



Christ's Perfect Provision-Part 5

When Following Him Is Painful

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Perhaps you, like me, grew up hearing about those fabled restaurants that were so exclusive that they didn't print the prices on the menu—heard of those places? But for all these years, I have to admit I've never been to a restaurant where they didn't put the price on the menu. I have been to some froufrou restaurants, though, where they remove the dollar sign—there's just a number over there on the side. Or the kind that think they're really nifty by just writing out, like, thirty-eight; they don't have the numbers, they just have to spell everything out. "Salad twenty-two." I've been to some of those. But I've never been to the restaurant where they say, "If you have to ask the price, then you can't afford it."

I thought of those restaurants because I read an article in the news this week about a suburban Charlotte, North Carolina restaurant that decided they were going to take all the prices off of their menu and just let you pay whatever you want. I like that policy—kind of praying that comes to the Best Buy stores here in South County. Let me know when you start that, because I'll be there paying whatever I want.

When I heard of that restaurant that let you pay whatever you want, I had to move from the news—because it was some news site that had that—and I had to find this place, you know, go to their website. I've got to see this for myself. So I finally tracked them down online, and I realized, when I start recognizing, "Yeah, this is the place," they said, "Oh yeah, they did have that policy, but they only had it... it only lasted a week." It only lasted a week. Because you're going to acquire some commodity or enjoy the benefit of some service—of course there's costs involved, and you need to pay those costs, or they won't be able to continue to give you those things. So things cost, and you need to pay what they cost.

And I realized that when you think about paying costs, it's not always a monetary amount that we're dealing with either. There are some things that may not cost financially, but there's some kind of related cost you need to factor in when you acquire that thing, whatever it might be.

Imagine for a moment a young couple comes to you and says, "Listen, I want to talk to you about having children," and they know you've had kids, "and I want to talk about that. I want to let you know that I have some benefactor that has come to me, though, and said, 'I'm going to pay for all of your medical expenses.'" Such a graciously received free gift—a trip to labor and delivery—it won't cost



you a cent. So they want to sit down with you and ask about children. And you say, “Well, if it’s all paid for, what are you worried about? Just have a bunch.” That would be cruel and misleading, would it not? Even though maybe all of your expenses are paid at the hospital, it doesn’t mean having kids isn’t going to affect your life in a dramatic way. And it’s certainly going to cost you to have children even if someone pays the bills at the hospital.

I give that analogy because some people look at Christianity very one-dimensionally. And they read verses like they grew up with in Ephesians 2:8–9; they talk about the free gift of eternal life. And, you know, you can’t earn it, so this is all about grace, and it’s all free, and, you know, Christ paid for it. And then they say, “Well, see there, it’s all free,” and they invite people to become Christians and they never even talk about the cost because they say, “It’s about grace. It’s free.”

Well, my contention, after reading the Bible, is that would be a cruel and misleading way to discuss the gospel, and so it would be a foolish way for us to think about the gospel. Because though I have to affirm—absolutely, the Bible’s clear—the currency that it takes to get you right with your Maker, the righteousness that you need to be forgiven by the eternal, holy God, is a currency you don’t have and can’t afford. And so in that regard, it’s all bestowed on you by grace through Christ. I get that: it is free, you cannot earn it. But to say—even though it is paid for in the currency that is provided in Christ—that doesn’t mean that if you associate with Christ and become a recipient of that forgiveness it is not going to cost you, radically affect your life. And if you step into Christianity not knowing that, you’re in for a big, big surprise.

Well, the grace of Christ is this—as we finally reach this particular passage, it’s well-known to many here. In our verse-by-verse study of Luke, we’ve reached Luke chapter 9, verses 23 through 27. That’s what we’ll cover this morning. And the good news is Christ is going to lay out to His potential followers the costs involved. I mean, He doesn’t give us a menu without numbers on it. He says, “Here is exactly what it’s going to cost you to follow Me.” Now that doesn’t come as some contradiction of grace; it’s certainly not. It is absolutely paid for in full by Christ for you to be forgiven and to have your sins obliterated—I understand that. But if you are going to ally yourself with Christ, if you want to be forgiven, it will impact your life in ways you need to be ready to—as often we say—count the cost. Consider it carefully.

Take a look at these verses. And please, as you get your eyes to verse 23, look back up and remember where we were last time. Jesus had said to them—in a sermon that we entitled “When Your Expectations Aren’t Met”—He said to them, after coming off the heels of this great explanation about Christ, saying, “Yeah, You are the Christ of God, You are the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies,” He then says, “Hey, you need to understand, there’s this seeming detour in terms of your



expectation. It's called the cross. I have to suffer, be rejected by the chief priests and the scribes, and then I'm going to be killed. You just need to factor that into the path for Me to the crown—it involves a cross. And so just get your thoughts straight about what it means to be My follower, and certainly who I am."

Well, Jesus then turns—if you'll notice the first five words of verse 23—not just to the twelve. This is no longer the inner-circle discussion. Luke contrasts this statement about the suffering of Christ, and now He says—that was the message to the crowds—He says to all, look at this, verse 23: "And He said to all, 'If anyone'"—now this is an open call to anyone who wants to be allied with Christ, wants to be forgiven, be on His team, be what we would call a Christian—"If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life"—you want to avoid those things?—"you're going to lose it. But whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world"—talk about saving your life—"what if you got everything, and everything went perfectly and went your way on this earth—what if you got all of that and yet loses or forfeits himself?" Rhetorical question: that would be terrible—tragic. Verse 26: "For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

Now, the kingdom of God, Christ in His glory, the glory of the Father—all of that spectacular re-appearance of Christ in the Second Coming, the second advent—He says that's coming, and you want to be on the right team, on the right side. And then He says, "Oh, there are some here that won't taste death until they see the kingdom of God." Now that necessitates that we look at the next few verses. We won't read them or anything, but you need to know what comes next. What comes next? Transfiguration—which is this moment when God reveals Christ's glory in some unmitigated fashion, and they get a taste, a glimpse of the kingdom. Now that's just for a few people—Peter, James, and John. For the rest of us, we taste death and then we see the kingdom. For them, they got a little preview of it without tasting death. And so that's the exception. Most of your translations of the text do, as they rightfully should linguistically and grammatically—they put this verse 27 with the previous section that we're studying today—but it is a setup for where we're going next time in verses 28 and following.

Well, let's take this section at a time, starting in verse 23, where Jesus graciously gives us what it means to be a follower of Christ. Of course, you don't earn your way into the family of God; but once you're there, there are some related costs. So let us be thankful, if nothing else, that the prices are on the menu. Number one in your outline—if you're taking notes—let's jot this down: we need to be grateful that the costs are clear. Let us be grateful that it is no surprise if you actually read the words of Christ or encountered a truthful evangelist in your past, that someone said to you very carefully, "Listen, it is free of charge to become a Christian. But once you are a Christian, there's this thing called



self-denial, daily cross-bearing, and following Him; and those things will radically impact and affect your life. It will be a costly decision for you—count the cost.” That’s good for us to understand.

Three things—you can see them there; they’re obviously in three separate components, they’re all related: “let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” At the center of that, that relates to both denial of my own self and following Christ, is the central picture of someone carrying, or bearing, or taking up his cross. Now, the problem with me in the twenty-first century talking to Christians in America about the cross is it has none of the power, none of the sobriety, none of the gravity that it had in the first century—particularly in the first century before Christ went to the cross. Because even after the cross historically in the first century, you could say, “Well, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, the way He did that was He was crucified and suffered on this Roman execution rack outside the city gates of Jerusalem.” So I know that’s theologically significant. Well, at this point that hasn’t happened yet. So at this point—even though He said in verse 22, “I’ve got to suffer, I’ve got to be rejected, and I’m going to be killed”—I guess if they thought about it, the worst kind of death you could be subject to would be a Roman execution. I mean, I guess that could be in their thoughts. But then He says, “I want to tell you, you want to follow Me? Let’s just get you thinking about the cross. And what it’s going to require is that you bear your cross daily.”

Now, if you know anything about the history of crucifixion in the first century, and you know about the story of the Via Dolorosa, or Christ bearing His crossbeam of the cross, you understand that that’s how they crucified people. They’d have a stake outside where they were going to crucify you—somewhere outside the city, because the Jews wouldn’t let it happen within the city gates—but outside the city there would be a place where there would be this post or this stake. You would carry this very heavy crossbeam; you would be beaten, you’d be stripped, and you would have to carry that heavy load on your shoulders through the streets as people jeered at you and mocked you as some kind of societal reject or some kind of criminal or insurrectionist. And moms would take their teenage boys and say, “Look at that—that’s where your life ends up if you reject what’s righteous or good,” and you would be mocked and maligned, and people would spit on you as you walked through the streets carrying the crossbar to the place where they would affix it to the stake and hang you on it, and you would die there.

Today, though, if I talk about the cross—usually it’s gilded on the front of pulpits, it’s over the shoulder of preachers, it’s on the buildings, on steeples. They have it plastered everywhere. Some of you have it gilded in precious metals and hanging around a chain around your neck. You have it in the entryways of your home with some beautiful Gothic design, and you, you know, dust it once a week to keep it going. We view the cross very differently than the apostles and the disciples and the would-be disciples that heard Jesus say, “Want to join My team? Let’s think about cross-bearing.” It’d be more like me talking about the guillotine. As far as I know, the guillotine is not the logo of any organization that I know of. We have the cross—that’s our logo. But no one thinks of the guillotine as this instrument of death and says, “Oh, but it’s also our logo,” and we—“Do you want it in silver and



gold?” “Okay, that looks nice on you.” No one sells them in bookstores, on plaques, or images of you. No one does that because it’s associated with one thing, and that is killing you—chopping your head off. Or the electric chair. Think about Jesus if He had used something that had the force that it has with us today—an instrument of killing people—and He said, “You want to join My team? Well, step on up into the electric chair.” What kind of evangelistic appeal is that? “Anyone who will come after Me, come up; just step up, step into the electric chair,” or into the gas chamber. In California, “enter into the gas chamber.” But gas chambers, guillotines, and electric chairs—as you may have heard me say previously—are really meant to kill you. The cross was meant to kill you; but before it killed you, to spend many hours torturing you. You understand that, right? There are easier ways to kill people in the first century. This was to put you on public display, let you suffer publicly, be tortured for hours before you die.

I guess the best and the closest we get to that in terms of some visual reminder is if you happen to go to London, in England, and you take the tour of the Tower of London—if you’ve been there—and in there they’ll have the rack, this historic figure, and there are plaques there and you read it. And there’s the rack where they put people in the Tower of London on the rack, and they would torture them, and their joints would pop out, and they would stretch on this rack. And you picture it and you go in there and “Oh, this is where they kept the prisoners.” And I understand that the Tower of London served many purposes through the years, but that was one thing it’s notorious for. And when you see the rack there—I mean, if you have any sense of humanity—“Ooh, this is horrible.” And in those days when they did that, if you were that kind of criminal and we knew it wasn’t just “We want to kill you or chop your head off.” We want to send you to be tortured. I mean, the verbiage they might say is, “Listen, you’re this bad guy—off to the Tower with you.” Off to the Tower—the Tower of London—where we do what? We hear screams over the wall, where people are tortured.

I think about that. That may be more of an accurate picture—Christ sitting around in some London setting back in the day saying, “Hey, you want to be My follower? Well, it’s off to the Tower for you—every day, daily.” “What are You talking about?” Well, what you’re talking about is the next phrase that follows it: “follow Me.” Well, that can be seen on two levels, but let’s just think in terms of following the pattern of Christ. Because what does it say in verse 22? He says, “You know, I, the Christ of God that you’re so excited about—I have to suffer, be rejected, and be killed. Now follow Me.” You take up your own crossbeam and follow Me. You take up your own suffering and your own rejection and incur your own ridicule and derision. Because if you stand with Me, you need to understand I’m saying things, representing things, doing things in this generation that they don’t like. And if you stand with Me—I’m calling you to follow Me—and that means not only in the things that I say but in the effects that that has. You stand with Me and you’ll follow in the pattern of Me.

In fact, you should put in the margin of your Bibles John 15:20—John 15:20—which is a perpetual reminder to the followers of Christ that simply says this: He says, “Please remember: if they persecuted



Me, they're going to persecute you." See, it should be no surprise. Now, for a generation that likes to hand the Christian menu to people without any prices on it, people assume that's not part of the deal. But Jesus handed clearly to His would-be disciples: "You want to follow Me? I just need to let you know you'll follow in the pattern of the difficulty that I have—living a righteous life, proclaiming a righteous message in an unrighteous world—and they will chafe against that. So you're going to have to follow Me."

Let's be even more specific about that. "Follow Me"—I said it's clear that we follow Him on two levels. We follow in His pattern, but the reason we follow in His pattern is because we have to follow—as any disciple would understand—we follow the Master. We follow the Teacher. I mean, the rabbi has his disciples, the Teacher has His students, the Master has His servants. And that means that clearly there's somebody in charge and someone who's following, someone who's deferring, someone who is obeying. You've heard me rant enough about the "God is my co-pilot" bumper sticker—I don't have to do that again this morning. Do you know how much I hate that? There are none in the parking lot, I trust. No one has that on their car, because of the rank heresy. Why? Because God is not going to be your co-pilot. He will never sign up to enter your spaceship and be your co-pilot. He has only—He's got one job: if He's going to invade a life and get into your "car," quote-unquote, He's going to be the pilot. He is the Master; you are the servant. He is the Teacher; you are the student. He is the Rabbi; you are the disciple. He's the One in charge—He's going to steer the ship, He's going to mark out the course, and He wants you to follow Him. You're going to have to obey Him. And that means that everything is laid on the table. We have to recognize, "Okay, I'm ready to let You be the leader."

You want a verse for the margin of your Bible on this? I know I quote it a lot, but 2 Corinthians 5:15—2 Corinthians 5:15: "He died for us so that those who live should no longer live"—you know the rest—"for themselves." Now I live for Him.

If you and I were having a donut at a table after church today, and some guy walks up and says, "Hey, I want to tell you—I led someone to Christ." "Really? Tell us." "It was a prostitute." Oh, we'd get our attention—I want to hear the story. "Oh, tell me about that. So how did you meet this prostitute? Tell me how the evangel..." It'd be interesting. And so they tell us, and give us this great story about leading this prostitute to Christ—however it might have happened. And so when they're done and they talk about how this prostitute responded to the grace of God, repented of her sins, put her trust in Christ, we would now expect, "Well, did you deal with, like, step one in her spiritual growth—like, talking about her career choice?" I mean, did that come up? Clearly that's what we'd expect—now that you're saved, you should look at your job and say, "Well, maybe this doesn't really match God's plan for my life because it's immoral and sinful." And so you did talk about that. You would expect that if someone said they led a prostitute to Christ.



Now, would you expect that if someone led an accountant to Christ? An architect? A professor? A dentist? We wouldn't expect that—even though we know, as a non-Christian, someone chose to be an architect or an accountant or a dentist or a professor; they chose that because that's what they wanted to do with their life. And now they become a Christian, we would think, "Well, you know, that's a respectable job; I don't want to be hardcore with this person." See, but when we become a Christian, one of the costs that we have to pay is that we are coming and saying, "My life is Yours. I'm under new management. What would You like to do with me?" Everything is on the table. We say to God, "What would You want me to do?" That's a decision and a discussion and a debate and a negotiation, if you will, that we have with the King of kings and Lord of lords. When we become Christians, everything's on the line. "I no longer live for myself."

If you want to look at the menu and the prices next to it, it is your future, your career, the direction of your life—not just the pain incurred for standing with Christ in a world that is unrighteous and doesn't really like the real Christ. That, I suppose, can be tied into the first phrase: "Let him deny himself." There are lots of things I would like to do with my life that—frankly, and I could tell my testimony; some of you who have heard it—I wouldn't bore you with it again this morning. But when it comes to things I want to do, I have things I want to do with my life. But, of course, as a Christian I recognized early on—thankfully by good mentors and teachers—"Hey, you've got to put all that on the table. What does God want to do with your life?" That's the question. And that changed the direction of everything for me. Some people, I understand, who become Christians as architects or accountants continue in that path even though they put everything on the table; and Christ is really Lord. I realize that God often doesn't redirect your career; I understand that. But you should understand that when you come to Christ, your life is now His. He has the right to make that decision, and you should be open to following wherever He leads.

But there's another level of that self-denial that sometimes is painful, and it feels like suffering and it feels like a cross. That happens not on the macro level of my life planning; it happens on the microcosm of the everyday decisions that I make. As a matter of fact, you're on a crash course with this this afternoon. There are things in your life you'll want to do that you know—because of the revealed will of God—you should not do. And therefore you're going to have to, in the dramatic words of the Apostle Paul, put to death the deeds of the flesh. That will be things I want to say—I know, though, the will of God would say, "Bite your tongue." There are things that I'll want to think and imaginations that I like to engage in; but, you know, because of what God's will is on paper, I need to make sure that I say, "No, I'm going to deny that." I have to do a lot of battling in my own life to deny my impulses, passions, and desires.

One passage on that I'd like you to look at: 1 Peter chapter 4. Let's start in verse 1. Just to remember that to be a Christian—it may be free in that the righteousness of Christ has been provided to you because of the gracious and free gift of God—but once you are a recipient of that grace, what will be



demanding of you is following the Christ that sometimes requires painful sacrifice. That will happen on the level of denying yourself what you want, sometimes on a minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour basis.

Verse 1, 1 Peter chapter 4: “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh”—which, by the way, was not only—the Bible makes clear—the kind of animosity and division He received from people that didn’t like righteous things, people who loved the darkness rather than the light; it was also, according to the book of Hebrews, because of things in His life we call temptations. We see that at the outset of His own ministry: that He faced desires He had to say no to—even in His own life—self-denial when He was here. He suffered in the flesh. “So,”—hey, Christians—Peter says—“arm yourselves with”—I love this phrase—“the same way of thinking.” And what was the way of thinking that He had? Well, His thing was, “I’m not going to sin. I’m going to do the right thing.” Hey, if you’re suffering—if you’re in that mindset—“whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” You’re willing now to be uncomfortable, to have the deprivation of not fulfilling your impulses and desires on several levels when they conflict with the will of God. And that’s because you don’t want to sin.

“So as to live”—let’s finish the sentence, verse 2—“so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for”—here’s the purpose, commitment, and resolve of your heart—“no longer for human passions”—that’s not why I’m here, to obey my passions, my human passions—“but instead I’m living for”—here’s my purpose—“the will of God.”

Now, on a macro level we can talk about career planning, your life, and all of that. But let’s talk about this afternoon. When your passion, your desire, your impulse will be in conflict with the will of God—now that I’m a follower of Christ, the price on the menu, so to speak, is: you will not always be able to do what you want. You will have to purposefully, willfully, through the resolve and the work of the Spirit in your life, say no to things that you want. Non-Christians won’t get it.

Verse 3: “The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do—living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.” They do whatever they want—whatever feels good. “With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery,” and they—here’s what happens, at the very least—they malign you, make fun of you, they mock you. They say things in demeaning ways to you because you won’t live like they live—because you’ve got all of these fences and parameters up—because you are—here’s the thing we hear from people even that name Christ—“You’re just a legalist; that’s what you are.” Well, the Bible says that’s the price you’re going to pay—derision from people. By the way, not only people that don’t name the name of Christ, but people that do name the name of Christ. Remember the people there that say to Jesus on that last day—on Judgment Day—they say, “Lord, Lord, did we not...”—and they list their résumé. And Jesus says, “Depart from Me. I never knew you.” You know the last line: “you who



practice”—what?—“lawlessness.” Oh, you’re saying, “Lord, Lord”—which, by the way, is a term of affinity, of tenderness. Right? It’s like when God comes to Samuel there as a boy and “Samuel, Samuel.” Well, they’re saying, “Lord, Lord—come on, we’re with You, we love You, we’re with You. Look at the stuff we’ve done. We’ve done it all in Your name.” And He says, “You have not lived according to My will, you lawless ones.” They’re the kinds of people that look at you and call you crazy. They’re surprised that you don’t just, you know, allow yourself to have some fun. “Where’s the liberty? Where’s the grace?” With respect to this—whatever the indulgence of their human passions might be—they’re surprised when you don’t join them in the same flood of debauchery to... and they malign you.

Be grateful that the costs are clear. And maybe you’re not a Christian here this morning and you’re thinking about it. It’s great for me to say to you that the payment on the cross of Christ has paid everything you need to be right with the living God—to trust in that, to say, “It is paid in full.” You can know for sure that you will be right with the living God at the moment you die—that if the world were to end today, you would go to heaven. To have that assurance—it’s absolutely, 100% free. Take it by faith and embrace it. But before you do, count the cost of what it will cost you to live the remainder of this life following Christ. Sometimes it’ll feel like being sent to the Tower to be tortured. Sometimes it’ll feel painful, and it may even cost you your life. I know it will cost you many of your desires. “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.”

Now notice what happens here in verse 24 of Luke chapter 9. The focus now changes. In other words, the orientation of this changes to the way that some people would say, “I don’t like those prices—they’re too high.” “Whoever would”—and here’s what I want to do: “I don’t want all that self-denial; I don’t want all that pain of daily carrying my cross; I don’t want to also slavishly follow Christ and obey Him.” They want to save their lives. Now here’s the warning of Christ: you want to do that—you want to live like that, you want to protect yourself from all the pain and deprivation and sacrifice and self-denial—you’re going to lose your life. That path—it’s not the path of genuinely converted people. Then He flips it around—we’ll look at this later—“Whoever loses his life”—that’s what it will feel like—“you’re going to save it.”

But let’s think again to the person who wants to save his life. Let’s say that you avoid the self-denial, you avoid the cross-bearing; you still want to say, “Lord, Lord.” You want to be in with Him, but you don’t want to follow Him. You don’t want to do those things that the world doesn’t like. Well, let’s just say you live that way and you gain all kinds of things—you get acceptance, people like you, you’ve got a foot in both worlds; you gain the whole world. He says: “I’ve already told you, you’re going to lose your life. And if that’s the case, at the end of your life, if you lose it and forfeit—what good was that?” So you had a few years, a few decades of acceptance and fulfillment and gratification, and no real sacrifice for walking with Christ—but you lose your soul. Rhetorical question—what good is that? That’s no good. That’s a terrible deal. That’s a ripoff.



Now, how do I seek to save my life and gain the world? Well, there's one simple way: the things that people don't like about Christ and your Christianity—just don't let those show. Be ashamed of it. Hold those back. Don't say those things. Don't stand for those things. Don't be known for those things. But He says, "If you're ashamed of Me and My words, of that person—of him—will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and the holy angels."

You don't want to be on the wrong side, on the wrong team, in the wrong place—not aligned with Christ—when He comes back. That would be a horrible loss—to forfeit yourself. And the real key here is: Are you ashamed or are you not ashamed? Are you standing with Him boldly or are you not? Are you willing to suffer the consequences of being allied with Christ or not?

Number two—let me state this the way I think it's certainly intended in verses 24 through 26—it is a warning for us. We need to beware, let's call it this: the persistent, the perennial, the ubiquitous—whatever word you want. It is always present—the ever-present ripoffs that are constantly pressuring and tempting us to say, "Be ashamed. Tuck it back. Don't be so bold. Don't stand up so vocally for Christ. Can you just fit in? I mean, really? Do you really want to lose a promotion over this? You want to lose a client over this? You want to lose a friend over this? Come on—can't you just tuck it back?" There's the perennial temptation; there's the consistent, ever-present temptation in my life to say, "Well, I don't need to lead with all this Christianity stuff." But the Bible says that's a ripoff. It's a loser—it's a loser because you're going to lose your life; you'll forfeit your soul. And God is going to be ashamed of you.

You understand this equation: you cannot have the acceptance of the world—which is now defined as saving yourself and gaining—or you can't have that and be in alliance or solidarity with Christ. The way I like to put it is simply this: you can't have popularity with the world and solidarity with Christ at the same time. You can't. You've got to choose one or the other. You want to be popular in this generation, in this world, with non-Christians? You want to be popular? You want to be accepted? You want to be praised and applauded by them? Then you will not stand in solidarity with Christ. You just can't. The only way is to be ashamed of some aspect of who Christ is or something that He or His authoritative apostles have said. You've got to make that decision.

I've got you there in 1 Peter 4—if you didn't leave that text—I'd like you to drop down to verse 5. We stopped in verse 4, did we not? Read verse 5: "But they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." You see, at some point the tables turn. It is that in my life I have to decide who I'm going to stand for. Am I going to stand for Christ, or am I going to stand to fit in with



everyone else and just be able to kind of tailor and modify and tuck back things that I believe in? I've got to make the decision. And the Bible says if you compromise—if you're ashamed of Christ and His words—well then there's this price to pay. Because at some point, as He puts it in verse 26, "the Son of Man is going to come in His glory and the glory of His Father and His holy angels," and when that moment takes place, the teams are determined and they're evident by how you lived your life. And you don't want to be on the wrong side of that. Everyone will give an account to the One who created them—He's ready to judge the living (those who are His children) and the dead (those that are lost).

Jump down to verse 12. That continues in this passage—1 Peter chapter 4—when he says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though some strange thing were happening to you." Why are you surprised by this? "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings"—He denied Himself passions in His own life; He suffered rejection at the hands of the chief priests and the people that were important in His day—"share in those sufferings; don't be surprised about it, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed." Same equation: if you're not willing to share in the sufferings of Christ, well then you can't be glad and you can't rejoice when He comes—you'll be ashamed. Why? Because you've compromised to fit in with everyone else.

Verse 14: "If you are insulted for the name of Christ"—I love that. Matter of fact, some translations—it's so strong in the way "the Name" is presented in this text—it's translated "you who bear His Name." Right? If you're insulted because you bear the name "Christ"—it's like a jersey. Which, by the way, there are some places where you don't want to wear certain jerseys. Am I right? It depends on who the Dodgers are playing. You know, if you go to Chavez Ravine, you probably should root for the Dodgers. You've read the news; you know how this works. If they're playing San Francisco—even though they're big World Series winners and all that—I would say, don't wear your Giants jersey in the parking lot at Dodger Stadium. Not a good idea. Why? They're really serious about who you stand for there. You do not want to be on the opposing team. You, by the way, will be in the minority up there in L.A. when you go to Dodger Stadium. You want to be sure to wear Dodger gear—that's the best way to get along in the crowd at Dodger Stadium.

That's exactly the world we live in. You better not be wearing the label of Christ—standing with a determination and a resolve to do what He says, unashamed of His words. You wear that jersey, you bear that Name in a hostile environment—I don't care what generation it is. I understand we're not quite—in South County—seeing Christian pastors' heads chopped off because of their theology. I know it's happening in other places around the world. But if you don't think there's not hostility to be borne—derision to be had—because you stand unashamed of Christ and His words... And I think it's simple words like this in today's culture: that Christ said, "You've heard from the beginning: God created them male and female." The question was about marriage—male and female. He created them, and He joined them together, and "what God has joined together let man not separate." You just want to stand hard and fast on those words of Christ and be unashamed about that—to talk about male and



female and marriage and monogamy for life—you're going to take derision. As a matter of fact, there comes a point—even in our darkening culture—where that may cost you your job, that may cost you your freedom. That's going to cost you a lot just to stand unashamed of Christ's words, to bear that Name. He says, "If you do bear that Name and you get insulted for it"—people throw their beer at you in the stadium, so to speak—"you are blessed." Why? Because it's not just the Name you're bearing; it's the Spirit of glory and the glory of God that rests upon you.

Now, of course, we're not talking about just being the person everybody hates because you're a bad person. "But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler." It's not about being masochistic and wanting people to hate us. But verse 16: "If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that Name." Now again, that name for us is good—it's like preaching about the cross in the twenty-first century. To use the word "Christian"—to use a positive word as the pastor uses in church—not a positive word in the first century. That was a word of mockery, and it was a word of insult for people in the first century. They hated Christ—they crucified Christ—and they called His disciples "little Christs." "There go the little Christs." That's the word—literally—"Christian": little Christ. "Hey, little..." There—there go the little Christs. It was a term of mockery. Think about that. He says, "If you suffer as a little Christ, let him not be ashamed." You're not going to find that word all throughout the New Testament; it's used only three times in the Bible—"Christian." And it started as a term of derision. And even here it's allowing the fact that people are mocking you because of that. But don't be ashamed of that. As a matter of fact, here's the reason it's become a popular and positive word among Christians: because here is Peter's directive—"Let him glorify God in that Name." Fine—you want to call me a little Christ? Fine—I'll take that. I will glorify God in the fact that you think I'm a little Christ. Absolutely.

"For it is time for judgment to begin"—are you still reading in verse 17?—"at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" I'll say more on that in a minute, but right now they're throwing their heat against us. Where you stand with Christ, unashamed of what He taught and what He is—you get heat from the world. You deny yourself the passions of your flesh because Christ and His will is clearly inscribed in the Bible; and I'm saying no to things—they're going to be surprised and mock you and malign you because of that. And the Bible says all that heat that they generate and throw at you—all the "judgment" that comes against us as the household of God on this planet—is one day going to reverse. And at some point Christ is going to come back in His glory and the glory of His Father and the glory of His angels. And at that point everything shifts, and every forehead that mocked you will be pressed down upon the ground, according to Philippians chapter 2, and they will bow down before Christ; and they, with their tongues, will confess that Jesus Christ is the Boss—He's in charge—that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. And they then—because they acknowledge it—will not be forgiven; the time of God's grace will have ended. And God will then turn His judgment on them. And the Bible says you don't want to be ashamed of wearing our jersey—bearing the Name of Christ—in a world where they hate you for it, because it's the winning team.



I understand we're in the minority. I realize there's plenty of reasons they mock us, and they even make sense to us in some ways—in our minds—why they would make fun, malign, and mock us. But here's the thing: we're on the winning team. With all the desire that you have to be ashamed of Christ—it's a ripoff. It never is good. You don't want to be someone who puts the windbreaker over your jersey when you're in the wrong company. You follow that illustration? It's like the word "turncoat." You just throw on the jersey—whatever's popular at the time, in the context you're in. If you're in church—sure—you'll wear the Christ jersey. But when you're there at the office party, or you're there in that situation, you know, with your neighbors—well there, you know, "I just cover that up, and I put on some other kind of..." That's what we call a turncoat. Which, by the way, I know you think of turncoat as a political term of someone who's maybe a colonial defender of American freedom—whatever—and puts on the British Army coat and they're a turncoat. I know it's been used that way. But before it was ever used as a political term, the word "turncoat" was a theological term—coined, by the way—look it up—by John Foxe. Does that name sound familiar to you? He wrote the Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. And he spoke of people who, for a time, had some adherence to Christ and wore the jersey, and then showed their true colors because they weren't willing to be unashamed of Christ and His words. He called those people turncoats.

That's exactly what I'm talking about. We bear the Name of Christ—you're wearing His jersey—you wear it all the time, everywhere. Not to be a meddler, not to make an issue of everything so that you have people mock you—we're not talking about that ("don't suffer as a meddler"). But if you're being insulted because you're a Christian, revel in that Name—it's fine. We're on the winning team. And I'd like you to be on the winning team, because if you're not—if you continue to oppose us—you're going to see what judgment is like when you have to face the King.

I guess I should say something about the concept of ripoff that I'm trying to get to. I know the temptation is to gain something in this world. I know the temptation is to save myself the hassle and spare myself the ridicule. That's the temptation. But every time, it's a ripoff. You want the dramatic turncoat examples? Think for just a second, if you would, of people like Judas. Satan, I like to say, has deep pockets. Whatever it is that you want—that you think will be saving, sparing, or advancing your life in this world—Satan's ready to give you, as long as you'll change jerseys. Fine—thirty pieces of silver. He's got that; he'll find a way to get you that if that's all it takes for you. If you're Demas and you just want a better time—you want more fun—as Paul lamented about Demas: he loved this present world, so he deserted us; he's gone. He's changed teams, man. He's put on the other jersey. Or, if you know your Bible, how about a guy like Diotrephes—this wolf in sheep's clothing—who, all he wanted was power and recognition and adulation from people; always had to be first. You want power? You want prestige? You want pleasure? You want fun? You want money? Satan's so glad to give you that. All you have to do is be ashamed of Christ and His words. That's it. But it's a losing proposition every time.



I was thinking of “turncoat,” and the way John Foxe used that word—I thought of the chameleon who changes colors. You know, that lizard, that funky-looking lizard. These days I think we don’t use that analogy or that idiom so often, but you do know they change colors. And I thought, “I want to see it change colors.” And since I’m so colorblind, I needed to see it in dramatic fashion. So I went on YouTube this week—I looked up “chameleon time-lapse changing of the colors of a chameleon.” And it was fascinating to watch, because subtle, slow changes sometimes I can’t catch because I’m so colorblind; but it was great to watch it sped up—to watch a chameleon one color, within a matter of seconds, turn completely and radically into another color. And I thought, “Well, there’s an example of, you know, a turncoat—adaptation—and say, ‘Well, I’m going to just change for whatever environment I’m in.’” But the thing that freaked me out when I watched that—and I was reminded when I pulled up “chameleon” on YouTube—that that chameleon is one of those strange lizards that has these big, protruding eyeballs, and they don’t work in sync—you remember that? Oh, there’s just something wrong about that. And then do it in time-lapse—it’s like, “Oh! I can’t watch his face—just his body changing colors.” That’s what I was trying to think of to illustrate this point from Scripture.

I don’t want these eyeballs—not to make too much of this analogy here, and obviously there’s no connection between his eyeballs and the changing of his color. When I think about the way we turncoat, I certainly know it has to do with the focus of our proverbial lives. And I think the people that are willing to put on the other jersey, depending on what context, are going to be ashamed of Christ and His words—are those that are always looking at what people think. Always looking. I couldn’t help but think of the passage I quoted last week for you from Hebrews chapter 12. I think we may have even turned there—and you don’t need to turn there now—but you remember the words. The last line of verse 1 in Hebrews 12 said, “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Then verse 2 says this: “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who—for the joy set before Him—endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of God.” He had His eyes fixed on the goal. And we are to learn from that by fixing our eyes on Him as our ultimate example. I know the ESV translates that “looking to Jesus,” but the very strong construction there and the strong sense of emphasis on the gazing and the looking and fixing our eyes—I like the way that’s put. It’s a good translation of that idea: keep your eyes focused on Him. And you know, that’s going to help you—keep you from being the chameleon that wants to quickly shift depending on what crowd I’m in. It’s a ripoff. Keep your eyes on Christ. Be aware of the temptation to change jerseys.

So much we could say about that, but let’s finish this. Verse 24—second half of the verse. I kind of skipped over this phrase, but let’s pick it up now. It says at the beginning of the verse—Luke chapter 9, verse 24—“Whoever would save his life”—if you would save your life—“you’re going to lose it.” But here’s what it feels like—here’s what self-denial, cross-bearing, and following Christ feels like: it feels like many things in this life I’m going to lose out on; I’m going to miss out on; it’s going to be a sacrifice and pain, and that’s not the way I want to live life. But “if you’re willing to lose your life for



My sake”—here’s a great word that’s become theologically rich—“you’ll save it.” You’ll save it. That’s the winning proposition.

And then He says in verse 27—“Hey, I’ve talked about Christ coming in His glory and the glory of the Father and of all the holy angels; I’m telling you there are some people here that are getting a preview of that—‘some of you standing here will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.’” Now, you’ve just talked about the revealing of the glory of the Son of Man that Daniel 7 talks about—having all authority. That picture of the authoritative Christ—the King of kings and Lord of lords. He says there are some of you here that you don’t have to die to see it—you’re going to see it before you die. Now it’s a preview—and that’s what comes next: the Transfiguration. And that’s just Peter, James, and John—I get that. Because for the rest of us, if I invert this, I start to recognize what the goal is. I am willing to sacrifice these things on the menu; I’m going to pay that price—it’s a high price—because I know that after I taste death—this is the pattern—we taste it, and then we see the kingdom. As it says in 1 John 3, it hasn’t yet been seen what we will be; we’re children of God—we’re loved by God; but when He appears, we’ll see Him as He is, and we’re going to be changed. You want to know who we are? You can’t see it now. But when it comes, the value of being saved—of being embraced in the kingdom—and hearing these words: “Enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,” as opposed to hearing this in the same statement of Christ: “Depart from Me, you accursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” You’ve got two ending words you’re going to hear: “Enter in,” or “Depart from Me.” That’s it. And for me, to incur the pain and the cost and the penalty of standing with Christ and denying my own passions and living for Him as a Christian in a world that doesn’t like the real Christ of the Bible—it’s going to pay off.

Number three on your outline—let’s just get that equation in our minds very clearly—we need to let the value outweigh the costs. You’ve got to keep your eyes fixed. As Romans 8:18 says, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” There’s just no comparison. But I’ve got to keep thinking that way, because I can be overwhelmed with the cost of it all. Didn’t get promoted. They don’t like me at work. My neighbors think we’re strange. We never get invited to anything. Everyone makes fun of us behind our back. Listen—it’s a small price to pay to be on the right side of this thing when the Son of Man comes in His glory. Now, a few guys got to see this ahead of time—a little preview of it. We’re going to live in it; we’re going to walk into the kingdom and be embraced and blessed by God. But it will only be those who are willing to suffer for the kingdom now.

Let me show you one passage on this, please: 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. All the elements of what we’ve been talking about are right here. You may be wearing the wrong jersey boldly—bearing the Name of Christ—and getting ridiculed now; but that ridicule is a sign that you are wearing the right jersey—that you’re not ashamed of Christ and His words. And then one day, the winning team will be revealed.

Start in verse 5—2 Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 5: “This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God...” What is evidence? Well, you’ve got to look back in verse 4. He’s just talked about their steadfastness and their faith in all their persecutions, and then the afflictions that you are now enduring. So they’re having a hard time there in Thessalonica—the Christians are being persecuted. And he says, “That’s evidence of the righteous judgment of God.” What do you mean? “That you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering.” So you’re suffering—God saw you worthy, so to speak, to put that jersey on you. You’re standing firm and unashamed, and you’re having all this affliction, and you’re standing strong, and your faith is not wavering. There’s a sign of God’s righteous judgment right there. And speaking of God’s good decision-making and His judgment, there is a day when all that’s going to turn around. “Since indeed”—verse 6—“God considers it just”—He’s a God of justice. I know we want Him not to be a God of justice, but He is—and He’s going to “repay with affliction those who afflict you.” Every forehead of every person that’s ever mocked you regarding Christianity is going to be facedown before the King of kings—every one of them. Every notorious world leader that’s ever done anything cruel or wicked or stood up against Christ—everybody who now wants to chop your head off or persecute you or outlaw your positions on the Bible—whatever it is—they’re all going to bow to Christ. And if they don’t repent, they are going to be afflicted—all those that have afflicted us. And then God at that moment is going to grant us relief—verse 7—“to you who are afflicted as well as to us...” Paul says, “We’re being afflicted too.” When? When is it going to happen? “When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels”—exactly what Jesus said in Luke 9. And it’s not just going to be a show or a parade—it’s going to be an army. And those angels are going to do His will, and they are going to “inflict”—people—“with flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus.” “They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He comes on that day to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling”—keep wearing that jersey proudly—“and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by His power, so that”—here’s the jersey picture again—“the Name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

There’ll be no buyer’s remorse on that day. I know right now, a non-Christian can look at your neighbor and you and say, “That guy’s not saved; you are saved. I don’t see the big difference there.” Matter of fact, “I see your life of righteousness costing you more than your neighbor. He seems to fit in and be accepted. I don’t get it.” It’s a Psalm 73—Asaph—thing: “I don’t understand; the wicked seem to have it just as well as any righteous person has. As a matter of fact, it seems to be better.” Because one is a “card-carrying Christian” who wears the Christian jersey—when Christ comes back, they will be granted relief; and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus will suffer the consequences of eternal punishment away from the presence of God and the glory of His power. To be saved is future—I know, we say we’re saved now, and I understand that—but “being saved from what” seems like we’re being thrown to the lions more than the non-Christian. Well, that’s true. But one day it will all come to fruition. Right now the price seems high, but the payoff is going to be huge.



I talk about numbers on the menu. If I were to go out to lunch today, and my family of five—I take them out—and instead of paying sixty bucks or seventy bucks or whatever it might cost at a decent restaurant to feed my family, the bill comes back and it's \$270. Well, I don't want to go there. But you said, "Listen, this is a good restaurant, Pastor Mike—you need to go here because (reminiscent of the words of Christ) if you pay this price and give this meal to your kids, they'll never be hungry again." Now, I know that in South Orange County for a family of five that costs anywhere from \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year to feed all those hungry mouths. And in my analogy, if you're telling me that I could pay \$270 this afternoon, have lunch, and my teenage boys will never be hungry again—man, I'll put down a \$200 tip on that lunch. You bet. Why? Because I'm going to save in the next three years \$60,000. Of course I'll pay that price.

People right now are not willing to pay the price to stand with Christ. They're not willing to be unashamed of Christ and His words and the authoritative words of His apostles. They're afraid, they're timid—they don't want to do it. I'm calling you to pay the price. And it may seem high right now, but the day that Christ breaks through the clouds, bringing us relief and affliction to non-Christians, you're going to see just how valuable this exchange was. In the words of 2 Corinthians—which is one of the passages I make you turn to in your discussion questions this week on the back of the worksheet—it's a great text; you'll look it up and ponder it later. But when Paul looks at his own afflictions—which is probably much more for Christ than you'll ever experience in your life—he said, "This light and momentary affliction"—what is it?—"it's not even worth comparing," and it's "earning for us an eternal weight of glory." Because the things that we see and experience now—short-term, transient, temporary things—we can't see the things that are coming: the coming kingdom of God, the things we have yet to expect—that is eternal. I'd much rather pay the cost now; and in light of eternity, it's small.

I can preach a message like this, and some people—just, I know how you are—some of you, you like these kinds of messages because you like having the pain of the Christian life, in a way, because you bear it like a martyr: "The world hates us..." and, you know, you go out of here and—all I'm saying is that's not the perspective of the Apostle Paul there in 2 Corinthians. In other words, to him, what was coming was so great and had such great value, it made the suffering small. It's like when you were told to do something because you wanted to go out on the weekend. You were a teenager, and your parents said, "Well, you didn't do your chores—you've got to go out and take the trash out, weed the garden, mow the lawn—and you have to do that before you can go out on a Friday night." And so you're rushing after school to do it, and you're hating every second of it: "Ugh—my parents, this lawn, these weeds by our driveway so long, the trash cans—ugh, hate this." You can do that, you can begrudge it all, you can have a terrible time—you can be the martyr in the classic sense, not the biblical sense. Or you can have that experience that I can only best illustrate with the injustice and the pain and the drudgery of working for Laban—remember that story? Jacob had to work for Laban; it wasn't fair—he was cruel, overbearing, not just. It was horrible. But in the text that always makes people coo and moan and say, "Ahh..." Let me read Jacob's perspective, because all that work was done for who? Rachel—



beautiful in appearance and form. He loved her. And after all the pain, all the high cost—here's the punchline, Genesis 29:20: "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her." That's when you say, "Oh—so sweet. Why can't my husband be like Jacob?" What a wonderful—what a wonderful guy. So awesome.

But you get the principle, right? He could have been out there like you were as a teenager, mowing the lawn on a Friday afternoon: "Ugh, I hate this." But his focus was on what he was serving for. The price and the injustice and the toil and the work and the sacrifice that he was making—it's all for this person I love. And because of that, it minimizes. That's why Paul could say in 2 Corinthians, "This light and momentary affliction." I don't know—I'm reading 2 Corinthians, going, "It seems like a massive affliction that you're suffering." To him, "light and momentary." Why? It seemed like just a small thing—a small price to pay—for the King of kings and Lord of lords, who loved me enough to die in my place.

Can we take a little grief this week? A little insult? Can we be maligned for the cause? Can you not be ashamed of wearing the jersey of Christianity in this world? Can you be saying, "Hey, I don't care. Doesn't matter what you think—we're on the winning team. I'm willing to suffer, to be counted as worthy of suffering for the cause of Christ"?

Let's pray.

God, help us to look at the prices here on the menu, so to speak, and say, "You know, it seems high—I get it. It would be easier for me not to 'eat here'—easier for me not to have this relationship with Christ. At least for now, it seems like it would be much easier for me to avoid all of this if I could just kind of tailor my own religion or pick and choose a few things from Christianity or just not be fully bought in." It would be a temptation. We might gain a few things in this world. But the deal is very clear in the Scripture: forgiving, redeemed people have to be followers of Christ, which is going to feel like, on some days, bearing a cross and being ridiculed and persecuted and rejected. It's all about self-denial on several levels—with my life in its entirety and every afternoon, every day, every morning—feeling the battle in my own life, saying, "I'm committed to the will of God, not just doing whatever I feel like I want to do."

And God, while that's difficult, it sets us up for a life that—for many people—looks really dark and depressing, and people will accuse me of that just in this sermon—I know they will. "So negative... Where's the joy and the love and the grace?" I get that; I understand that. But, God, because we realize



that this affliction is light and momentary—really—even though it can be severe, and it may, in the future, in this declining society, cost us increasingly more and more. It may even cost some in this room—before this generation is done—it may cost them their lives. But God, we’re willing to pay the price because we know that the surpassing value of knowing You and having our sins forgiven and being able to walk into the kingdom with the words echoing in our ears, “Enter into the joy of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,” as opposed to hearing, “Depart from Me, you accursed ones.”

God, help us, please, to revel in the grace of forgiveness and the future joy that’s coming in the kingdom, so that we can wear the jersey of Christ proudly this week—not being an irritating meddler; we don’t want to be that. But, God, when we’re pressed—when we’re there, when it’s time to speak up and stand up for Christ—we’re willing to do it without fear, without shame, and without embarrassment. Make our church strong in that regard, I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.