

## THE NEED FOR CONSISTENCY Luke 9:23

### INTRODUCTION:

For the third week in a row, I want to draw your attention to Luke 9:23.

*(After church last Sunday, I found out that I failed to type this verse correctly into the PowerPoint presentation. Of all things, I failed to include the word "daily" in the verse and that was the central point to the entire sermon! What a goof-up!! I almost feel like I ought to preach that sermon all over again. But I won't. Hopefully, you got the point even though you didn't get the point in PowerPoint.)*

This week, we are going to look at that verse again but this time I want to stress the fact that Jesus' words have an open-endedness to them.

*"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me."*

In spiritual fitness, as in physical fitness, if someone wants to be fit for life, they must diet and exercise consistently. We've all seen the person in the check-out lane at the grocery store who has a package of potato chips, a Twinkie, a candy bar and a diet soda. None of us want to be the one to break the news to him that the diet soda isn't going to cancel out the other stuff. A diet, to do any good, must be followed consistently.

Mark Twain is said to have claimed that it was not difficult to quit smoking: he'd done it hundreds of times. I say it is not difficult to start exercising: I've done that dozens of times. But it doesn't do any good without consistency. In fact, an old, overweight man who exercises only sporadically actually endangers his life. We often read about out-of-shape men in their sixties who go out to shovel snow and fall over with a heart attack. That's why I don't shovel snow!

But seriously, if we want to get in shape, we have to establish a rhythm to our workouts that is consistent over time. The same is true if we want to become spiritually fit: we must consistently walk with Jesus. That is why he made his statement with an open-endedness to it. Coming after him, taking up our cross and following him are not once and for all actions. These are things we do and do consistently.

If it is our intention to be fit for life, there must be consistency in our Christian lifestyle. Too many church members point back to a time when they were in youth group or when they were in church camp or when they attended a revival and they made a decision to become a Christian and they consider that this is in effect unless and until they decide to change it. They registered for a political party when they were 18 and haven't changed that decision and they view their decision to "register" as a

Christian in much the same way. They believe that as long as they haven't written a letter to have their name removed from the church's membership role, they are still Christians: they have the certificate that says so.

But Jesus says that being a Christian is not like that. It is ongoing. It is open-ended. It is discipleship and not merely decision. That is what Jesus said in Luke 9:23. So let's turn to that verse and look at it.

**I. The Consistent Call: come after me**

I want you first of all to notice the consistent call. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me..." That is the call: to come after Jesus. For almost 2000 years, that has been the call; to stop whatever else you are doing and come after him.

The call of the Christ has never changed. The church has become distracted and misguided at different times but the call has never changed. During the 200 years between 1095 and 1291, the church got caught up in trying to recapture Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslims who ruled it. Misguided leaders within the Church called for these crusades and both heroic and gullible men volunteered to go to war to seize these lands. This was nothing less than a Christian jihad. Muslims, at the point of a sword, were asked to renounce their faith and convert to Christianity or die. This dark blot on the history of the church still taints international relations between predominantly Christian countries and predominantly Islamic ones. However sincere the efforts of the Crusaders, the crusades were a mistake. Jesus never called his disciples to jihad.

Jesus never called his disciples to form political action committees or political parties. He never advocated hiring lobbyists to play partisan politics like the world does. Jesus said we are to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and render to God that which is His. That is why you have not heard and will not hear partisan political rhetoric from this pulpit while I am preaching. I do not endorse candidates and we do not distribute materials that do. We want to stay laser-focused on Jesus' consistent call, which is to come after him.

Jesus never called us to take monastic vows, living in poverty and isolated from the world. Nor did he call us to grab all the material wealth we can amass as proof that following him is the fast track to prosperity and financial security. No, Jesus' consistent call was to come after him.

It is always a call to come after him. That's how Jesus called the twelve apostles. He found them engaged in their daily activities and he called to them to stop what they were doing, drop what they were holding and come after him as disciples or learners of him.

That's how he called Saul (who became Paul). Saul of Tarsus was on his way to Damascus to harass, persecute, imprison and even kill the followers of Jesus. Saul was a zealous Jew and he believed he was defending the faith against the cult of the Christ. But on the road to Damascus, God stopped him in his tracks and Jesus said, "Saul, come after me." Saul left a life as a respected Jewish scholar and celebrated Jewish leader and he became a servant of Christ...because Jesus called him to come.

That's how Jesus called Pearl Willis who, in the 1940s, preached at First Christian Church in Flora and got a vision of reopening a church in Clay City. That's how Jesus called Howard Yanaka who was preaching with the Sailor Springs Christian Church at that time and who caught the vision that Pearl Willis had. Howard Yanaka devoted his time not only to lead the Sailor Springs church but also to organize and lead this church. Pearl Willis and Howard Yanaka heard the call of Jesus to come after him...and they did.

Our elders and deacons have heard the call to come after Jesus and they have responded. The call of the Christ is a consistent call. To all people and through all generations, the call is the same: "Come after me." And that is exactly how he calls you, too. How are you responding to the consistent call of Christ to come?

## **II. The Consistent Cost: the cross**

The call is consistent and so is the cost. Think of it: the cost is the same today as it was back then. It has not been adjusted for inflation and has not been touched by deflation. There are no end-of-season sales and no overstock promotions. No one is required to pay more and no one is allowed to pay less. The cost of following Jesus is always and ever the same. It is the cross. It is consistently the cross.

As I said last week, to those who first heard Jesus' call to carry the cross, there would have been something dark, stark and grim about his words. They knew the cross as an instrument of execution. It would have been the same if he had said that they were to take up their own noose, their own electric chair, their own lethal injection and follow him. There was nothing ambiguous about what he was saying. There was nothing obtuse, abstruse or puzzling about his words. Everyone understood that he was saying that if anyone at all wanted to come after him, he would have to dispose of himself. Obviously, he was not calling for physical suicide but he was calling for those who came after him to put self and self-interest to death.

Jesus will not be the first among a list of priorities. He never would be and he will not be now. In another figure of speech, he calls for us to declare him as our lord and for us to become his servants. No servant tells his master, "Later." Or, "Not now." Or simply, "No. I don't want to." When Jesus called for people to follow him, he called them to the consistently high cost of the cross. He called them to deny themselves their preferences, their choices, their options and their prerogatives.

My friends, that is the consistent cost of being spiritually fit for the rest of your life. That is the consistent cost of being spiritually fit to receive eternal life. That is the consistent cost of being a Christian. You don't have to pay it. You only have to pay the price if you decide to come after Jesus. But if you are unwilling to pay the price, do not insult those who have by calling yourself a Christian. Because you are not. You may be a fan of Jesus. You may even be a student of Jesus. But if you have not put self to death so that He lives in you, you are not a Christian.

### III. **The Consistent Consequence: following Jesus**

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me." That's what Jesus said.

After four years, I feel like I know you. I believe I know what you are thinking. I think I know the question that you are asking about now. You want to know, "Darrel, what tense is the Greek verb at the end of that sentence?" I'm glad you asked.

Let me put an end your frustration by telling you that "follow" is third person singular present active imperative of *ακολουτηω* meaning "to come behind". What makes that especially interesting is that the verb used in the phrase "take up his cross" is third person singular orist active imperative. Now everyone say it with me. "AAHHHH!"

OK, let me explain. The aorist tense is a simple tense meaning merely that an action is taken. In the context of that verse, anyone who wants to come after Jesus must take up his cross daily. Every day, he must shoulder the cross again for that day.

But the present active imperative of "follow" means that the action was taken in the past, it is still in effect and the effect will continue into the indefinite future. There is a timelessness about the action of following Jesus: once a person decides to do it, there is no expiration date on the decision. As one linguist put it, a disciple cannot ride on the past nor put off to tomorrow: following Jesus is in the now...always in the now.

Let me illustrate, if I were a runner and someone were to ask me what I do for exercise, I would say "I run". That would convey that I have already

taken up running, I still do it and I plan to continue to do it. There is a continuity and a consistency to the decision to run.

So if someone were to ask a Christian about his relationship with Jesus, it is enough for him to say, "I follow". I have been following. I am following now and I plan to continue to follow...consistently.

Jesus said that if anyone (no exceptions) would come after him (no reservations and no substitutions), he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow in the ever-present now of the rest of his life.

Guys, don't kid yourself: that takes consistency. Deciding to follow Jesus and doing so for a while is one thing but following him always is more demanding.

When a person becomes a Christian, he becomes a Christ-one. He commits to follow in the ever-present now of his life for the rest of his life. It is not a decision to be taken lightly or on the basis of a moment of emotion. The consistent consequence of coming after Jesus and crucifying self is following him for the rest of your life.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

A musician knows the need for consistent practice. An athlete knows the need for consistent practice. It is with consistent repetition that the unfamiliar becomes a lifestyle. The same is true in our walk with Jesus. As we consistently and repeatedly follow in the footsteps of Jesus, his way of living becomes our way of life. Let me put it plainly, if following Jesus has not been a life-altering experience, you aren't really following him.

The great reformer, Martin Luther, pronounced a simple but expressive eulogy for a pastor at Zwickay in 1522. The pastor's name was Nicholas Hausmann and at his funeral, Luther said, "What we preach, he lived."

It would be great to have a highly respected religious reformer say that about you. But you know what is greater still, do you not: to have the author and the perfecter of our faith, God's own Son say of us, "What I preached, he lived." "What I preached, she lived."

Jesus proclaimed that if anyone would come after him, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow him. Consistently answering the call, consistently paying the price, consistently saying and meaning, "Where he leads me, I will follow."

**INVITATION:**        *#593 – "Where He Leads Me"*