

Have you ever thought about why so many people buy into things like the prosperity gospel, the churches for people who don't like church, or the "anything goes" gospel? It gives people a peace of mind because they believe they are in Christ. And on top of all that, these specific gospels offer things like health, and happiness, and emotional fulfillment, and better family life, and addiction-free lives, which are all wonderful things! Lots of times people will come to Jesus for these things. And I will suggest to you that with these things people come to Jesus for, he didn't have to come into the world to provide! He could have and does provide these from Heaven. There's only one unique thing Jesus came to provide on this Earth. We're going to read 4 verses and we can decide what it is.

John 1:29, John 3:16, Luke 24:46-47, Acts 13:37-38. Jesus' main purpose of coming into the world was providing the forgiveness of sins! So many people come to Christ for every other reason under the sun except for what Jesus came to provide, forgiveness of sins! They come for health, or happiness, or emotional fulfillment which can be found outside of Christ. All you have to do is think you are in Christ and you can get those things. The *only unique blessing* to those who are truly in Christ is forgiveness of sins. All those other things are secondary. Two illustrations:

1. Man
 - Leads an extremely sinful life, did terrible things
 - Starts going to worship services and reading his Bible
 - Sees what Jesus did for him and he is the only way to get forgiveness
 - Comes tearfully to Christ and becomes a Christian
 - Completely changes his life
2. Woman
 - Raised in the Church, knows right from wrong
 - She is a good person
 - She thinks being in Christ will give her a happy life
 - Gets baptized because it's just what they are supposed to do
 - Doesn't really change, still a good person
3. Both go through ups and downs. The man can persevere because he knows Christ came to provide forgiveness not a happy life. The woman is no longer faithful because she expected a happy life and didn't change.

The question is why? The answer is the man understood that Jesus came to offer forgiveness and he completely changed who he was to get that. So, when troubles came, he persevered because Christ didn't promise ease. The woman came for the secondary benefits of Christ, so when troubles came she was no longer faithful. After she was baptized there was no change in her life, just the next step. The man came out of that water ready to work because of the immense gratitude for forgiveness. The woman came out of that water expecting blessings without a real change in her life.

She is, what I am going to call, an unchanged Christian. If we are not becoming a brand new person after we are baptized then there is something wrong! We need to be able to look back on our baptism and know without a doubt that was a turning point in our life! Completely changes us! I think the reason we may have this problem, if nothing changes, it is because what don't really understand what it means to follow Jesus! So, for a few minutes tonight, that is what I want to study!

How to follow Jesus: **Luke 9:23**

In all of these, there are two stages. There is the initial stage before we are a Christian or at our conversion and there is the continual stage after we have become a Christian.

DENY OURSELVES

1. Initially, what Jesus means by denying ourselves is after we realize we want to follow him, we have to give up who we are! The reason for that is because the person we are is disgusting. We are full of sin which like dirt and grime covering us from head to toe! We realize we are completely and utterly lost without Jesus! We ought to be grieving for our sins and tearfully coming to God begging for his forgiveness with a broken spirit! **Luke 7:37-38**. She was weeping! She was cleaning the Master's feet with her tears and her hair because she was a sinner! She came to Jesus in the right way for the right reason. She knew that only Jesus offers salvation! While those Pharisees all around him

were looking with disapproval because she was a sinner, this woman understood! Look at **verses 47-48**. This woman's sins were forgiven her. She denied herself and dropped her pride to serve the master.

2. The continual change of denying oneself is a changed lifestyle. Where the old self would do whatever they want, the new self realizes that they are not their own and make every decision, every path, every minute of every day to serving the master no matter what he says. **Ephesians 4:22-24**. This is exactly what it means to deny yourself continually. After we become a Christian we forget that old self. We deny that old self and put on this new self. Paul then gives some specific examples in the verses that follow. Look at **verse 28-29**. If someone is a thief and they become a Christian, the desire to steal may still be there but you deny yourself and labor. If someone used foul language and becomes a Christian, you deny yourself and give words of edification. We deny the old self and make way for the new self.

TAKE UP OUR CROSS DAILY

1. Initially, what Jesus means by taking up a cross is after we realize we want to follow him and after we deny ourselves, we realize that Jesus is the ONLY one who offers salvation and we die for him. We talked a couple weeks ago how the cross meant one thing to those in the first-century. Death. So what Jesus says is, "You be willing to die for me." You are actually taking up *your* cross, not someone else's, yours. That means you are going to die on this cross. So initially, we have to put to death that old self that we are denying. **Romans 6:3, 6-7**. We crucify our old self through baptism. We deny them and kill them, they are gone. We are no longer slaves to sin and now we have been cleansed from our sins. That dirt and grime of sin has been taken away!
2. The continual change of taking up our cross, the one that is daily, is we are willing to die for him every day because he has cleansed us from our sins! We need to be so appreciative and so lovingly thankful that it doesn't matter what he tells us to do we are going to do it! If we came to Jesus with a broken spirit then there will be nothing he asks of us that we won't do! **Romans 6:17-18**. Paul says thanks be to God that though we were slaves to sin we have been freed and because of our gratefulness we willingly make ourselves slaves of righteousness! We want to serve God with everything that we are because we are so thankful! We need to be people that are willing to die for him every day.

FOLLOW HIM

1. Initially, what Jesus means by follow me is just do it. Notice in **Luke 9:23**, that Jesus says whoever wants to *follow me* must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and *follow me*. Jesus kind of bookends this statement. Jesus says if you want to follow me, then follow me. Change your life! If you are going to do it then do it, but don't do it halfway. Follow me. That means as we look through the scriptures we take what he says on every issue and we do it. **James 1:22**. It is such a simple idea but it can be so difficult for us. If we come to god broken, understanding the seriousness of what we have done, and are willing to die for Christ every day, then we will do what he says!
2. The continual change of following Jesus is becoming more and more like him. **John 21:18-22**. Jesus says follow me twice to Peter. He says no matter what's going on you follow me. This is right after Jesus asks him 3 times if he loves him, and says tend my lambs, shepherd my sheep, tend my sheep. Jesus is saying you become more and more like me and take care of these people. So, for us, we want to become more and more like Jesus, then we put God before our families. We rebuke our close friends in sin. We defend God even if it puts our life at risk. We are compassionate to those who ask for our forgiveness. And that is anybody who asks us for forgiveness. If we have Christ as our example then we need to take the uncomfortable things Christ did into account and follow him.

What is common in all three of these instructions is change! We can't afford to be unchanged Christians because if we are unchanged, we are not following Christ! If we have been baptized into Christ and our lives have not been drastically changed by it, then there is something wrong. If we were a good person before we were baptized we still had sin. And after baptism we need to be 2x, 3x, 4x more active in the Lord's work afterward. We need to follow the footprints of Jesus and seek to be more like him!