daily" means a daily dying -- the daily surrender of self-determination, self-preservation, and self-advancement as the governing principles of life. This is not occasional self-denial. It is a fundamental reorientation of who is at the center of your life. It is the death of the self that stands in God's place.

"Luke 14:25-33"

-- Secondary Text

The Paradox -- Lose Your Life to Find It

Immediately after the most demanding cost description in the Gospels, Jesus articulates the paradox that makes the cost comprehensible: "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it" (Luke 9:24). The person who refuses the cross -- who insists on managing their own life, protecting their own comfort, advancing their own kingdom -- will discover that the life they were protecting gradually empties of meaning. The person who surrenders the self-managed life to Christ will discover, on the other side of the surrender, a life so much larger, so much more meaningful, so much more genuinely alive that the cost seems in retrospect not a loss but an exchange.

"Matthew 10:37-39"

-- Third Text

Application and Invitation

Close with a specific, honest invitation. Not "raise your hand if you want to accept Jesus" but "Is there something specific in your life that Jesus is asking you to give up? A relationship, an ambition, a habit, an idol? Would you be willing, right now, in this room, to offer it to him?" Allow a moment of genuine silence. Pray a prayer of surrender together.

Small Group Discussion Questions

1. What did this sermon say to you personally -- not in general, but specifically? Where did it land?
2. Was there anything in the message that challenged or confused you? How did you engage with it?
3. What specific application is this text calling you to? Name it as concretely as possible.
4. Who in your life needs to hear what you heard today? How might you share it?

Preacher's Preparation Checklist

- Have I allowed this text to preach to me personally before I prepared to preach it to others?
- Do I have a specific illustration that makes the central theological claim concrete and immediately recognizable?
- Is my introduction creating genuine need for what the text provides -- curiosity, tension, a felt question?
- Is my conclusion specific, clear, and calling for a concrete response rather than general inspiration?
- Have I prayed specifically for the individuals who will be in the room when I preach this?

The sermon is not yours. You are the herald -- the one who delivers the message on behalf of the One who sent you. Prepare with everything you have, and then step behind the text and let it do what only it can do.

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