

Backbone: Fully Surrendered

Aaron Brockett | Luke 9: 59; Matthew 16: 24-25; John 12: 24-26

Good morning. It's good to see you guys. And if you have a Bible, would you please get to Luke chapter 9. Luke chapter 9, starting in verse 59. That's the passage we're going to look at today. We're actually going to be in several different places around the Bible, but that's the first place we're going to camp out for a significant amount of time.

If you're visiting with us today, you came on a really good day because we do series of messages around here. Today is the brand new beginning of the series that I have been excited about for a while called *Backbone*. When I was growing up, my Dad had a couple of things that he would oftentimes say to me to try to encourage me - some fatherly advice. One of the things that he would often say when I was maybe complaining or just whining about something is that he would look at me and say, 'Son, get a backbone.' And which basically means "toughen up." Quit whining about this, have the courage to face this situation; don't turn away from it.

Another thing my Dad used to often say to me when I was really wrestling through a difficult time is he would put his arm around me. He'd say, 'Son, don't worry about it. This will just put hair on your chest.' But I decided to go with backbone for this series. Thought that might work a little bit better for the overall audience. But if we were to define the term "backbone" and what we mean by it, we would say that it is the vertebrae spine or spinal column, the main support or major supporting factor, but really the thing that we're getting at in this series is that this is the strength of character and determination.

And we all know that we have a backbone in our physical bodies and it's not necessarily that part of our body that receives a whole lot of recognition, but it's pretty clear if you have one or not. If you didn't have one, your flesh would sort of fold over on itself. Instead of standing before you today, I would just be piled up before you if I didn't have a backbone. And yet backbones don't really receive a lot of notoriety or recognition. Very rarely do we point somebody's backbone out. That would be weird. 'Hey, you've got a great backbone.' But we're all thankful for them and I think in a very similar way, we all have a spiritual backbone. It is that resolve, that strength of character, it's the courage to speak or to act at the right time and at the right place. And it becomes pretty clear after being with somebody for just several moments whether or not they have some sort of character - whether they have a spiritual backbone.

And there have probably been moments in your life where you wish you would have displayed more spine. You wish you would have displayed more courage in the face of some sort of fear or uncertainty in your life. Maybe you shrunk back from it. Maybe you chose what was convenient over what was costly. And if that's true for you, congratulations - that just means you're human. That's kind of where we all drift to. We just want what is convenient over what is costly. But having backbone means I'm

going to swallow my pride. I'm going to put my trust in something or someone and this is, the very nature of having a backbone means this is a difficult thing to do. I've got to summon the courage to actually do this thing. And there have been lots of moments in my life where I just displayed very little backbone.

I remember when I was in college. I was with my friend and we were at the mall in the middle of the afternoon during the week. I have no idea why. I don't even remember why we were there at the mall. I don't even like the mall anyway. But we were there in the middle of the week in the middle of the afternoon and we're walking down the corridor (there were not very many people there), and all of a sudden we hear a bunch of commotion behind us. And we turned around and there were three men on the ground wrestling. What we found out is that one of these guys had shoplifted something, and the other two guys who were employees of the store had tackled him right behind us. They were trying to hold him down until mall security or the police could get there, but they weren't doing a very good job. He [the shoplifter] was a lot bigger than they were. They were just barely holding him down. And so this is what my buddy did. He hit me on my chest with the back of his hand and said, 'Come on, man, let's go help.' And he takes off running toward these guys that are wrestling on the ground. And here's what I did. I pulled a 'hey man, I'm right behind you. Let me tie my shoe.' All right. I just got to double knot that thing – those things come untied a lot.

As he's running up to them, mall security ends up swooping in on their segways before he could scrap with the guys. Granted, my buddy was probably a little bit too jacked up on testosterone. He probably saw the Bourne identity movies one too many times for his own good. And you might hear that and think, Aaron, I think your buddy was kind of stupid and you displayed great wisdom by not getting involved. Why are you laughing? That was not a joke. Actually, the reason why I hesitated was not because I contemplated in the moment this would be a foolish thing to do. I hesitated because I didn't want my fragile frame to get pummeled by the shoplifter. I just had no backbone in that moment. And having backbone is the courage to speak or to act at the right time and the right place. Now, we're not talking about breaking up fist fights at the mall, but we are talking about times in your life where you know something should be said but you don't say it. You know something should be done but you refrain from doing it. Opportunities that need to be seized but you fail to seize them. And most important of all and this is what – this series is certainly about courage, but it's not just about courage in general.

This series is about the courage to follow Jesus. The courage to put your trust in Jesus. That is not something that we spend a whole lot of time talking about. We never frame it up that way. But if you think about somebody surrendering their life and choosing to go all in for Jesus, choosing to say I'm not just going to make you my Savior, but I'm going to make you Lord in every area of my life. I'm going to follow after you. That requires a tremendous amount of backbone. That requires a great deal of courage on our part. And we shouldn't be surprised at that because everything in life or anything in life that is worth doing it requires some sort of courage. You know, a good marriage really requires a great deal of

courage. If you were to set down with married couples who have had good, healthy marriages for 20, 30, 40 years one of the things you might likely hear from them is that they would say that the thing that has kept our marriage together and alive isn't necessarily the romance, it's been the courage - The courage to do things that are not easy, the courage to put the needs of my spouse over my own.

As a young father, one of the things that I hadn't anticipated is that one of the things that is required to be a good parent is courage, a little bit of backbone. I've got four kids. I've got a boy, but I've got three girls. And my three girls are all drop dead gorgeous like their Mommy. They've got these big eyes that are as big as saucers that come in either brown or blue and they bat their little eyelashes at me. They've already figured this thing out that they can play Daddy like a fiddle. Aw, Daddy. And they come up with – and I've got to have backbone. Back away little she devils. You are not going to get your way. And half the time they still do anyway.

You think about your job or your career. You're not going to advance, you're not going to get anywhere if you don't display a little courage to do the right thing, not just the easy thing. It requires backbone. Anything in life that's worthwhile requires backbone. So, it shouldn't surprise us that the decision to put our trust in Jesus Christ and to follow Him requires some courage as well. Jesus says basically that the only way to come to Him is in this posture. Both hands up in the air – that's kind of the international symbol for 'I surrender' – meaning I don't have anything in my hands to preoccupy myself with, nothing to defend myself with, nothing to be distracted by. Jesus, I take my hands off of my life and I come to You as I am. That requires significant courage. Because what if we get hurt? What if we get the raw end of the deal?

And I hope you don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that your courage is what saves you, but it certainly requires courage to be saved. It certainly requires courage to come to Jesus to come like this *{hands lifted up}* and say hey, I surrender all. Jesus alludes to this in Matthew chapter 16 verses 24-25. You don't have to turn there. You're already in Luke 9, but I'll throw this up on the screen because this really is the over-arching passage that kind of describes what we're talking about. And Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." In other words, if you try to hold on to your life, in the end you're just going to end up losing it anyway. But if you really let go of it, that's when you're going to find life. A key word in that passage is the word "take." It implies this proactive stance upon our parts. That we are going to take up our cross. We're going to deny ourselves. We're literally going to die to ourselves which is not a natural thing for us to do. The natural thing for us to do is to preserve our life. The natural thing for us to do is to guard what we think is important and valuable to us. Scientists refer to this as the survival instinct. And we'll do anything that we can to ensure self-preservation.

Jesus says, would you have the courage? Would you have the trust to let go of your life and come after Me? And the word for this – and it's not a popular word – we don't like this word at all because of what

it implies. The word is commitment. And that's not really any of our favorite words. We don't like the idea of committing. But the very essence of commitment means that I eliminate all other options and I bind myself to one thing and that's what I go with.

Now, another thing that commitment implies is vulnerability. That if you kind of release all of these other options and bind yourself to one and you commit to something, in essence you're making yourself vulnerable which could hurt you. But it's also the only way for you to experience true and lasting fulfillment. Maybe one way that we could illustrate this whole concept (because here's the thing) is that if we just straddle the fence when it comes to Jesus, we'll never really come to fully understand what He's offering. That if we just kind of say, 'Well, Jesus, let me just get a little bit of you. Let me just kind of attend church on Sunday, but I'm not going to wholly commit' Then, what will happen inevitably is that you'll eventually just end up walking away from all of this, or you will be really frustrated. And the word for that is religion; because it's like a treadmill. You're always trying to feel good enough. You're always trying to get good enough. But Jesus says will you hold up your hands and commit yourself to Me? And yes, you're making yourself vulnerable, but I can be trusted.

Maybe a way that we would illustrate this is – how many of you know what a play action pass is? Throw up your hands if you do. How many of you don't care? - A number of you. My wife does not care about football at all. So, for some of you, you're like I'm zoning out right now. Hang with me. Let me just describe this real quickly because it illustrates what I just said.

In the game of football you have a team of guys on one side that are trying to defend territory and a team of guys on the other side who are trying to gain territory. The guys who are trying to defend territory are known as the defense. There are three lines of defense. The first line of defense is what we would call the linemen. And the linemen are really big guys that are paid to not fall down (In very simple terms). So they stand on the line and they try to keep the other team from advancing the ball.

The third line of defense – you go all the way to the back through linemen defense called the secondary. The secondary are really fast guys who try to bat the ball out of the air, intercept it or tackle the receiver if he does catch the ball. But then there is a middle line of defense and those are called the linebackers.

Linebackers have a dramatically different role to play than the linemen or the secondary. The linebackers have to commit. They have to try to anticipate the play. And so if it's a running play, they have to commit to that. They've got to run up on it, but if they do, it's going to make them vulnerable for the pass. If they think it's going to be a pass, they have to commit to the pass but making them vulnerable to the run. A play action pass is when the quarterback fakes the run so the linebackers will commit; thus, making the passing lanes open and they're vulnerable to it.

And that's in essence what commitment is: that when you commit to something, you're all in but it leaves you vulnerable as well. And this is why some of you in this room – you've said, 'Aaron, you've

exactly argued my case for why I will never commit' because I don't want to be vulnerable. But you just did. You just committed to never commit. You can't ever get away from this in life. It doesn't matter if you proactively choose it or it happens for you, eventually we all commit ourselves to something that costs us everything. The question is what I just made myself vulnerable to, is it trustworthy? Can it be trusted? And if it can be trusted, then I should commit to that. If it can be trusted, then I should make myself vulnerable to it.

Jesus alludes to this in Luke chapter 9. This is our primary passage. I asked you to turn there. Luke 9 verse 59. Jesus asks a man in this passage to commit; thus making himself vulnerable, but Jesus seems to indicate that it's worth the cost. But it's going to require this man to have a backbone. It's going to require him to have some courage to trust Jesus at His word. Listen to what it says here. Verse 59 – Jesus is speaking: "To another he said follow me. But he said, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. And Jesus said to him, Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." So, we don't know a whole lot about this guy. We don't even know his name. He seems like a good guy. He seems well-intentioned. And Jesus comes to him and he offers this two word invitation that he offered to Matthew and the rest of the disciples. It's the same two word invitation that Jesus offers to every person in this room. It's the invitation to follow Him.

Notice Jesus didn't say believe in Me. That's usually how we frame it up. We say we believe in God. But Jesus didn't say 'Believe in me.'" Jesus said, Follow Me. And this man initially seems willing to do so because the very first word out of his mouth is the word 'Lord' indicating that he sees Jesus as King. He sees Jesus as an authority, and he sees himself as a servant. But one of the very next words out of the guy's mouth is the word "first" which indicates that he's got his priority list laid out in front of him and following Jesus isn't at the top of the list, something else is. But like all really good excuses, it seems reasonable. Right? What's the guy's excuse in this passage for why he can't follow Jesus? Well, he needs to bury his father.

I don't know about you, but as I was reading this passage this last week I thought well that sounds reasonable. Right? You get out of work for that. You know, it runs pretty high on the priority list. If a loved one passes away, I'm going to stop everything. I'm going to go to the funeral and I'm going to attend to that. And Jesus doesn't seem interested in that excuse at all. In fact, the way he talks about it makes Jesus seem kind of insensitive. Don't you think? Jesus is like, 'No, let the dead bury their own dead.' Wow, Jesus, thanks for the compassion. It's like Jesus, lighten up a little bit. Let the dude bury his Dad and then he'll go follow you. One of the things that we need to understand here is that when somebody passes away today, usually, the funeral takes place within a week. In the First Century, funerals were a year-long process.

So, understand this, when this guy says let me bury my Dad. He's essentially saying, 'Jesus, not this year. Jesus, it will have to be another year. It will have to be next year.' I think another thing that we need to at least entertain here is the possibility that his Dad hadn't even died yet. That maybe other than a case

of really bad flu or a bum knee, his Dad is very much alive. And so really what he's saying to Jesus is, 'Jesus, wait until my parents pass away.' Why do you think somebody would say that? Some of you maybe can relate to this. Maybe his parents wouldn't understand his decision to follow Jesus. Maybe he's so afraid of what his family would think, he's like it would just be a lot easier, a lot more convenient if my family just wasn't really in the picture any more than Jesus, I could follow you and not have to have those awkward conversations at family dinners and holidays. Just wait a little while longer then I'm all yours, Jesus.

Maybe one thing that he's saying is Jesus, wait until I can get the inheritance money. You know, following You I don't think comes with a very good health or retirement plan, so if I leave now they'll probably cut me out of the Will. But if I can wait, then I'll receive the inheritance money and Jesus, you won't have to worry about another mouth to feed, I'll be self-sufficient on my own. And whatever his excuse is – it doesn't matter – Jesus isn't interested in any of it. And Jesus says, "No, you need to follow Me right now." And some of us – I know even part of me – I look at this and I can kind of sympathize with the man in this passage. And I think, Jesus, he's willing to go, it's just not good timing. He's not saying no; he's just saying not yet. And here's what Jesus is saying. The only way that I can be fully known is through full and immediate surrender and we don't like that. That requires backbone.

And I think there would probably be somebody here today who says, you know, Aaron, I was kind of tentative to come to church today and to hear all of this and that's why. That's exactly what I'm afraid of; and that's what I'm turned off by. I don't understand why Jesus can't keep this thing casual. I don't understand why the extreme language here. That just sounds kind of crazy. I mean, hey, I believe in Him. It's all good; but complete surrender?! Like following after Him? I don't like the sound of that. And so we end up kind of reducing Jesus to a salesman that we don't trust. Jesus is trying to pull the deal over on us and we're going to get the raw end of the deal.

When Lindsay and I were engaged to be married, we received an invitation in the mail to a cooking demonstration at a conference room at a local hotel. And basically what it is it's a sales pitch for you to buy very expensive high-end pots and pans. Now, how many of you ever received any of this in the mail? Yeah, a fair number of us. And so we get this thing in the mail and it's on a Friday night and I really didn't want to go, but Lindsay wanted to go so we went. You learn that lesson early. So, we go and apparently all of our other friends that were engaged to be married go the same invitation and so we're all filing in to this conference room. And the guy who was doing this sales pitch was good. Like really good because immediately he knew how to capture the attention of all the guys because he had been cooking for a half hour and so it smelled really good when you walked in. It was right around dinner time so you were hungry anyway. So, he's doing this cooking demonstration, showing us how easy it is. He's cooking some chicken teriyaki and he's cutting it up and passing it around.

And then he starts in on this whole sales pitch and he was talking about the quality of these pots and pans and how as a young married couple you really need this because a lot of time is spent in the



kitchen. You're preparing meals for each other. And he said the hand-me-down pots and pans that you're going to get from your Mom and Dad are not good for your health. They've got all kinds of extra stuff on them. They've got dried food on there for years and years and all this stuff. He tells us clean up on these is a cinch. He told us how easy it was – one swipe. Just clean it up. And he said you know what? This is an investment into the quality of your marriage because you won't have to spend as much time cleaning up. You can spend more time together. (That was an actual line that he used that we believed.) And so we get done with this whole thing and we had not intended on showing up to this hotel that night to buy pots and pans, but by the time he was done, we looked at each other and we were like, we really need this. We really need to get our marriage off to a great start by going into debt for high-end pots and pans.

And so the moment of truth came when we had to sit down with him. We picked a package. We had to sign on the dotted line and it was crazy expensive. We're talking multiple payment plan expensive. We'd be paying it off for the next two years. But in the moment, we were like, we've got to have this. And so we signed on the dotted line and we thought the cost was steep, but you know what, the cost is worth it until the next morning at 4:00 a.m., my eyes popped open. It was like one of those delayed things, you know. Buyer's remorse that I should have had before I ever bought it, but it hits me and I woke up and I said, what did we just do? We don't even have two nickels to rub together. We need a new car. We don't need to be in debt to pots and pans. So, I called the guy and I told him that we wanted out. I cancelled the order.

I think there are maybe some of us we kind of feel that way a little bit when it comes to Jesus. We're like, Jesus, I'm okay with giving you a little bit, but what's this whole business with my whole life. Why do you require full and complete surrender? And what's my family going to think? And what does that even mean any way? I think I need to read the fine print because I think that I'm probably getting the raw end of the deal on this. And you know what, those are all very natural questions to ask. I would never discourage anybody from asking them. It is what the Bible calls counting the cost. And I'd actually get a little bit nervous anyway whenever there's somebody who comes to me and they're really overly eager to give their life to Jesus Christ without displaying any sort of doubt or angst because it is a big deal. You are making a big decision. And people who make the decision kind of flippantly, many times don't stick with it. You know, when something is really costly, there are only two ways to explain it. When something costs a lot, the only options are (1) it's overpriced and it's really not worth it; or (2) it's the real deal. We know this in life.

An example that comes to my mind – there are probably numbers of examples that we could think of. But one example is Bose stereo. You hear that name Bose – what do you immediately think of? It's expensive, right? It's kind of good quality. You know one of the things that Bose never does is run a sale. Have you ever walked into a Bose store, like today, hey, today is buy one get one free? Great. They never do that. They never slash the cost because they believe they have a quality product. The cost is high, but what you're buying is quality.

Do you know what the salesman of the high-end pots and pans did when I called to cancel the order? He slashed the price like crazy. We're not talking 10%; we're talking 60%. He even offered to send us to Disneyland. I was like what does that have to do with pots and pans? And you know the whole time he is desperately trying to get us into the deal, the only thing that it did was it just further convinced me that it wasn't worth it. If he's willing to cut the cost that significantly, then really it's not worth it.

You know what Jesus never does? Cuts the cost. He never slashes the price. Jesus doesn't go back to this guy in Luke 9 and say hey, wait a second, maybe I was being – I woke up in a bad mood today. I'm sorry. Here's my cell phone number, call me, text me in a year (all right) whenever this kind of gets wrapped up.

Another example that comes to mind is the rich young ruler where the rich young ruler comes to Jesus and it's not that his money was going to keep him out of heaven. It's that his money had become the false god that sits up on the throne of his heart and Jesus knew it. And so Jesus said to him that the only way that you can follow Me is to sell all that you have and give it to the poor then come follow Me. And the rich young ruler said I cannot do that. You know what Jesus didn't do? He didn't renegotiate. He didn't say, well, wait a second, how about half or how about we incrementally work our way up?. Jesus let him walk. And you know what that says to me is yes the cost is high, but it's worth it.

Jesus is offering us immeasurably more. You come to Jesus with your hands emptied out and you actually come to realize that you never really sacrificed anything at all. You see at some point you are going to put your trust in something that will cost you everything. That's not optional; it's mandatory. We all put our trust in something that will eventually cost us everything. The question we have to answer is am I putting my trust in the right thing?

So, even though I had a bad experience with that pots and pans guy, that didn't mean that I would never buy something costly again. It didn't mean that I would not put my name on a document that would cost me a great deal. Because less than two months after that, I signed another document that was very costly it was called a marriage license. It cost me way more than the pots and pans and completely worth it. All right. I should make that very clear. I was signing over my whole self. Were there moments when I questioned it? Were there moments when I wondered if...? Of course! It's a big deal, but I realized you know what, after 14 years of marriage I never sacrificed anything. This is what Jesus is asking of us. Some of you might say, once again, you might say why does Jesus require us to die? Maybe you've heard that language before where deny yourself, pick up your cross, follow Me. Why does Jesus require us to die to our self?

And the answer to this can be found in another passage Romans chapter 6. If you would, hang a right in your Bible, flip over to Romans chapter 6. I want to read 11 verses in this chapter that basically explains why it's necessary for us to die to ourselves. Romans 6 starting in verse 1. If you don't have a Bible in front of you, this will be on the screen for you to follow along. But let me just read through the passage.

It pretty much stands on its own two legs. There is not a whole lot of explanation that's required here. Paul is speaking and he basically starts with a question. And he says: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" And then he answers it emphatically. He says, "By no means! How can we who died to sin (so that there is our first clue. What are we dying to? We're dying to sin.) still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized in to Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

Some of you are like what's the big deal about baptism? Why do you guys get so excited about it? That's the reason right there in that passage. Verse 5: "For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who have died has been set free from sin." Do you see what this is saying? This is answering the question of why we have to die because we get set free from sin. "Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Here's that those eleven verses are saying. You will be a slave to something. So which is it? You are either a slave to sin or you can be a slave to Jesus Christ in the best sense of the word. See, sin is not just a list of bad things that we do that disappoint God. Sin is the cancer that has infected your mind, your heart and your soul. And so when Jesus comes to us and says I want you to deny yourself, I want you to die to yourself essentially what He's saying is this is the only way to put that sin nature to death that is within you.

I know that many of you in this room, you either have been yourself or you know a family member or loved one who has been diagnosed with cancer. When somebody is diagnosed with cancer it's usually a surprise. Maybe they go into the doctor not having this information, but then a diagnosis is given. So that you were told, well, you have cancer. And their response to that is what really determines life and death. People who have been diagnosed with cancer – you don't just say, well, I don't think it will be that big of a deal. If I don't bother it, it won't bother me. I'll just kind of coexist with it. Or let me just take a couple of Advil and get a good night's sleep and I think everything will turn out okay. You know what cancer patients rarely ever do? They don't look at a doctor and say how dare you judge me with cancer? How dare you declare that upon me? That's just a part of me. No, cancer patients have to act swiftly and aggressively. They have to act quickly to say I've got to put this cancer to death and the only way I can do that is this. And I've known several cancer patients that have had to go through medication, chemotherapy, radiation and all of them have this tone, this attitude of surrender. This is going to be hard. This is going to be painful. This is going to be costly, but is the cost worth it? Absolutely.



See, here's the thing. Jesus says would you just at least come to me with this posture – but I've already paid the price. I've already gone to the cross. Yes, I'm asking you to give this up, but actually, in the very end, you're not really giving up anything. You're receiving surpassingly more. You're receiving infinitely more from Jesus Christ. The issue is do I trust that which I've become vulnerable to? Do I trust Jesus Christ or do I not? And this is such a difficult thing for our culture to get our heads around because this runs against the grain of everything we've been taught or trained to believe.

There's a sociologist by the name of Peter Berger who wrote a book called *The Homeless Mind* and in it he says here's the primary difference between those of us who live in the modern Western world and the mindsets of those who around the globe throughout most of history, and it really comes down to this. Our perspective on life and what we're after comes down to two very simple words: honor or dignity. And he argues in the book that most of the mindsets of people around the globe throughout history have been in pursuit of that which is called honor. And honor is tied up in my role, my responsibility as a citizen and so as a fireman, as a police officer, as a stay at home Mom, as a teacher, as a plumber, I set aside my needs for the good of the community and I fulfill my responsibilities. And the by-product of all of that is that I get honor. I don't go and chase it, but it comes to me because I set aside my own needs. I sacrificed that. He said that what has driven most of mankind throughout history is honor.

He said you know what the modern Western mindset is after today? Dignity. Dignity says the most important thing is my own happiness and my fulfillment. And so I have the right to those things. So, I am going to pursue those things. In fact, there is a cell phone commercial and you'll probably recognize it. Every time it comes on, I laugh out loud because it's so absurd. There's a narrator and he comes on and he's talking about the data plan coverage for the cell phone. And the narrator says, You have the need. No. You have the **right** to better data coverage with your cell phone plan. And every time that comes on (my kids think I'm crazy), I laugh out loud. Well, of course you have the right to better data coverage on your cell phone plan. What do you think our forefathers fought the war for your freedom? Right. But this is all over our marketing. It's all over commercials. It's all over reality TV. It's our dignity. Now, why do I bring this up? What does this have to do with following Jesus Christ? Here's what it has to do with it. It's called a head-on collision. That what Jesus is asking you to do is a head-on collision with the sermon that you hear the other six days of the week in our culture. That it is all about your dignity. It is all about your – there's nothing wrong with you. You just pursue your own happiness and your fulfillment. And Jesus says no, there is a cancer called sin and it needs to be dealt with and the only way you can deal with it is this: complete surrender.

Jesus cannot be known apart from absolute commitment which is why for some of you who have been attending church for years and years and years, but you've never fully let go of your life completely. This all seems crazy, absurd and boring. And just giving Jesus a little bit of yourself works like a flu shot. You get just enough of Him to be inoculated by Him. But Jesus can't be sampled. Jesus can't be sampled like a yogurt cup at Costco. This is not like a 30-day money back guarantee trial. Jesus says – and this is why

baptism is so significant which, by the way, baptism is one of the most celebrated, awesome, cool things that we do. It's also the thing we get the most resistance by. Why do you think that would be? Because that's tangible. That's kind of like if I go up in front of several thousand people and I go under water then I can't really hide that. It's like I'm dying to myself.

Do you want to know one of the things that I love about the symbolism of baptism? Is that nobody looks good doing it. How many people do you know look good wet? That's why we don't do close-ups. It's like you come up and it's like snot hanging out of their nose, eye mascara, and you just come up and you're vulnerable. You're basically putting your trust in that other person who is lowering you. The symbolism that is packed into baptism is so huge. And so many of you are resistant to it for any number of reasons. We never suggest that that's what saves you. But the Bible teaches you're saved by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ, and then the Bible commands you to be baptized. It's as simple as that. Basically, through this symbolism you're saying, okay, I'm no longer straddling the fence; I'm completely in when it comes to Jesus Christ.

There's one more passage I want to look at real quickly. It's in John chapter 12. You might flip back over there. Hang a left again, okay. You guys are going to get a paper cut. Back in John chapter 12 verse (unless you're on your iPad then you'll – I don't know what you'll get – skin rash or something). John 12, verse 24. Listen to what Jesus says here. These are the words of Jesus and Jesus says, "Truly, truly..." in other words what I'm getting ready to say can be trusted ..."I say to you unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies ..." How many of you think of planting a seed like that? Well, kids, we're going to kill the seeds. Right. No, we're going to plant the seed. Jesus doesn't say that. Jesus says this grain of wheat dies, but unless it goes into the ground and dies ..."it remains alone; ..." In other words, it's just a seed; there's no harvest from it. It's just a little seed. ..."but if it dies ..." In other words, if it gets planted, if it goes into the ground "...it bears much fruit."

Verse 25: "Whoever loves his life loses it, ..." Man, that's sobering. "...and whoever hates his life ..." That's that word hate - this is this idea that it's, that what Jesus is offering you love it so much more that when it comes to your own life, it looks like hate. "...whoever hates his life in this world (it's a matter of priorities) will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also." You want to know why Jesus is worth following? It's because Jesus displayed the ultimate act of backbone when he laid down His life for you. That he submitted his own life to the will of God the Father. And here's the great thing. Jesus never asked you to do anything that He is not willing to do already Himself. And Jesus said I'm just asking you to follow Me, to lay down your life, as I laid down My life for you.

And I love this analogy of the seed because if you just imagine a seed is getting ready to be planted in the ground. Can you imagine if the seed was a living object what it's thinking before it gets planted? And the seed's thinking, oh no. This is the end of my existence as I know it. I'm going under the ground. I won't be able to breathe down there. And yet if a seed had its way, it would probably say, I don't want

to do that. But the seed has no idea the kind of potential that lies within it. The seed has no idea what kind of fruit that lies within it. But it has to first die. It's got to go into the ground. In a very similar way, Jesus says to you and He says to me, you have no idea what I've got planned for you. You have no idea how infinite and blessed and enriched the kind of life I have for you. You have no idea of the potential of the faith that resides within you, if you would just be willing to do this. If you'd just be willing to say, I surrender all. If you would just be willing to say I'll no longer do this on my own terms anymore; I'll come to you just as I am. Yes, I'm being vulnerable when I do this, but Jesus, You can be trusted.

And here's what we find – it is that if we can manage to do that, we come to discover that we really never sacrificed anything at all. That we just exchanged a pseudo treasure for the one true treasure that never tarnishes or expires. And for some of you in this room, you'll reject this message. You'll say, well, I'm just not interested in that. And that's certainly – you have the freedom and the right to do that. But I'm just telling you this will just continue to frustrate you because Jesus can't be sampled. It's that decision where we're not saying that you have to know everything. We're not saying that you have it all figured out. We're not talking about absolute perfection; we're just talking about commitment to say, Jesus, here I am and I'm going to continue to reside in this posture. It requires for you to be saved from your sins, for you to gain salvation, you've got to do this. And for you to continue to grow in Jesus requires you to continually do this. And when we continue to grab back a hold of our lives, that's when we begin to simply just mess it up.

And so today what I want to do is we respond to the teaching today. We're going to take communion together. If you're not a follower of Christ, just feel free to let the tray pass to spend some time reflecting. Today – I want to pray over you. So if you would, I know we're kind of wrestling around the room, if we could just bow our heads real quick. I just want to pray a prayer over you this morning as we conclude.

Lord God, I come to you right now and I know that there is maybe somebody here today who is just really wrestling and somebody who feels really convicted. And they're not even sure what the next step should be, what they should do. And Lord, I just pray that You would give them this sense of peace right now that the only thing that they need to do, the only thing they need to know is surrender. And maybe if that's you right now, the prayer that you would pray is God, here I am. I'm still not sure what this all exactly means. I've still got doubts and fears and insecurities, but I guess the first step that I make is I'm willing to surrender. I'm willing to come to You with both hands in the air and ask that You would be not just the Savior of my life, but the Lord of my life. God will meet you in that place. God, I pray that if there is anybody here whose heart is ready for that that Your spirit would meet them right where they are and begin that journey of a fully surrendered life following after Jesus Christ.

Lord, we pray this in Jesus' Holy Name. Amen.