

Unconditional Surrender

March 19 – Luke 14:25-35

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Day 78 – 287 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus spoke again about the cost of discipleship, what it meant to be one of His followers. The context for His comments is the large crowds going along with Him (v.25). Undoubtedly, there were people following Him out of curiosity, or because everyone else was, or because it seemed like the thing to do at the time, or because of His uncommon teaching and miracles. But Jesus wanted them “to count the cost” before going any further. Thus, His remarks were meant to weed out the fair-weather fans who were unwilling to endure the “storms.”

Jesus told two related parables, one about a man with a building project and another about a king going into battle (v.28-32). Both men had to consider the risk factor before committing themselves fully to their endeavor. If not, they could end up in over their heads, unable to complete what they had started. But what is so risky about following Jesus? Why was He pressing them to consider their commitment?

First, Jesus warned them that following Him would cost relationships (v.26). Remember, Jesus’ family and friends in Nazareth did not believe He was the Messiah. They thought He had lost His mind, and even tried to kill Him. He knew that there would be times when His disciples would have to decide to choose Him over others. Which one would they love more?

Second, Jesus warned the crowd that to follow Him meant to lose their lives for His sake. He said, “Whoever does not carry His own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (v.27). In other words, we must be willing to forsake our desires, our plans, our preferences, our opinions, and our loves for His will and ways. To “come after Me” means to follow in His steps, to take the same path, to forfeit our lives and, instead, mirror His.

Third, Jesus told the crowd that those who followed Him must “give up their possessions” (v.33). His disciples must hold loosely the things of this world and be willing to go without or to use their resources for His purposes. We cannot chase after Christ and worldly goods at the same time. The two are incompatible.

Daily Reflection

When one general surrenders a battle or war to another general, the two of them usually meet to negotiate terms. The one who is forfeiting may get to surrender on his terms, or he may have to compromise with the conqueror’s requests. However, there are times when a victor demands unconditional surrender, which means that the one forfeiting has no say in the matter. He must be “all in,” or there is no deal.

When we surrender our lives to Christ, we do not get to request conditions. He expects an unconditional surrender, in which we give Him everything, relationships, marriage, family, time, habits, plans, passions, possessions, and money. We give it all to Him!

Have you surrendered all to Him? What has been hard to forfeit? Is there anything you have refused to release? What does that say to Him?

At times, we may be tempted to believe that if we surrender all to Christ, then we will have nothing left for ourselves. **But, in truth, what we will find is that Christ is everything we need.**

Oh Brother!

March 20 – Luke 15:1-32

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Day 79 – 286 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus told three parables with one message. His stories were prompted by the grumbling of the Pharisees who weren't impressed that Jesus was surrounded by tax-collectors (v.1, 2). But it was Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost (Lk. 19:10). These outcasts were drawn to Him because of His offer of grace, forgiveness, and hope. By telling these parables, Jesus made clear the different perspectives in the moment.

First, Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep (v.3-7). What shepherd would not leave the 99 to search for the one who had strayed and, when he is found, would not rejoice at his return? Is he not as valuable as the others in the field? Notice that in the story, salvation begins with repentance of sins.

Second, Jesus told the parable of the lost coin (v.8-10). What person would not take time to search for money and rejoice when it is found? Is it not as valuable as the rest? Notice again that salvation begins with repentance.

Finally, Jesus told the parable of the lost son (v.11-32), or what we call the "Prodigal Son," since he wasted his money on lavish living. What father would not rejoice when one of his children comes home? Is he not as valuable as his other son? Notice again that salvation begins with repentance. The prodigal told his father, "I have sinned, and I am not worthy" (v.19, 21).

While we tend to focus on the lost son or the welcoming father, Jesus told the parable to point out the difference between the tax-collectors and the religious leaders. They were represented by the angry brother in the story, who was not willing to celebrate with his father. Though the father reassured his angry son that he was also welcome in the house and that all he had was his, Jesus did not finish the story. What did the angry brother do? Did he also repent of his sins and join the party, or did he refuse and storm away?

Daily Reflection

Jesus' words are convicting. **Rather than seek out lost sinners, I am quick to condemn them.** I dismiss them for their poor choices, their worldly lifestyles, or their repeated failures. Rather than see them as sheep to pursue, I view them as a plague to avoid. At times, **I am the angry son who refuses to show mercy or forgiveness, or who refuses to celebrate at the prodigal's return.** I am skeptical of their return, believing that it's insincere and short-lived.

Which character in the story are you? Explain?

We are good at condemning the world for its sins and shortcomings, while overlooking our own faults and failures. Have you ever struggled to show mercy or forgiveness to the lost world? Or have you ever compared the actions of others to your own, holding to a self-righteous attitude and judgmental spirit? Explain.

Whether we are the prodigal son or the angry brother, **we all have many sins to lay at the father's feet. Praise God, He is always ready to welcome us home.**

Unworldly Riches

March 21 – Luke 16:1-31

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Day 80 – 285 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus continued his teaching aimed at the Pharisees' hypocritical lifestyle. Specifically, He focused on their excessive love for and misuse of earthly wealth. First, he told the parable of the unrighteous steward, then a story of a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus (not the Lazarus Jesus later raised from the dead).

Jesus' story of the crooked manager highlighted his shrewdness in taking steps to provide for his future (v.1-8). Even though he cheated his master of great sums of money, he did so to make friends with people who would take care of him after he was fired (v.3, 4).

Jesus used the parable to challenge His followers. "Make friends for yourself by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings" (v.9). In other words, **use worldly resources for godly purposes**. Invest it in the lives of people, for the sake of the gospel, who may one day welcome you in heaven. While earthly riches cannot afford salvation (only Jesus can do that), they can be used to store up treasures in heaven.

The Pharisees were greedy lovers of money, who used their positions and social status to enrich themselves at the people's expense (v. 14, 15). Instead, they should have been using their positions and social status to minister to the people in their care. Though they acted like they were serving God, they were really worshiping *mammon*, the god of wealth. Jesus told them that they could not serve both (v.13).

Then, Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Again, it was aimed at the Pharisees, who believed that "godliness" was a means of great gain. Meanwhile, the rich man ignored the poor man. But after death, the roles were reversed. The poor man enjoyed heaven, while the rich man experienced suffering. Neither riches nor religion secures a place in heaven.

Daily Reflection

Why are people so willing to forfeit their soul to gain earthly wealth?

Have you ever been greedy or tempted to chase worldly wealth? Why or why not?

Why is it difficult for us to think about securing treasures for ourselves in heaven?

How can you use worldly wealth for godly purposes?

You may not be able to take your treasures to heaven, but you can send it ahead.

Faithful Service

March 22 – Luke 17:1-10

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Day 81 – 284 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Luke included some instructions that Jesus gave to His disciples. At first, they seem disjointed, but they fit together nicely. The theme is that **God expects a great deal of His followers.**

First, God expects us to be a good example for others (v.1, 2). Our conduct, character, words, or attitudes should not cause others to stumble or fall. Those “little ones” in the faith (i.e., children, new or young believers) watch us to know how to live the Christian life. They imitate our walk with God. Are our lives exemplary of the Lord’s will and ways?

Second, God expects us to confront sin but to forgive the sinner (v.3, 4). Both commands are difficult, especially when we are offended multiple times by the same individual. But the Lord expects us to pardon offenders repeatedly, as we have been pardoned by the Lord.

When the disciples understood what the Lord was asking of them, they recognized that they needed more faith (v.5). But Jesus pointed out that even with a little faith they can accomplish what seems to be impossible (v.6). It’s not that the disciples needed more faith, they simply needed to use the faith they already had. They needed to practice or exercise their faith so that it would grow stronger. Thus, when we pray for faith, the Lord gives us opportunities to use it.

Finally, as the disciples were overwhelmed with His expectations, thinking to themselves, “You are asking us to do so much,” Jesus told a parable (v.7-9). The story was of a servant who was expected to plow the field, tend the sheep, and then prepare a meal, get cleaned up and dressed in the proper attire to serve the master dinner. Neither does the servant refuse His master, nor does the master thank the servant, but rather the servant only does what is expected of him. **We, too, serve the Master at His pleasure, doing all that is expected of us with joy and without complaint.**

Daily Reflection

Consider these expectations. Are you a good example of the Christian life? Could others imitate your walk with the Lord, or are there areas that would cause others to stumble?

How are you at confronting sin and forgiving sinners? Which one is more difficult?

Are you regularly asking God to increase your faith, or do you recognize that the situations in your life are meant to increase it?

We are the Lord’s servants. He has done great things for us, having bought us with His blood. **It should be our pleasure to fulfill whatever commands or expectations He has for us without expecting thanks in return.** God does not, nor should not, thank us for what is our duty. Rather, when we fulfill His expectations with excellence, we will one day hear Him say, “Well done, My good and faithful servant.”

The Resurrection and the Life

March 23 – John 11:1-57

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 82 – 283 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, and the Jewish leaders decided to arrest and kill Him. Why did John dedicate 57 verses to this story? This miracle was the beginning of the end, a significant transition from Jesus' general ministry to the events leading to His death.

When Jesus received news that Lazarus was sick, He knew what He would do. In fact, He prophesied that the story would not end with Lazarus' death (v.4). The entire incident was meant to bring glory to God and to prove that Jesus was (and is) the Messiah. Had Jesus been there before Lazarus' death, He would've certainly prevented it, but by waiting two days, the miracle would be more impactful (v.6, 15).

At this point, the disciples were aware of the danger of going anywhere near Jerusalem (v.8). But Jesus knew it was not yet His time to die and that they would be safe to return (v.9, 10). However, Thomas was not convinced, and rather than allow Jesus to die alone, he urged the disciples to accompany Him (v.16).

Before Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had already died. But Jesus referred to his death as having "fallen asleep" (v.11-14). This description is very informative. **Though we view death as final and irreversible, Jesus simply views death as sleep. In other words, what seems so daunting to us is no problem to God.** If we are simply asleep, then all that needs to happen is to be awakened (1 Thess. 4:13).

Jesus communicated this truth to Martha by saying, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even if he dies" (v.25). **God has overcome mankind's greatest enemy — death. For the Creator to give a person life a second time is no problem at all.** Also, notice that Jesus woke Lazarus with His voice (v.43). We, too, shall be resurrected one day with a shout of the Lord's voice when He returns (1 Thess. 4:16).

Some people were troubled by this miracle. For example, the religious leaders were concerned that Jesus would ignite a revolution, which would increase tension with Rome. Thus, they decided to seize Jesus and put Him to death. "Better for one man to die for the people than that the whole nation should perish" (v.50). Without knowing it, Caiaphas foreshadowed the event and purpose of Jesus' crucifixion.

Daily Reflection

We also read today the shortest verse in the Bible, "Jesus wept" (v.35). Why do you think John made sure that we knew this about Jesus? *Isaiah 53:3* might be helpful here.

If Jesus knew that He would raise Lazarus from the tomb, then why would He cry?

What encouragement do you find in the story of Lazarus, regarding life and death?

Be the One

March 24 – Luke 17:11-19

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 83 – 282 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus healed ten lepers near the border of Samaria. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (yesterday), He traveled from Bethany to the country near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim (*Jn. 11:54*). We are not told why He doubled back and went away from Jerusalem. Perhaps, it was to prevent His arrest and buy some time; or, perhaps, there was still more ministry left to do in other regions.

When the ten lepers saw Jesus, they stood at a distance and cried out for Him to have mercy on them (*Lk. 17:12, 13*). Lepers were social outcasts, of course. They were not allowed to return home or to participate in the events of everyday life, and for fear of infecting others, they were required to stand at a distance.

Evidently, these men were familiar with Jesus or had heard of His miracles, and they believed that He could help them. Thus, when Jesus told them to show themselves to the priests, they went immediately. To be restored to society, a priest had to declare them clean and clear of their leprosy. The amazing aspect of this miracle was that they were healed along the way, meaning their healing required faith.

Another amazing aspect of this miracle is that only one of the men returned to thank Jesus. Perhaps the other nine were so excited to get back to normal life that they forgot about what the Lord had done; and by the time they remembered and went to look for Him, He was already gone. But one stopped in the moment to glorify God for his recovery (*v.15-18*).

Jesus noted that the thankful man was a foreigner, a Samaritan, meaning that the other nine must have been Jewish. He also told the man, "Your faith has made you well" (*v.19*), which means that he was not only healed physically but spiritually. Again, we see another picture of the fact that Gentiles responded to Jesus when the Jews did not.

Daily Reflection

One of the most rude and unappealing attitudes we can exhibit is ungratefulness, to neglect to express appreciation for what others have done for you. To ignore their kindness or service wreaks of selfishness and arrogance, which is hurtful to others (*2 Tim. 3:1-5*).

Likewise, we often pray and ask God to help us in some way, but how many times do we stop and thank Him when He answers? Perhaps we are like the nine lepers. We get back to normal life and forget what the Lord did for us.

Instead, let's **be the one** who stopped what he was doing. Let's **be the one** who took the time to find the Lord. Let's **be the one** who returns thanks for His blessings. Let's **be the one** to worship Him for all that He's done. We would not be who we are or where we are without His gracious help. **Be the one to say thank you.**

What has God done lately that you have failed to stop and thank Him? Take time now to do it. Don't take anything for granted.

We should be the most thankful people in the world for we know what God has done for us. Give thanks at all times, for He is good (*Eph. 5:4; Col. 4:2; Ps. 106:1*). **Be the one.**

The Second Coming

March 25 – Luke 17:20-37

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 84 – 281 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus had a discussion with the Pharisees and His disciples about the kingdom of God. Remember, the kingdom of God has multiple meanings. It can refer to the universe over which God is sovereign, the spiritual transition from darkness to light with the spread of the gospel (*Col. 1:13*), or the earthly rule of Jesus after His second coming.

Because of the Old Testament prophecies, the Jews were expecting the Messiah to establish an earthly kingdom when He arrived. However, they did not understand that the Messiah would have two advents. In His first coming, He would bring the gospel (salvation) and establish the spiritual kingdom of God. At His second coming, He would establish the earthly kingdom. Thus, when the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming (thinking the physical kingdom), He told them it was “in their midst” (meaning spiritual kingdom, *v.20, 21*).

However, Jesus saved the discussion of His second coming for the disciples (*v.22-37*). First, He told them that **there would be a day when they would long to see Him**, implying that He would go away for a while but come back again (*v.22*). Second, Jesus warned of rumors of His arrival, that some would falsely claim that He had returned secretly (*v.23*). He assured the disciples that **everyone would know when He returned**. It would be a brilliant, public display, as when lightning flashes in the sky (*v.24*). But, before any of this would happen, Jesus said that He would suffer, referring to the cross (*v.25*).

The third detail Jesus gave about His second coming was that **it would happen quickly and unexpectedly** (*v.26-30*). In the days of Noah, the flood caught everyone by surprise. Likewise, when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed in the days of Lot, no one was expecting it. So will it be “when the Son of Man is revealed” (*v.30*). There will be no time then to repent. We must be prepared, for the time of salvation is now.

Next, Jesus warned that **this world is set to be destroyed, and no one should cling to it**. Those who “return for their goods” will be like Lot’s wife, who was so enamored with Sodom that she rejected her deliverance (*v.31, 32*). Those who cling to this world will be destroyed with it. “Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it” (*v.33*).

Finally, **Jesus foretold of the great separation that will occur when He returns** (*v.34-37*). Whereas during His first advent He brought the hope of the gospel (salvation), at His second coming He will bring judgment. At that time, He will separate “the sheep and the goats,” His followers from the rest. Those who are not His followers will stand before Him to be judged for their sins. Those who believe in Him “have eternal life and will not come into judgment but have passed out of death into life” (*Jn. 5:24*).

These signs will be so obvious that Jesus described them like vultures on a carcass (*v.37; Job 39:30*). Everyone knows where the dead body is because the birds begin to gather.

Daily Reflection

How do Jesus’ warnings encourage you?

How do Jesus’ warnings challenge you?
