



THE DEATH OF EGO

Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 9:23

5:30, 9:15 & 11:00 Grace Church September 6-7, 2008

This **past spring**, the **Grace Staff** went on an **overnight retreat** at Lake Chautauqua. We try to **get away** at least **once a year**. What **happens there shapes some key things that happen at Grace**.

Our Staff can get **pretty crazy**. The last couple times, we played this game called "**Salad Bowl**". Everybody puts about 4 recognizable **trivia names** in the bowl and in **3 rounds** with **harder clues** each time, the team that **gets the most** names wins.

You wouldn't believe the **inhibitions that come down**. Especially from **people you wouldn't expect**, like **Jill Mintsiveris**, **Bernie Farabaugh**, **Miriam Crossman**, and **Dick Page**. But do you know who went over the **top this year**? Our Executive Pastor, **Derek Sanford**. I really think he needed to **blow off some steam** from all the **pressure of leading our relocation effort**.

Derek led us in an **exercise** that put this **year's vision** and **goals** before us. He put down **numbers of the floor** between **1 and 10**. 1 was **low** and 10 was **high**. He asked the Staff to **rate how we think Grace is doing** in key areas of our vision and goals. **Areas like** intentionally **seeking out** people who **need Christ** by going to them, successfully **developing Christ-followers**, reaching the **younger generation**, and ministering **outside our walls** to the community and the poor. We **stood on our numbers** and we each told the **reason for our ratings**.

Do you know which area **scored the lowest**? **Discipleship**. After people come to Christ and **walk through our doors**, we don't think we're doing **as well as we can** in helping our people **grow up** spiritually. **That result** really stuck to my heart and I said, "We've got to **make some changes**. I don't want to see us become a **larger church** without also becoming a **maturing church**." So I sat down with the **Preaching Team** and said, "When we launch the **fall season** at Grace, our **1st sermon series** needs to be on **discipleship**."

The word "**disciple** (*mathetes*)" in its basic form means "**a learner, a pupil**". But to be a **New Testament disciple** means that we need to **add another component**. You see, we can **learn something** everyday and still not be a disciple. There **also** needs to be a **relationship with the teacher**.

So to be a **true disciple** means that we not only **learn from** the Teacher but we **follow His ways**. That's the **meaning of "disciple"** and the word can be **used either** as a **noun** or a **verb**. The one who's **learning to follow** the ways of the teacher is a **disciple—a noun**. The one who's **teaching the learner** is **discipling—a verb**. And the **process of making disciples** is called **discipleship**.

The **best known verses** on discipleship in the Bible are found in **Matthew 28:19-20**, the **last recorded words** of Jesus by Matthew: "**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.**" The phrase, "**make disciples**" is 1 **Greek word**—"disciple". It's used as a **verb**—"disciple all nations". **That command** was given to the **11 disciples** and, by common understanding, to the **church** of Jesus Christ as well. Our **major task** is to "**disciple disciples**".

How are we supposed to make followers of Jesus? These verses are clear. The church must do 2 things:

1. **Baptize**—baptism is an **evidence of conversion**.

So when a person is **immersed in water**, it's a declaration that they've come to **know Jesus Christ** personally for the **forgiveness** of sins, **pardon** from hell, and for **everlasting life**. That's where **discipleship begins—with baptism**.

Every month, several people are baptized in our services. When a person gets baptized, they're in essence **telling us** that they've **come to faith** in Christ and that they **want to become** His disciple. They're taking the **1st step**.

The **2nd thing** a church must to **make disciples** is:

2. **Teach**—people become disciples of Christ through **teaching**. But making disciples involves a **certain kind** of teaching. Jesus was **not ambiguous** about this. We disciple people when we **teach them to obey** all that Jesus commanded. Jesus was saying that we **disciple people by teaching them** how to live **according to His teachings**.

Not all teaching in the church is **this kind** of teaching. Some pastors and people want **more knowledge** of the Bible. And so they **teach dates**, places, history, culture, nuances of **original languages**, and interesting topics of all sort. That's all well and good, but **that doesn't make** disciples. It makes **classrooms**. You make disciples when you teach someone to **live according to** the teachings of Christ.

Every so often, I hear someone say that we **don't teach meat** in our worship services. If they mean teaching more complicated truths of the Bible **unrelated to** the commands for **life-change** by Christ, they're **probably right**. I'm not after deeper knowledge for **knowledge sake**. My sermons are basically teachings about **some command** of Jesus with a **plea** for life-change. So let's not misunderstand the nature of making disciples. Making disciples is teaching with a view to **life-change**, not teaching with a view to **more** knowledge.

Don't get me wrong, I'd love for all of us to **know more** about the Bible. But when learning **bypasses obeying Jesus**, you **end up** with a bunch of **Pharisees**. By that I mean, people who have a **religion riddled** with judgment-alism, **blinded to** their own violations of Christ's commands.

I want to tell you where our series on discipleship is headed. You're going to learn **4 essential components** that must happen for someone to be a true disciple of Christ.

Today, I'm going to talk about the **death of ego** or self. We can't follow Christ if **self runs** our lives. **Next week, Derek** will talk about how a disciple must **manifest the divine life**. We need to see **evidence** of the **fruit** of God's Spirit in us. The **3rd week, Mike** will talk about **radical love**. A disciple of Christ is **known foremost** by how he **loves God** and **others**. And the **final week**, I'll talk about the **power that makes it possible** to truly follow Christ.

The **death of ego**—that **preaches well** but this is the **biggest challenge** for all of us in this life. **The biggest problem all of us have is ourselves**. There's **no greater clash** in discipleship than the **power of our ego** versus our **full surrender** to Christ. Our text today is **Luke 9:23**—**“And Jesus said to all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.’”**

There it is. There's **no real way** to follow Jesus and **please ourselves** at the **same time**. Sorry. I wish I could say that you can live with **yourself at the center** of your life and ask Jesus to **enhance your own little kingdom** by asking Him to answer all your **self-serving prayers**. It **doesn't work** that way. But that's **where most** Christians are. Most of us don't **deal adequately** with our ego, **the self** in us.

I want us all to **make progress** in this **1st necessity** of discipleship because I don't believe **anyone** in our church has **conquered self** yet, **including me**. And so dealing with the **strength of ego** and self is the **place we must begin** and **sustain** if we're going to be **true followers** of Christ.

I want to make this as **simple** as I can for all of us. Jesus tells us **the secret to putting our ego down** in this verse. **Four stages** are involved. I found appropriate words that all **start with "D"** to make the toughest task in the world as **easy as possible to remember**.

Stage #1—Desire to follow Christ

Jesus said that the **starting place** for being a disciple is **desire**—"if anyone **wishes** (*thelei*), desires, **wants, resolves** to come after Me." Jesus doesn't force us to follow Him. He let's us **choose that path**. There must be some **motivation from within** to get really connected with Jesus.

What I tend to see is **2 conditions** relative to desire **among believers**. The **1st condition** is **enthusiasm**. A person comes to Christ and **they want** to follow Him. They **want** to leave the old ways behind and **learn** the new ways of Christ.

The **2nd condition** is **stagnation**. People call themselves Christians but there's **little motivation** to go deeper in Christ and their lives are pretty **self-centered** with a little **religion thrown in**. I've discovered that **the longer** a person is a Christian, the **more prone** they are to stagnation.

Here's what the **Bible teaches**. If you're truly **born again** of the **Spirit of God**, you'll have an **inward desire** to follow Christ. You don't have to **manufacture** it. You'll **hunger** and thirst for **righteousness**. If your desire **vacillates** up and down, **that's normal**. We all **go through phases** with Christ. But our **overall heart** is to follow Him.

But if we **lose our desire** to come after Jesus and **massive amounts of time** pass, we've **either** lost our **1st love** or we've let sin and **self overtake us**. We must **repent** and do the **things we did early** in our relationship with Christ. And if we **claim** to be a Christian but have **never really desired** to follow the Lord **other than** to be a **little religious**, there's **reasonable doubt** as to whether we've **really been** born again. That's going to set the **scene** for dealing with the ego.

Friends, Jesus **doesn't force us** to come after Him. But when we **truly meet Him**, that's the result. We'll **want** to follow Him.

Jesus takes us to the **next stage** of the **death of ego**:

Stage #2—Denial of self

Next Jesus said, "Let him **deny himself**." I'd say that we as Americans, even **American Christians**, know very **little about self-denial**. We're so **self-indulgent**. We want **what pleases us** when we want it and we're willing to **fund our indulgences** with credit. If **self-denial** is involved in

following Christ, there aren't a whole lot of **true disciples** because **what self wants** is pretty much **what self gets**.

Let's take a look at **precisely** what Jesus **means** when He talks about denying one's self. The word "deny (*arnesastho*)" means to "disregard, repudiate, disown". It's a rather **strong** word. It's the word **Jesus used** when He told Peter that he would **deny Him 3 times** (Lk. 22:34). Friends, we can't **play around** with the ego. We need to **deal firmly** with it. With **intensity**, we have to **consciously disown** or deny self.

So what are we **denying**? You might think it's an **extra helping** of potatoes or another meal out or another **DVD** or that new piece of **jewelry**. And it **could be** that. But it's **much more**. Jesus wants us to **renounce the lifeblood** of the ego. We have to **deny what** the ego and self **thrive on**.

Here's a **list of things** that **empowers the ego**. Whenever you see these things, you know that **ego is in control**.

- ***Reacting**
- ***Being right**
- ***Unforgiveness**
- ***Complaining**
- ***Addictions**
- ***Superiority feelings**
- ***Taking things personally**
- ***Defensiveness**
- ***Jealousy**
- ***Envy**
- ***Judging**
- ***Blame-shifting**
- ***Attention**
- ***Control**
- ***Comparisons**
- ***Concern for what others think**
- ***Need for more**
- ***Illicit pleasure**
- ***Gossip**

The list is **much longer**. But listen. Whenever **these kinds** of things **manifest themselves**, it's our **ego**. It's our self. It's **showing its hand**. And **that's what** we must deny.

A few months ago, I was **preparing to go** to a **pastors' meeting** in Western New York. I was going to be the **facilitator** for the **1st session**. **Marie and I** were in the **kitchen** and we got in an **argument with just 4 words**. She **didn't do something** I thought she should do and I said, "**You should.**" And she said, "**Oh well.**" I didn't like the **tone of that "Oh well"** and I let her know it. I really thought she was **in the wrong** and I let her **know it** in no uncertain terms. We parted **without a good patch-up job**. But I left knowing **how right I was** and **how wrong she was**.

I got as far as **I-90** when this **little voice inside** me said, "That **wasn't about Marie** at all. It was about **your ego**, your self. You aren't **as far along** as you think you are. You **served your ego**, you **didn't deny it!**" Wow. That **voice was right**. I'd been a **jerk**. My ego had **disguised itself**. Friends, I think that most of our **relational problems** are right there—a **camouflaged ego**. It **asserts itself** and the **telltale signs** are all evident. But **we're blind** to them. And as long as we **feed the ego** and don't deny it, we **lose ground** both **as disciples** and in **our relationships**.

What's more, as long as we **feed the ego**, we're actually **blind spiritually**. We may *think we're spiritual* and growing. But the truth is, **spiritual wisdom** and growth can-not coincide with an active ego. Unless we deny our **selves**, we'll only have a **form** of religion and follow Christ from **afar**.

I must say this again. Our **# 1 battle** in life is **not our work** or our boss or our finances or **difficult people**. Our **# 1 battle** is **repudiating the incredibly strong ego** in all of us.

Jesus moves us to the **next radical stage**:

Stage 3—Death of Ego

Incredibly, Jesus tells us to **take up our crosses daily**. Actually **denial of ego** is insufficient. We need to **crucify** it. We need to **treat ego** or self as though it were **dead** and **not capable of functioning**. We need to take **extreme measures** because our ego is **so powerful**.

Death by cross was perhaps one of the **most brutal ways** ever invented to kill someone. **Spikes were nailed** in the **wrists** and through the **arches** of the feet. With the **passing of hours** and the **slumping of the body**, the person would **push his body up** using the spikes so as not to **suffocate** causing **more intense pain**. Eventually, and sometimes it took up to **3 days**, the person **couldn't push up** anymore and would **suffocate**.

Jesus uses this **imagery** in order to get across the **extreme measures** we must take in **dealing with our egos**. We must **be brutal** with them. It **requires a death**.

I want to make **2 observations** about the cross in this verse:

- 1.** The **cross** here is **our personal cross**, not the cross of Christ. **For years** I used to imagine that we had to **join Christ again** and again on **His cross** in order to **die to self**. **Romans 6** and **Galatians 2** tell us that we've been **crucified with Christ**. So I thought this was an invitation to **think our way back** to the cross of Christ and **our participation with Him there** in order to **rid ourselves of indwelling sin**. Not so. This is our **own personal cross**, not the cross of Christ.
- 2.** The **cross** in this verse is a figure of **death or separation from the ego** or the self. This cross is **not our troubles**, sorrows, **disappointments**, and diseases. That's not what Jesus is telling us to carry here. The **cross we're to carry** is our **going on a daily mission** to **deal death** to our ego. It's a daily **death-like attitude** towards ego.

We don't carry a **literal cross**, but it's a **real cross** none-the-less. We must pick it up **every day** in order to **defeat the ego** in our lives. Because each day **we don't**, the **ego is in control**. Paul **understood this maneuver** when he said in **I Corinthians 15:31**, "**I die every day!**"

Friends, you must **find a way** to consciously tell yourself **daily** that your ego is **not** in control. You need to **picture a cross** in your arms and across your shoulder every day in some fashion or you'll **lose the battle** of the ego. It'll overtake you **the moment you forget** about your cross.

Those of you who **see me up close** know that I often wear this **ring**. I got it in Israel 4 years ago. It has a **Jerusalem cross** on it. I don't wear it just for **sentimental** reasons. In a way, it helps me to **remember** that I must **pick up my cross daily**. I must **reckon my ego** as being **condemned to death**. Even with this reminder, I often **put my cross down**. Immediately, ego reappears. It's amazing how resilient it is. If we fail to **recognize the ego** in us and carry our cross, we've **lost** the spiritual battle. And the **prevailing presence** of ego makes us **spiritually unconscious**.

We now come to the **last stage** in this verse:

Stage 4—Dedication to Christ

Jesus simply says, “**Follow Me (akoloutheitw)**”. You **can’t get** to this stage **without the other 3 stages**. **1st**, you must **desire** to follow Him. **2nd**, you must **deny** your ego. **3rd**, you must daily think **death to ego** by taking your cross with you **wherever you go**. Now you’re **in a place to dedicate yourself** to Jesus—to **follow Him**. (And just as we’re to carry our crosses daily, we’re to follow Jesus daily because the tense of the word “follow” in Greek is present continuous action, “Keep on following Me”.)

What does it mean to follow Jesus? Let’s use another word—**OBEY**. Let’s **put that word** in the verse because that’s what “**follow**” means: “**If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and OBEY Me.**” If we’re **serious** about being a disci-ple of Christ, here’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to **study the Bible** and find out how the Lord wants us **to live** in a difficult and evil world. We’re going to deal with the ego that works in every way possible to **keep us** from doing that. And we’re going to **do what** the Bible **tells us** to do **whether** we like it or not. **That’s what it means to follow Jesus.**

As we **deal with our egos**, we become **dedicated** or **committed** to obeying Christ in **everything**. We become **devoted** to following Jesus by **acknowledging** that He’s **our teacher** and **imitating His character** as His willing **apprentices**. Following Jesus **becomes the purpose** and **drive** of our lives.

The truth is—most of us are far better **followers of ego than** we are of **Christ**. We just kind of **cloak** and excuse it. When that’s true, it’s **virtually impossible** to really follow Jesus because **obedience** is an **affront to our ego** and we **resist**. Ego is the **biggest reason** we disobey the commands of Christ and why we **deceive ourselves** in the process.

Conclusion

The **theme** of **denying** ourselves, **carrying** our crosses, and **following** Jesus is **substantial** in the Gospels (Matt. 10: 38; 16:24; Mk. 8:34; Lk. 14:27. Jesus **taught it** to His **disciples** and to **great crowds**. Jesus **understood our attempts** to **strengthen self** above everything else we do.

So in **verse 24**, He made an **amazing statement** of revelation. The **ego in control** will **never understand** this statement: “**For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses His life for My sake will save it.**”

The **grand deception** of the ego is this—if you **listen to me** and **follow me**, if you make **life about yourself**, then you’ll be **fulfilled and happy**. But Jesus said the **exact opposite**. If you live for **yourself**, you’ll **lose your life**. A **self-seeking life** leads to **misery**. But the death of ego **to follow Christ** leads to **joy**.

I want to tell you the **leading cause of unhappiness** in the world—**seeking your own life**. Serving self. **Enthroning** ego. And **here’s why**. It’s **impossible to please** the self. It’s **never satisfied** and its **major manifestation** is **dis-pleasure** when it doesn’t get its own way. How many of you have **discovered** that the world has **not** been structured around **making you happy** every day? Our egos **don’t like that**. And an **unhappy ego makes life miserable** while it **blames everyone** and everything around it.

Ego is not our friend. It lies to us and **actually injures** us. Our job is to **destroy it** and get on with this business of **discipleship**—**loving Jesus** and **learning** all we can about what Jesus wants us to

do and **aligning our lives** with that. That's when we become **true disciples**. That's what I **want for me**. And that's what I **want for each of you**.

If God has spoken to you about dealing your ego a blow, with sincere heart, pray the following prayer of confession*:

Incline Your ear to me, O Lord, and answer me
For I am poor and needy.
Preserve my life, for I am ungodly.
Save Your servant who trusts in You.

I have allowed my ego to reign in my life.
I have done its will far more than I have done Your will
And somehow I've managed enough deceit
To actually believe that I could grow spiritually.
I do want to follow You, Lord Jesus.
Today I realize more than ever that to do so
I must disown my ego and deal it a death blow daily.
I admit that most of my issues with others involve my ego.

Father, please forgive me because I really didn't know what I
was doing.
I now recognize my sin and my responsibility.
I realize that I don't have the power to bring down my ego.
Thanks be to You, O Lord, that I can do it through the power
of Christ.

You are good and forgiving and abounding in steadfast love
to all who call upon You.
Against You and many others I have sinned.
With this honest confession, I accept Your forgiveness.
Show me a sign of Your favor and continue to deliver me
from myself.

In Your merciful and gracious name,
Amen

*This prayer of confession is based on Psalm 86