

Why We Follow, Part 2

Luke 9:24-25

I've been reading, lately, and profoundly enjoying a particular, short but rich, little book by Henry Scougal called, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. As the title implies, he's reflecting on the self-emptied soul, which was made to love and worship God. The one who denies the self, who sets the self aside, he makes room in his heart for life itself, from the Author of life who inhabits his heart. Listen to this from Scougal, "The love of God is a delightful and affectionate sense of the divine perfections, which makes the soul resign and sacrifice itself wholly unto him, desiring above all things to please him, and delighting in nothing so much as in fellowship and communion with him, and being ready to do or suffer anything for his sake or at his pleasure." End quote.

It's a delightful, affectionate sense that we have of the divine perfections. Men, do you know why it's so important that we meet every other Saturday and study the attributes of God? Because we want our souls delighted and our love inflamed for

the perfections of our God. That's why we meet. We want that passion to burn brightly within us and drive us to worship.

You know what that creates for our families? A self-emptying, self-denying man, who's actually worth something around the house. A man who will teach, and lead, and stand in the gap, and face the enemies, and protect, and provide, and preserve, and instruct, and love his family. If you're not there, you're not, you're just missing out, you guys.

What Scougal described, there? That's how Jesus lived and walked on this earth. He's completely enraptured by and enthralled with the glory of God in the beauty and the holiness of his perfections. Jesus lived that way. So listen carefully to this: If we, like Jesus did, if we lose our life for God's sake, for Christ's sake, then we also will, like Jesus did, even though he died upon that cross, and even though he was buried in that tomb for three day, we too, will live like Jesus lives.

And likewise, we, too, will save our lives. That logic is bomb-proof. It's bullet-proof. Here's the kind of life that lives in the soul, that's fixed on Christ, that's inflame with the love of God. As Scougal put it, "When once the soul is fixed on that supreme and all-sufficient good, it finds so much

perfection and goodness as doth not only answer and satisfy its affection, but master and overpower it, too."

One more quote from Scougal. I can't resist. "The severities of a holy life and that constant watch which we are obligated to keep over our hearts and our ways are very troublesome to those who are only ruled and acted on by an external law, and have no law in their minds or their hearts inclining them to the performance of their duty. But where divine love possesseth the soul, it stands as a sentinel to keep out everything that may offend the Beloved, and doth disdainfully repulse those temptations which assault it.

"It complieth cheerfully, not only with explicit commands," but get this, "with the most secret notices of the Beloved's pleasure, those warnings of conscience that come across the mind when we consider this or that thing, the most secret notices of the Beloved's pleasure. And that heart is ingenious in discovering what will be most grateful and acceptable unto Him. It makes mortification and self-denial change their harsh and dreadful names and become easy, sweet, and delightful things."

Is that how you think of mortification? Is that how you think of self-denial, as sweet, and easy, and delightful to you? So why do we follow? Because we believe Jesus, because we love

him, because we desire God above all else. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." We believe him when he tells him that. It's that simple. When we believe him, denying self, losing our life for Christ's sake, we find the life of God filling our souls. That's the trade-off. Self for God and we're good.

Here's a second reason for obeying Christ's call to discipleship. Jesus told us, number two, release the world to gain your soul. Release the world to gain your soul. Let go of the world, and you'll gain your soul. That's a bargain! That is a bargain, verse 25. Jesus said back in verse 23, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him take up his cross daily." We embrace the rejection and condemnation of the world as Jesus did, which comes from following the will of God, like Jesus did. Why was he crucified? Because he was obedient to the point of death, even death of the cross. That's why.

So why do we do that? Why do we take up our cross? Answer in verse 25 is this, "What does it profit a man if he gains the world and loses or forfeits himself?" The commitment to follow Jesus, it has implications on our relationship to the world. Discipleship means the end of our former ambitions, and

pursuits, and desires, and dreams. God is not about making my dream a reality. This isn't the Dream Center. We don't dream for what the world dreams of. We don't share the same mentality as the rest of the world around us, the world's pastimes, and leisure, and love of money, and lust for baser pleasures, or even sinful pleasures, all in the incessant pursuit of personal liberty, personal autonomy. Look, by following Christ, we set all that aside. We give it up to gain Christ, who is our soul's reward.

Notice how Jesus puts this verse here in financial terms. I think that's brilliant because that's how people think, in financial terms, profit and loss, commerce. That's how he puts it, here. It's the verb *kerdaino*, to gain, to get a gain, to make a profit. Jesus speaks in terms, here, of profit and loss. Joel Green writes, He's, "He," Jesus, "is concerned with here to talk about possessions, whose potential for strangling the faith that he has already mentioned back in Luke 8:14, and Jesus thus uses the language of business dealings. At one level, to highlight again the threat of possessions, at another level, more direct level, as a symbol of the disposition of the self, which always is calculating in terms of profit and loss. 'What would get me...?'"

Look, don't let the world, don't let the stuff of the world, Luke 8:14, like "the cares and the riches and the pleasures of life," we've already gone through all that, but don't let those things choke out the Word of God. Why? Because the Word of God is the only voice calling you away from all that. If you choke out that voice, you've silenced God. So Jesus comes in verse 25, he's presenting, here, a very different kind of accounting. This is a heavenly metric that comes from a divine perspective. Listen, don't lose sight of the fact that Jesus, he came down to us from heaven, which means he has seen the heavenly treasures for himself. He knows the infinite, and eternal, and all-glorious God, and what that God has in himself. He knows the treasures are vast and infinite, more glorious than anything that we puny-mind human beings can imagine here on earth.

And from that heavenly perspective, Jesus says, don't take the devil's bargain! Don't do it! Don't trade your soul for the fading and fleeting treasures of this world because if you do, you've lost it all. You've lost the only means of receiving any of that joy and satisfaction, namely yourself. To lose yourself, the same verb as in verse 24, *apollymi*, to lose by ruination or due to destruction. But also, he adds another word there, forfeited yourself. The verb *for*, forfeited, means, to suffer

damage, or injury, or irreparable harm come to yourself. Why is that? Because this entire world is passing away. It's fleeting; it's dying.

You know, that's why God, I think, one of the reasons God gave us the seasons, so every year we can watch the life, growth, flowering, and death, of everything on earth, to imbed within our minds that this world doesn't last. Don't bank on it; don't put too much into it. "The world is passing away," 1 John 2:17, "along with its desires."

So if you invest yourself into the structures of the world, the businesses of the world, the governments of the world, all the community activities of the world, the societies, the sports, the entertainments of this world, they are all of them passing away. They're dead already and dying and rotting, never to be seen again. "But whoever does the will of God," John tells us, "abides forever."

So beloved, don't be a fool. This world was not created to fulfill us. It wasn't created to satisfy us. God created this world to serve our physical needs and instruct our spiritual eyes. The goodness of God in caring for us with the earth and its fulness, that's always the lesson in helping us to see the lovingkindness of our creator. It's so easy to get our eyes off

of him, isn't it? And to look longingly at the stuff that he's made. There's stuff that looks like gold and silver. There's stuff that looks like food. There's stuff that looks like...stuff.

And it's all just atoms, it's just interestingly arranged differently. Atoms arranged as food, atoms arranged as gold, atoms arranged as your spouse. I'm, you know, I'm not saying don't love your spouse. I'm just saying, I don't idolize that spouse. The point is that the world is here to serve a greater purpose of caring for our needs so that we might look to God and worship him.

One of the key turning points in the testimony of Bishop J. C. Ryle, he's a nineteenth-century Anglican pastor, it's when his father, who was a wealthy banker, it's when he lost everything. John Charles Ryle was a young man back then. He'd just graduated from Oxford, and he anticipated a long and very celebrated career in the English Parliament. But as a very young Christian, God taught him a monumental lesson about the temporary, fleeting nature of money, of wealth.

Ryle wrote in his autobiography of that financial devastation as a violent blow that inflicted ruin upon their family. He said, "We got up one summer's morning with all the world before us as usual, and went to bed that same evening



completely and entirely ruined.” It made a very profound impact on him. It changed the course of his entire family because it was so sudden. And the effects were immediate. The family had to liquidate everything to pay their debts. The estate, the home, all the property, it’s all being sold off right underneath them. That meant all the household servants and their families were suddenly turned out.

A lot of people looked to that home, that Ryle home, for their livelihood. So it not just affected their family; it affected a number of families. And he said, quote, “That whole, the whole circumstances of that time were just about as painful as could be conceived, and at the end of thirty-two years,” which is the time of writing his autobiography, “at the end of thirty-two years are as vividly before my mind as if they were yesterday.” It lasted with him. It hurt deeply.

I’ve never had household servants. I’ve never had to suffer the loss of great wealth, but I know people who have. And I do think there is a profound pain and difficulty for those who have, and suddenly lose everything, than for those who’ve never had and are always clawing their way up the ladder. There’s a deeper pain because it’s, they knew what it was like.

And yet praise be to God that God did this in Ryle's life, and that Ryle could endure that misery in order to write these words about Luke 9:24-25, "The possession of the whole world and all it contains would never make a person happy. Its pleasures are false and deceptive. Its riches' rank and honors have no power to satisfy the heart. So long as we do not have them, they glitter and sparkle and seem desirable. The moment we have them, we find that they are empty baubles and cannot make us content. And worst of all, when we possess all the world's good things we could possibly desire, we cannot keep them. Death enters and separates us from our property forever. Naked we came into the world, and we will leave it naked."

Understand that J. C. Ryle, he didn't come to that by adopting some form of stoicism to deal with the loss of his father's fortune. He felt all this deeply and acutely, and he felt it for the rest of his life. His feelings were not detached in some cloud, mystical religion. His faith was robust and practical. He walked around in it. He wrote this, "I believe that God never expects us to feel no suffering or pain when it pleases him to visit us with affliction. Submission to God's will is perfectly compatible with intense and keen suffering under the chastisements of that will. Troubles, in fact, not felt are no troubles at all. To feel trouble deeply and yet

submit to it patiently is that which is required of a Christian. A man may submit cheerfully to a severe surgical operation in the full belief that it is his duty to submit and that the operation is the likeliest way to secure health, but it does not follow that he does not feel the operation most keenly, even at the moment that he is most submissive. It was a wise saying of holy Baxter, when he was dying of a painful disease, 'I groan, but I do not grumble.'"

Listen, beloved, this world that we live in, it is under a curse and by pursuing the world, and chasing the world, and trying to gain the world, and be something or be someone in this world, you are chasing the wind and pining after death. "All that is in the world," 1 John 2:16, "is lust, sinful desire, self-centered longing. It's the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." None of that is of God. It foams forth from the decay of a dead and rotting world.

And so "if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." So those who love the world are not Christians. There can be no happy truce between the world and God. Jesus laid down that principle, Luke 16:13, we'll eventually get there, "No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and

despise the other.” That’s the principle. But the immediate application, there, “You cannot serve God and money.” Well, we could add other applications to the same principle. You can’t serve God and self. You can’t serve God and your career. You can’t serve God and stuff. You can’t serve God and ambition, and reputation, and leisure, and food, and entertainment, and money, and sensual desire, and fill in the blank. All that stuff is what the world is made of.

And as James says so clearly, “Friendship with the world is enmity with God. Whoever, therefore, wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” God is a jealous God. He tells us that from the very beginning, in the Ten Commandments. “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or an idol. You shall not bow down to them and serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am” what? “A jealous God.”

In fact, the “Holy Spirit, whom God made to dwell in us,” James 4:5 says, “he envies intensely.” That Holy Spirit, it lives within us is so intensely jealous of our heart’s affections, he wants to see our hearts enraptured with Christ, totally devoted to God, undyingly loyal to him. Why? Because our life devoted to God is our joy; it’s our soul’s satisfaction and

happiness. That is the jealousy of divine love. He wants what's best for us. So that means you can't serve him with part of your heart and serve yourself with the rest of it. He will have all of you, or none of you. That's the, jel, jealousy of divine love.

Christ says, "Let go of the world and all that's in it. Embrace me. You will gain your soul." How is that possible? Because through Christ we are made partakers of the divine nature. Through Christ we're united to him because he is in union with God. We're united to him and united to God, "for you have died," Colossians 3:3 says, "and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

If you're in union with the creator and the sustainer of the universe, you're in union, then, with the source of all being. You're in union with the source and giver of all life. You're in union with the self-sustaining God. We could put this in terms of the, Green New Deal. God is the only sustainable source of renewable energy in the universe. We should send that to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, right? She needs to understand this and put it in her Green New Deal. Self-sustainable energy! Life from God!

So why do we follow? Because Jesus has called us. We want to follow. He says to us all, "Anyone who will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose, and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses, or forfeits himself?" I hope you're hearing that because that's either-or language. It's black and white.

No middle ground, here. There's no room, here, for mediocrity, for passivity, for half-hearted, good-enough Christianity because that's false Christianity. Jesus is calling, here, for radical, whole-hearted commitment. He's calling for profound engagement in the Christian life in the worship of God and in the church for which Jesus Christ died.

One man who lived this way was an American missionary named Jim Elliott. You guys have heard the story, I'm sure. He died in 1956 evangelizing the Auca people of Ecuador. Remember this saying, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose"? You know, his death proved that he believed that. I can say without fear of contradiction Jim Elliott today believes that he made a good exchange. He traded the prospect of a long and prosperous life in wealthy America

and embraced, instead, a short and violent death in impoverished Ecuador.

And if he could stand before you today, he'd make the same trade a thousand times and tell you to do the same and follow him, because that short life of Jim Elliott is still bearing fruit. Only God, the omniscient God can count its measure. Jim Elliott died in 1956 when he was only 28 years old, same age, by the way, as Henry Scougal, when he died of tuberculosis at 28, 300 years earlier, roughly. He died in, 16, 1678. When Scougal was just 27 years old, he wrote the words that I've been quoting to you, and he wrote the words of this prayer, which we'll use now to close. Bow with me and pray along with me as we follow the model of this prayer of young Henry Scougal.

"And now, O most gracious God, Father and fountain of mercy and goodness, who has blessed us with the knowledge of our happiness and the way that leadeth unto it, open our eyes, O God, and teach us out of Thy law. Bless us with an exact and tender sense of our duty and a knowledge to discern perverse things. O, that our ways were directed to keep Thy statutes; then we shall not be ashamed when we have respect unto to all Thy commandments. Possess our hearts with a generous and holy disdain of all those poor enjoyments which this world holdeth

out to allure us, that they may never be able to entice our affections or betray us unto any sin. Turn our eyes from beholding vanity. Quicken Thou us in Thy law.

“Fill our souls with such a deep sense and full persuasion of those great truths which Thou hast revealed in the Gospel as may influence and regulate our whole conversation, and that the life which we may live henceforth in the flesh we may live through faith in the Son of God. O, that the infinite perfections of Thy blessed nature and the astonishing expressions of Thy goodness and love may conquer and overpower our hearts, that they may be constantly rising toward Thee in flames of the most devout affection, enlarging themselves in severe and cordial love toward all the world for Thy sake, that we may cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in Thy fear, without which we can never hope to behold and enjoy Thee. Finally, O God, lead us in Thy truth and teach us, for Thou art the God of our salvation. Guide us with Thy counsel, and afterward receive us into glory for the merits and intercession of Thy beloved Son, our Savior. Amen.”