

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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Matt Moberg
REVIVE: The Cost of Discipleship
Luke 9:23-25

I work at The Table, and my name is Matt Moberg. Let me get that out of the way. It's good to be with you the first day of fall. Amen? This is the best season of them all. It feels like the middle of the day for me right now because I have a five-month-old son who apparently hates me and doesn't want me to sleep. He woke me up about 4:30 this morning and I've watched about 14 episodes of SportsCenter already so I'm a little dazed, a little confused, but we'll make it through this.

I want to start today by telling you a quick story. A couple of years ago, about three or four, somewhere in there, I was between jobs. I was playing music full time which means I was completely broke. Since I did not have a lot of money, I was trying to figure out how to have enough money where I could at least put clothes on my back and feed myself because you need food to stay alive. So I was doing that, and doing the day-in and day-out routines, and I got a call from one of my friends. He said, "Hey, Matt, listen up. I've got an opportunity for you." There is heavy breathing on the other end of the line and he's whispering and I'm like, what is going on? I go, "What is the opportunity? Kent, tell me what this is?" He goes, "Well, you can make a lot of money. It's not a lot of work, but I can't tell you what it's all about over the phone. I need to tell you in person." I'm intrigued. In a place, again, where I don't have a lot of money, this is like the voice of God coming through my friend saying, "Here is a way to get some money."

So I go over to his house and hear his presentation. He is telling me about how they discovered these berries down in South America, yeah-yeah, and how in these berries is the miracle of life, okay? You squish these things up, you turn them into a juice, and all of a sudden, you become the most beautiful person in the world. You will never experience pain or sadness, and you will live forever. You can fly if you drink this juice, so I'm like, sold. He goes, "It will cost you \$400 to get in the boat, but you will be making like 24 mil in no time and you'll be living in the Bahamas." He's got pictures of paradise on the screen and I'm like, "I can live like that. Don't have \$400 but let's do it! So I did. I went \$400 in, thinking okay, I could sweet-talk my friends into believing this, all right?" I start calling up friends. I say the same thing that Kent said to me and one-by-one, I realize how alone I am in this because nobody wants to buy the juice and because I am stupid. I started thinking, well, maybe it was just a bad month, so I go another \$400 in, \$800 in at this point, and nobody buys the juice from me. At the end of it all, I had to come to the point of realizing that the cost didn't make sense. It was way too high and it wasn't going to work out. I had to count my losses, leave the table and fold.

I tell you that story because as I moved into The Table and this role of leading The Table, I put this weird burden on myself that is not good at all. It was that I am supposed to be selling Jesus

to the world as if Jesus is juice, as if He is a product to be sold. But He is not a juice. He is not a product. He's much, much bigger and the cross reminds us of that.

When I get into this mentality that I am to sell Jesus, I start manipulating the story of Christ because I want to make the story of Christ as attractive and as beautiful as possible. I would play for you the highlight reel, the moments that show Jesus' character in incredible ways. I would tell you about how He walked on the water, how He shut down storms, how He turned a couple of fish into a feast, how He healed the lepers and brought sight to the blind. I would manipulate it so far that I would say in the fall on Sundays—Sundays can be some of our most painful days—that even Jesus was a Vikings fan because after all, it says something in the text about Jesus wearing a purple robe. It doesn't make any mention of a green-and-gold robe. I could elaborate on that if it would help to sell Jesus.

Then I would get to the cross, the climactic moment in Jesus' life. This is the purest expression of selfless love the world has ever seen. This is where we find our hope. This is where we have a stake in our lives. But when talking about the cross, I would be careful how I handled this story. I would tell you about how before He even went to the cross, Jesus had His skin torn apart by 39 lashes on his back, one short of the lethal amount. Then you should know about how He had thorns stabbed into His skull. Then, already pretty much dead, they tell Him to carry a 100-pound beam up this hill, which He physically cannot do, so they enlist Simon to help Him. Finally, He dies on the cross by having nails pounded into His hands and His feet, which wasn't the norm for how people were crucified in those days. People were usually roped onto the cross but they used nails for the ones they hated the very most, and Jesus was hated so much that they put nails through His body. He died as a villain, one of the ugliest and most painful deaths, to conquer sin. He did this so that you and I could have life and life to the full. He took the sting right out of death and brought hope to the world.

This is all abundantly true, but there is another side to the cross that, if I am just trying to sell Jesus, I am scared to tell you about. When we only think about Jesus on the cross, we are not seeing the whole picture. The second chapter of the cross tells us that the cross was not meant to take the life of Jesus alone. The cross was meant for you and me to carry as well. We are called to lose our lives for it, too. That makes Jesus a hard product to sell, doesn't it? If you have your Bibles, open them up to Luke, chapter 9, verse 18. This is what I want to look at today.

18 Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?" **19** They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."

So what Jesus is saying here is, He is trying to get a public opinion poll. He is saying, "What's the word on the street?" The people are like, "Wow. A lot of people think you are one of the prophets from a long time ago who has come back to life." Then Jesus says this.

20 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

John Crosby brought this up the first week of this series. This is the defining moment in our lives. This is the biggest question that you will answer because if you answer "One of the

prophets, he is a man, he is just somebody who has come back from a long time ago," then so be it. Great. A prophet has a good word, and it's great that Jesus did that. But it changes everything if you say what Peter says.

Peter answered, "God's Messiah."

Peter says, "You are the Christ that we waited for and You are the Lord." When Peter responds this way, life can no longer look the same. Understand, when Peter is saying that He is the Messiah, it is such a pregnant answer because he is saying "You are the one that we have waited for to take over Rome so the oppression will be over, so Israel will be restored and we will no longer face pain. You are the military hero we have been waiting for. You have finally come to rescue us. You are superman." You can imagine then how far their jaws dropped when Jesus says the next thing. He tells them this. "Don't tell anyone about the fact that I am the Messiah."

21 Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. **22** And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

So instead of this idea of Jesus coming, "Yes, You are the Messiah and You are this military hero who is going to restore Israel, take over Rome and be the king," Jesus is saying, "Well, actually I am going to get beat. I am going to suffer. I am going to die but I am going to be raised back to life." "What? That is not what we were told You were going to do. That doesn't make sense." Jesus takes it a step further.

23 Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. **24** For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. **25** What good is it for you to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit your very self?"

Let me pause there really quickly. When Jesus is talking here, He is saying that what the disciples need to do is be crucified daily. It is important to understand that Jesus did not die when He was carrying the cross. Sometimes I think we get this idea that we are called to be these Christian masochists, where we wake up every morning and say, "Okay, how can I get killed today? How can I find a way to hurt myself?" That is not what He is saying. He is saying to *be willing*. He is saying, "You better love Me so much and desire to follow Me so much, be willing to follow me so closely, that the world would not be able to stand you. And you must be willing to die. Do you want to follow Me to the point where you are willing to die physically and suffer? Are you willing to take up your cross daily and follow Me?"

He uses that word *cross*, which the disciples in that moment knew. In that culture at that time, the Romans were massacring people on crosses. It was their way of not only killing the body of those they crucified, but it was a way of killing the spirit. The cross was meant to humiliate people, make people walk toward death in an excruciatingly painful and shameful way. When Jesus told His people to pick up their crosses every day, make no mistake that they knew exactly what a cross was and what it all entailed. The cross was the worst way to die.

Here Jesus is essentially telling His followers that if they want to continue to follow Him and walk with Him and heal with Him and learn from Him, they will have to be willing to pick up their

crosses every day because the ways of Jesus are a rejection of the world and when you reject the world, you get nailed to a cross. Jesus is saying, "Yes, even if the cost is the cross, will you follow Me?" A couple of chapters later in chapter 14, Jesus really starts pushing the limits.

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus

First of all, if large crowds are following you and are eating out of the palm of your hand, you better tell them something that is really hopeful and warm and encouraging. Tell them about a potluck. Tell them about that Men's Breakfast we are doing October 5. But what does He do? He turns to the crowd and says this,

26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate their father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters--yes, even life itself--such a person cannot be my disciple. **27** And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. **28** Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? **29** For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, **30** saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'"

Detach from the text of what Jesus is saying here. A part of you kind of hopes you don't understand the text here because it's pretty strong. What He is saying is, "Above your own needs, your own dreams, your own desires, your own life, your own health, your own wealth, your own wife, kids, mom, dad, above all that, *I come first.*" Then after all that, He asks them, "So, are you in? Do you still want to follow me?" I have to imagine it's kind of an awkward moment because Jesus is saying "I'm telling you what's required. Don't start if you can't finish. There's too much work to do and there is no time for people who will only go half-way. You guys still want to come with Me?"

The story goes on to tell us that the disciples all said *yes*, and they actually *did* have to pay with their lives. All twelve of the disciples gave their lives in ugly, terrifying ways. They were fed to the lions. They were torn to pieces. They were crucified. They were boiled to death. All because when death looked them in the face, they said *yes*. They were told, "You can keep on living if you deny Jesus," but they wouldn't do it. They were witnesses to the Resurrection and they said, "That is something we cannot deny. Because of the resurrection, we know that there is life through death. Death is but a moment." They were aware of that, and they actually had to live that out. Our church was founded on the blood of the martyrs, people who went to death. We don't have to face that today, many of us don't, at least. This is America. He still asks that question though, "Are you in?"

The other day I was driving my son to his grandma's place in Chanhassen. Traffic was brutal because 694 where we live is so busted up right now. For about two hours we drove from New Brighton to Chanhassen and laced throughout that time were these moments with Wyatt. In the mirror, Wyatt and I would lock eyes and it was in those moments that I started to feel the weight of this text. I could feel the Spirit asking, "Matt, am I more important to you than Lauren and Wyatt? Do I come first? At the end of the day, do you choose Me before you choose your wife and your baby boy?" I paused because that is a huge question. I thought to myself, there are a lot of different ways I can answer this. I can say, "Well, God, we are all in this together, right?" And I can keep going to church and do the religious stuff. I can read my Bible and do my small

group studies. Okay, I can do that. But if I say, “Yes, Jesus, You are more important,” then there is a cost I need to pay. I have to give my life away. I have to lose my life. I have to say, ‘Jesus, take me where You want me to go. It doesn’t matter what happens to me because You come first. It doesn’t matter if I take my family into harm’s way if it is for Your sake.’” I hesitated on that question until I came to the answer, “I know that I need to say yes.”

Saying yes to constant discipleship has really rattled me. What became clear to me was this awful realization that I have made the cross too small. I have turned it into a decoration. I am a very greedy person. I like to get things. I like to acquire things. Maybe it’s because I’m an ugly person, but I like to put pretty things around me to balance myself out a little. In my life, I have turned the cross of Christ that we see hanging right there. I’ve turned it into a tattoo. I’ve turned it into a necklace. I’ve turned it into an earring. When I think of the cross of Christ, I think about Kirby Puckett making the cross on his chest before he used to take swings. But the cross is not a decoration. If we say yes to Jesus, the cross becomes our declaration. Whenever we see the cross, we are called to declare Galatians 2:20. You have that. It’s in your Bibles. Go there. It says this,

20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

So if I have been crucified with Christ, I am already dead. That is what Paul is saying. If we say that we are following Christ, then, no, we are not afraid of death. We are not afraid of denying ourselves because we have already died and Christ is living in us. We have submitted ourselves to the ways of Jesus Christ because we believe and hope. We believe that death is only a moment. We believe in the idea that when we reject the ways of the world, we are choosing Jesus instead. And, yes, we love our families. Yes, we love our friends, but we love Jesus more.

What I have found is that Scripture is asking us, asking me, to have an entirely new approach to the way we see the world. It’s a worldview shift. I cannot see my place in society, in this culture, the same anymore if I am living by the signature of Jesus which is the cross. It all changes. And I can’t help but ask the question then, as a person who is trying to submit to the cross and wake up daily and deny myself and carry that cross, where do I conflict with America? Because if we start looking into how Jesus is calling us, we will start to understand that there are some conflicts with our country and the ways of our world. When Jesus says,

² Do not conform to the pattern of this world [Romans 12:2].

to the pattern of America, you start to understand. Well, maybe there is something to that. Maybe there *is* something to the fact that as a country right now, we are 16 trillion dollars in debt because we cannot stop buying things. We are addicted to consumption. But the cross tells us that less is more and we are not supposed to be storing up things. Amen. It all gets destroyed anyway and it doesn’t mean much. That makes me start to think, okay, so if that’s true, should we be seeking to buy all these homes that have all these empty rooms? Should we be spending hundreds of dollars on haircuts? Should I be spending my money...? I spent a good amount of money on fantasy football this year but I started feeling pretty crappy about it. I’m not answering these questions. I’m not saying *yes*. I’m not saying *no*, but what I am saying is, if we are living under the cross, we have to evaluate how we are acquiring things, our addiction to

consumerism, by the cross. Are we walking consistently and faithfully? Are we denying ourselves? Is it more important to keep up with the Joneses or to keep up with Jesus?

Another thing that is feeding our country is gun violence. Guns have torn apart our cities top to bottom and, as Christians, followers of the cross of Christ, we have a choice. We can get lost in the forest of politics and can get into an argument of *I want guns; I don't want guns*, but we cannot ignore the trees, the people who are actually being shot up. In Minneapolis this past summer, we had toddlers who were killed. Toddlers! Not much older than my young son. So what that tells me is, "Matt, instead of posting reasons about gun control or whatever on Facebook or talking to people about it, maybe you should start having relationships with people in Minneapolis." Yeah, it might put me in harm's way, but that is what the cross will do sometimes.

I see how we objectify people, turn people into objects of our own desires, and that is not good. Do you know that Americans spend over 3 billion dollars every year on pornography? What that tells me is that if this is a Christian country and we are trying to follow Christ, we have forgotten that the people we are objectifying are sons and daughters of the King. We are forgetting that Christ calls them His workmanship. If we acknowledge them as sons and daughters of a royal King, we can't watch and take part in this stuff with a clear conscience anymore. And the way of the cross says that we won't. It says that this is wrong, that it is evil.

I have a problem with gossiping. Whether it is about people I know or people I don't know, I run my mouth about too many people, and it's wrong. When Jesus went to the cross, He was silent because He knew that words matter. I remember that we are defined by our fruits—our actions and our words. When I'm running my mouth about Miley Cyrus or I'm running my mouth about my mom, that's inconsistent with the cross. It doesn't add up. I can't say that I'm actually following the cross if I'm doing that.

⁴⁰ . . . 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me' [Matthew 25:40].

This means that in a country that praises individuality and self-worship, we will choose to be about the others. We will take on the Spirit of Christ that says whatever is happening to the poor, the widow, the orphan, the misfit, the prisoner, the sick, the hungry, the weak, and the weary, that's happening to me. When we take on that identity, we are not thinking of ourselves, we are thinking of the broader community. You can't be self-obsessed if your identity is wrapped up in a bigger community, and that's what the call of Christ is. It's that it isn't about you any more. That's the heart of the text, isn't it? Get over yourself. This is a very hard culture to get over yourself in. What I want to do is tell you about all the good things I've done lately. I want people to love me. But the cost of discipleship says we must lose our lives. Through the cross, we lose our lives.

We live in a world that tells us that when you get through at the end of life, you only live once, YOLO, then comes death so have as much fun as you want because death has the final word. But every time we come in here and look at that cross, every time we think about Jesus, we remember that death does not have the final word. Love wins! The grave was empty on Easter Morning! We hold on to the hope of Easter morning and believe that it is through death that we find new life. We try to avoid death at all costs and run away from it, but God is saying, "Don't

worry about death because life is on the other side.” Jesus’ upside-down Kingdom reminds us that we are citizens of another place. We are called to the cross. We are not called to this country.

So as I think about that and I ask you the question—Are we in? Am I in? Are you in?—I realize this is going to put us on the narrow road if we say yes. The beauty of picking up the cross is that it sets us upon the narrow road. Yes, it is hard. Yes, it is uncomfortable and it may cost us our lives, but it’s also beautiful.

My favorite word in all those Luke texts is *daily*. When you are following Christ with such dedication that any day could be your last, you have to look at that instrument of death you are carrying and you no longer can be apathetic or slaves to a routine. You start to live in the moment intentionally. Daily. Jesus loves the moments of now.

- You stop worshiping tomorrow and *start acknowledging* today.
- You stop planning how you can best live a life filled with love and service and *start seeing* the hurting people around us.
- You stop staring at the forest and *start caring* for the trees.

That call of Christ to walk the narrow road is one of self-denial and willingness to put Jesus above everything, even our own lives. It means we submit everything to Him; we evaluate our choices through the filter of the cross, the filter of Christ. It’s a very hard call. You can understand why Jesus becomes a very hard product to sell. Get your Bibles out. I want to show you how it is that in this recklessness and our willingness to pay this cost, we defeat darkness. Turn to Revelation 12. It says,

¹¹ They triumphed over him

That’s Satan. Satan has fallen. Evil has lost. And how has it lost?

¹¹ They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony;. . . .

Then this is my favorite part of this text right here. It says,

. . . they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

Friends, may we continue to live for Christ. May we continue to value Him above everything else. But may we also take into account the idea that maybe we should start dying for Christ. Maybe we should start dying to our egos, our desires, our dreams, our consumerism, our need for revenge, our lust. The call of Christ is a beautiful call that gives us more hope than anything else ever could. Let me pray.

Jesus, You are holy; we are not. So I pray, Lord God, that You would lead us closer to You. I pray, Lord, for courage against fear. I pray that we would understand the reality of Easter Sunday and how big that hope is because that changes everything. Lord, I apologize that we have made the cross too small. We have made the grave too small,

and we have not made Your hope big enough. I forfeit my life, Lord. It is yours. In Jesus' Name, we pray. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.