

Living in Denial

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[0 : 00] All right, how many of you have been blessed by the service already? Yeah, I have too. That worship was powerful, and I'm grateful to the choir and our musicians and Jared for leading us to the throne of God already this morning.

Let's go to the Gospel of Luke chapter 9 and verse 23 if we can. Is this any better? It's not working. It's weird.

Can you all hear me okay? I'm not sure what's working. Sorry. Luke chapter 9 and verse 23. We're continuing in our series this morning on be a disciple.

Be a disciple. Last Sunday, we talked about choosing the Jesus way. Choosing the Jesus way. Back during Pioneer Union, our choir blessed us on Sunday morning and again at the Power and Praise event at the Cowboy Church with the song entitled, The Jesus Way.

We talked about that last Sunday morning, choosing the Jesus way. What does that look like? Our takeaway was commit to the Jesus way and watch God transform you into becoming his disciple.

[1 : 34] So all of our sermons are available on our YouTube channel at FBC Henrietta on YouTube. So you can get caught up if you'd ever like to do that. But that is our challenge from last Sunday.

Watch God transform you into becoming his disciple by choosing the Jesus way. If you wouldn't mind, if you're there in Luke chapter 9 with us, would you mind joining me in standing as we read this opening text, Luke chapter 9 and verse 23.

Let's read down through verse 25 together and it's on the screen as well. Then he said to them all, God, I pray that you would teach us this life transforming lesson from your words that you spoke to your disciples.

I pray that it would change us from the inside out, that we would give you the glory for it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You may be seated. Thank you for standing. The title this morning is Living in Denial.

Living in Denial. Now, I want to go back to Luke chapter 9 and verse 23 so you know what kind of denial we're talking about.

[3 : 17] He said, if anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself. Just so we're clear, Mark Twain said denial ain't just a river in Egypt.

We're not talking about the kind of denial you might be thinking of, okay? We're not talking about denial river either. We're talking about denying ourselves.

I want to pivot and go a place that you probably didn't wake up and your mind wandered to this place this morning. I want to go to the concept of asceticism.

Did anybody start thinking about asceticism when you woke up this morning? Just me? Okay. Only me because I had been studying for this passage.

So that was the only reason. I want to talk to you about Simeon the Elder. All right? Simeon the Elder was a monk from Aleppo, Syria. He was a stylite.

[4 : 21] A stylite is someone who believes that physical suffering is necessary to be right with God. An ascetic, a stylite is a form of an ascetic.

Someone who ascribes to asceticism. So an ascetic is someone who is characterized by or suggests the practice of severe self-discipline and abstaining from all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reasons.

So it's someone who takes self-denial to the extreme, usually for the reasons of faith. This is an early painting of Simeon the Elder.

Simeon the Elder became a monk, like we said, only over in Syria. He joined a monastery in Aleppo. And his views and his ideas were so extreme, they kicked him out of his monastery.

How extreme do you have to be to get kicked out of a monastery? Because they think you're too strict, you're too rigid. He moved to a tiny little hut.

[5 : 44] But people wouldn't leave him alone in his hut. So he built a nine-foot pillar and a little three-by-three-foot platform on top of the pillar and refused to come down.

Problem was, people would still come talk to him on top of his nine-foot pillar and they would seek his wisdom and his advice because they thought this guy must have found the better way. We've got to come find out how he's cracked the code to this higher way of life. See what I said, this higher way of life? Problem was, he was still too accessible to people for his liking. So he kept building his pillar higher and higher until it was 50 feet high. And he stayed on that pillar, true story, for 37 years until he died.

And you don't want to know what physical condition he was in when he died. This guy took self-denial to another level.

[7 : 01] Did anybody get that? Thank you. It just wasn't that funny, was it? I thought it was pretty funny, personally.

He took self-denial to a level 50 feet high, all right? Sorry for another bad joke. The most ironic thing is this guy was trying to get closer to God.

He was trying to set himself apart. In reality, by his own writings and teaching, he was trying to deny himself.

But the irony in it is that he was living in actual denial. Because he was denying the actual fact. He was completely oblivious to the fact that God calls us not to self-absorption, not to isolation. He calls us not to lift ourselves up on a pedestal, not to ignore the world around us, but to come down from our self-erected high place, to deny our inner pride and self-righteous attitude, and to follow Jesus himself as he leads us on mission among those all around us who need him so desperately.

[8 : 32] That's what a disciple is. It's not Simeon the Elder. It's not asceticism. It's not being a stylite. It's not lifting ourselves up.

That's what denying self actually looks like. In trying to deny himself, he actually prioritized himself above everyone else.

So when Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, we have to be very careful to look at what he actually means.

I found a very accurate, I believe, I believe description at what Jesus actually means from the Bible teacher, Kylie Dunn. She wrote this, Jesus does not have broad generic ideas about self-denial. He has something very specific in mind. From Luke's writing and elsewhere in scripture, components of self-denial start to take shape. Self-denial is not about you, but it's submission to a very particular person.

[9 : 40] Because of that person, when properly motivated, self-denial is not asceticism. That's why I wanted to give you that definition a minute ago.

It's not asceticism. It's not Simeon the Elder. It's not being a stylite. It's not this extreme form of rejecting all indulgences and lifting yourself up and being a hermit.

It's not any of that. It's worship. It's worship of Jesus Christ himself. That is self-denial.

So let's go back to the word of God. Colossians chapter 2 and verse 8. Would you turn with me over to Colossians chapter 2 and verse 8? We're going to look at Colossians 2 and verse 8.

Then we're going to skip down to verse 16 and read down through the end of the chapter and into chapter 3. Colossians 2 and verse 8.

[10 : 49] Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elements of the world rather than Christ.

Let's read that again. Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy, through empty deceit, based on human tradition. Did you catch that?

Based on the elements of the world rather than Christ. So what's the lesson here? Human tradition rarely comes from God.

Simeon's tradition here became something that became a tradition. It's still actually practiced today. In modern day Turkey, there's a guy on a pillar, there's a monk on a pillar who's been up there for, I want to say 12 years.

You'd have to fact check me on that. But he's trying to be the modern day Simeon. He's over there right now. You can go visit Turkey if you want and go see him up on his pillar. It's a tradition still alive today.

[12 : 00] He thinks he's closer to God because he's being a stylite. That's a tradition that's nowhere commanded in the Bible. It's not getting him one ounce closer to God. He's actually disobeying God's commands rather than obeying something that God commanded his people to do.

So human tradition rarely gets us closer to God. Now that's an extreme example, but let's bring it a little bit closer to home. Are there things that we have incorporated into our lives that feel like maybe that's something that came from God, but when we break them down, it really never came from God.

And it might actually be leading us a little bit further from God than closer to God. Or it might be distracting us from what God actually wants for us rather than helping us accomplish the mission that God actually has for us.

Let's look at our home lives. Are there things that have become so important to us in our home lives, we can't think of our life without them, but they're actually keeping us from the best that God has for us and our families?

How about our church? Are there things that have become so important that we're used to seeing in our church, but it's keeping us from the best?

[13 : 27] That God has for our church and accomplishing the mission that he has for our church. The questions that we've got to ask, tradition not only doesn't always come from God, rarely comes from God, sometimes it can keep us from the best that God has for us.

Matthew 15, verses six through nine, Jesus was, man, really laying it down for him, and he said, you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition.

He was calling out the Pharisees. And he said, you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition, you hypocrites. Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God. They teach man-made ideas as commands from God.

Now y'all, I'm all about learning from the culture around us. I'm all about, you know, Jesus used a donkey and made it talk. You know, Jesus quoted different people.

[14 : 41] Paul quoted different people. On Mars Hill, Paul quoted philosophers that had nothing to do with God. It absolutely stood counter to what God believed.

But, you cannot quote those man-made ideas as commands from God. You can't have a man say something and then put it in the mouth of Jesus.

You can't come up with an idea and then force it on people as though it came from God. That's what the Pharisees tried to do. And then enforced those rules on people.

And then legislated their commands as though they came from God. That's what Jesus called out. He said, you honor me with your lips, but your hearts are so far from me.

That worship is a farce. That is not worship. You're not denying yourself. You're lifting yourself up so far above me. You're not my disciples.

[15 : 50] So when he calls you to be a disciple, he's calling you to deny yourself. We're starting up a Sunday school class. Can't really call it a Sunday school class, I guess, but it's a class that will meet for a period of Sundays during the Sunday school hour, but it's a discipleship class is what it is.

For new believers, we've had a lot of baptisms recently. It's a discipleship class that'll meet up, meet during the Sunday school hour for just a few weeks called Starting Points. And it's for some of our new believers or people who maybe just never got disciplined.

Maybe were saved, maybe were baptized, maybe recently joined the church and just never went through those foundational level steps toward being a disciple and follower of Jesus. We're starting that up in just a couple of weeks.

And that is going to be one of the key elements of that class is what Jesus says about being a disciple.

And one of the key elements is denying yourself. It's saying, I don't run my life anymore. Jesus runs my life now. Because on the outside, you can follow one of two paths.

[17 : 08] This isn't in my notes, but this is free here, okay? There's two paths you can follow to be a Christian or a church person. You can say, I'm going to look like I am on the outside and then I'm just going to live like everybody else does the rest of the time.

Or you can say, I'm going to let Jesus take over my life and even though I'm going to be imperfect and I'm going to fail a lot, God's going to transform me from the inside out.

So it's going to be from the outside or it's going to be from the inside. The majority of people sitting in church will follow the first path.

They're going to let God change their outside. They're not going to give Him much access to the inside. The choice you have to make is are you going to be part of that one or are you going to let God change the inside?

And that's what I'm going to talk about with the discipleship class. Are you going to be part of the group that's going to let God change the inside? That's what Jesus is challenging us here in Matthew.

[18:16] So let's get back to Colossians 2. Colossians 2. First, human tradition rarely comes from God. Second, rules cannot conquer sin. Rules cannot conquer sin.

Back in Colossians 2. Let's look down at verse 16. Verse 16. Therefore, don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.

These were all controversies back then. These are a shadow of what was to come. The substance is Christ. See what he's calling you here? He's not using these words lightly.

He's saying shadow and substance. This stuff isn't real. It's not important. The substance, the real thing, is Jesus.

Let no one condemn you by delighting in ascetic practices. There's that word again. That's why I gave you all the definition at the beginning because we were going to be using it, okay?

[19:20] Okay. Ascetic practices and the worship of angels claiming access to a visionary realm. Such people are inflated by empty notions of their unspiritual mind.

You ever met anybody who was inflated by empty notions of their unspiritual mind? It's really harsh language, isn't it? Say, man, Christians are just supposed to be nice all the time.

Well, that's true, except Jesus was pretty hardcore over there, and Paul's kind of rude here. Man, he's calling them inflated by empty notions of their unspiritual mind.

He doesn't hold on to the head from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and tendons, grows with growth from God.

If you're not holding on to the head, where are you going? Well, you're not part of the body anymore. If Jesus is the head and you become disattached from the head, you're on your own.

[20:29] Where are you wandering off to? The mind, the thinking, isn't going to control you anymore. You're off on your own. If you died with Christ, verse 20, to the elements of this world, why do you live as if you still belong to the world?

Why do you submit to regulations? Wow. Why do you submit yourself to regulations? Such as, quote-unquote, don't handle, don't taste, don't touch, verse 22.

All these regulations refer to what is destined to perish by being used up. These are human commands and doctrines. These were made for the law.

When the law controlled you, when you were subject to the law, when you belonged to Satan, when you belonged to sin, this is what controlled you. Verse 23.

Although these have a reputation for wisdom, by promoting, what do they promote? Self-made religion. False humility.

[21:40] And severe treatment of the body, otherwise known as asceticism. They are not of any value in curbing self-indulgence.

They won't help you with self-denial. These laws, these regulations will fail every time because you won't keep them.

Time and time again, we see in the Bible people don't keep the laws. They can't. And you're no exception.

And the minute you start thinking you do, like the rich young ruler who came to Jesus, I kept the law every day since I was a kid. And Jesus quickly shows him, you missed the whole point of it.

Give up all you have. Sell it and give the money to the poor. Well, I can't do that. Well, you missed the whole point of it. You're never gonna measure up. You're never gonna be good enough.

[22:52] That's the whole point. The whole point is God is so much greater than we are. You're never going to be good enough. So then quit trying to do this self-promoting religion.

Quit trying to do this man-made, I gotta keep the law and I gotta be good and I gotta keep all the regulations and I gotta do it myself. Fall into the arms of grace.

Thank God that he's a God of love and compassion and he's willing to forgive you and let you start again every day with him. And then treat others that way.

And quit holding yourself and everybody around you to a standard that you can never meet. That's what I gotta remind myself of every day. And that's what I gotta remind you of every Sunday.

So, rules can't conquer sin. Sin will conquer rules every time. But Jesus can conquer sin.

[24 : 03] And Jesus can conquer the rules. He conquered the law. He instituted it and then he conquered it. Joel 2 verse 12. Let's get back here.

Sorry, I jumped ahead. Romans 8 first. Romans 8, here we go. What the law could not do since it was weakened by the flesh, God did. Man, I love that verse.

One of my favorite in Romans 8. And that's like saying, which one of your kids do you like the best? I like them all, right? But Romans 8 verse 3, just one of the best in an amazing chapter. What the law could not do, God did.

God did. God did it. The rules couldn't do it, but God did it. So quit trusting the rules to make life better for you.

Trust God. Y'all. Colossians chapter 3. Back at it now. We finished chapter 2. Let's jump into chapter 3.

[25 : 02] So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above. So now we've proven that the law, the rules, the regulations can't fix it for you.

They can't make your life better. You have to rely on Jesus. When problems come, when your flesh fails you, when your kids' flesh fail you, when your wife's flesh fail you, when your husband's addictions and problems and lust fail you, you can't run back to the rules and say, why didn't you keep him on the straight and narrow?

You must run to Jesus. Now we turn to Colossians 3, and it says, so if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, greed, which is actually idolatry.

[26 : 19] all these things that the law, the rules, the regulations tried to control and couldn't, Jesus can help you put them to death.

Because of these things, God's wrath is coming on the disobedient, those that are still under the law. You once walked in these things when you were living in them, but now, put them away.

put away all the following, anger, wrath, malice, slander, filthy language from your mouth. Now we're getting out of that immoral area and getting into the anger area.

How about this one, verse 9, do not lie to one another since you've put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self. You're being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your creator.

In Christ, there is not Jew nor Greek. There is no more circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, all the dividing lines that separate us from one another, but now Christ is all and in all.

[27 : 27] Verse 12, therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, here's what you put on. You put all this stuff on, but you gotta put, I'm sorry, you put all this stuff off, but you gotta put something on instead.

Okay? That's a tale as old as time. You don't just stop something, you start something in its place. Alcoholics Anonymous and whatever other addiction recovery program will always tell you you don't just try to stop doing something, you have to start something in its place or eventually you'll go back to what you were doing before, right?

So instead, this is what you put on. You put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another, forgiving one another.

Y'all, some of you, that is not in your nature. You're not naturally the kind of person who bears with one another. You're the kind of person who wants to pick a fight.

That's your old flesh. Put it off and let God help you put on something new and different. God can do that through you. You can't.

[28 : 43] Your spouse can't make that change in you. But God can. Now if you believe God can do anything, then He can make a change in you.

Trust me, He's made a change in me. And He can make a change in you. If anyone has a grievance against one another, we forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven us. So we also are to forgive. Verse 14, Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ, to which you are also called in one body, rule your hearts and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in our hearts. Man, we had some of that this morning, didn't we? And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Now, here's the last one.

[29 : 50] Godly self-denial transforms us from the inside out. Talked about it last week, how choosing the Jesus way will transform us. Well, that happens through godly self-denial.

Godly self-denial is not saying, well, I'm going to give up cokes for a year and I'm going to deny myself that. Now, maybe, maybe your doctor thinks you ought to give up cokes for a year. Maybe your waistline thinks you ought to give up cokes for a year. Right? But God is not in the scripture saying, you have to give up cokes for a year or you're not going to be close to me. That's not what godly self-denial is about.

Godly self-denial is what we just read in Colossians chapter 3. That is how it transforms us from the inside, not from the outside. The inside change will change the outside.

Us Christians have got it backwards so much that if we change the outside, eventually the inside will catch up. It doesn't happen. It's a lie. It's a lie. The truth is, eventually, the outside will fail because the inside is rotten.

[31 : 08] Godly self-denial must begin on the inside. We deny our flesh because Jesus has shown us so much love, we fall in love with Him.

When you love someone, you're happy to give something up for them. When you're in love with someone, you're happy to say, you know what?

I love you so much, I'll do what you need. I'll do what's better for you. That's where transformation comes. Now we're going to go to Joel and we'll be done.

The Lord says, turn to me now while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don't tear your clothing and your grief, but tear your hearts instead.

Y'all, this is such a powerful concept here. Don't miss it. This is the last thing we're going to read before we're done. Please don't miss this.

[32 : 13] Do you see the last sentence here? Don't tear your clothing in your grief. Tear your hearts instead.

Talk back to me for a minute. What do you think he means by that? When they would mourn, they would tear their clothes.

And it was a regular practice. It was something they regularly did. Why do you think he's telling them not to do it? Superficial.

Don't let this be like every other time. Let it be meaningful. Let it be real change.

Let it be change on the inside, not the outside. Maybe they were doing it for show. They would tear their clothes when somebody would die.

[33 : 19] They would have their, in certain cultures, you go down to New Orleans, anybody ever been down to New Orleans, Louisiana, for a funeral? Seen the wailers walk through the streets? If you have a real New Orleans funeral, you'll see people walking down through the streets of the French Quarter, and you have the people that are wailing.

Like literally, they'll be, whoo, oh, I mean, it's a thing. It is a cultural thing. And I'm not mocking it at all. It is just a part of their culture.

You're just not used to it if you see it. You know, it's different. Sometimes you can hire some wailers if you don't have people that are equipped to do that. That's a little weird to me, but whatever.

But back then, yeah, definitely a similar thing. You know, they would have their wailers. So, yeah, I mean, people are wailing in their grief and tearing their clothing, and it's an outward show.

Maybe sometimes it was sincere. Maybe it wasn't. But the prophet is saying from the Lord, don't tear your clothing in your grief. Tear your hearts this time.

[34 : 26] Let it be on the inside. And that's what he says before. Turn to me now while there's still time. Give me your hearts. Give me your hearts. That's what Jesus is always saying to us.

We'll give him our tithes. We'll give him our attendance on Sundays sometimes. We'll give him our membership.

We'll give him lots of different things before we give him our hearts. We hold back our hearts. We guard him very closely. And all he really wants is our hearts. God bless you. He wants us. He wants us.

He wants us. Because he can do so much better than we're doing. He can do so much with our families.

[35 : 34] He can do so much good through us. You underestimate the power that God can do through you.

the good that God can accomplish through you. You give him your heart. So I ask you would you give God your heart today?

The Jesus way is a way of transformation from the inside out. Our takeaway this morning is to deny yourself and that starts on the inside as God transforms you into becoming his disciple.

Would you pray with me? God I pray that we would be a people who give you our hearts. That we would tear our hearts on the inside.

That you would convict me. that you would convict the men in this room to man up, to step up, to take the lead.

[36 : 52] Say family, we're going to follow Jesus. We're going to choose the Jesus way. over sports, over work, over politics, over money, over comfort.

We are going to choose Jesus. Over tradition, over reputation, whatever idols might be standing in our way, we're going to deny ourselves.

We're going to choose the Jesus way. God, I call on the women in this room. So many times, you've used women to stand up and take the lead.

And I call on women to be women of God and if that's your will, let them say, God, make me a woman of faith to be a godly mother, a godly wife, a godly single woman who would say, I will choose the Jesus way.

I will keep myself pure. I'll keep myself right. I'll be an example of what a holy woman of faith would look like.

[38 : 23] and I will choose the Jesus way above all else. God, I give you my heart. I pray for the teenagers and for the children in this room.

They are growing up in an age when the outside world is continually coming after them, trying to get their attention, trying to pull them away from the Jesus way, from being God's disciple.

I pray that they would listen to the voices in this church, in godly families, in their youth group, in their Sunday school classes, in their lives, that would say, don't listen to that.

You choose the Jesus way. You listen to the Lord Jesus in your life. That they would come to faith in you at an early age, that they would follow you in baptism, that they would publicly name your name and choose to be your disciple.

That we would rally around them as a church and lift them up in prayer and participate in their discipleship journey. Thank you for what you're doing in our church.

[39 : 40] We ask you to multiply it, continue to bless it and move it forward. Church, right now, with our heads bowed, I ask it every Sunday, I'm going to ask this question, is there anybody here who needs to give your life to Jesus for the first time?

Say, I'm going to turn from my sin and turn to Jesus. I believe that I'm a sinner and that Jesus died on the cross for me. He rose from the dead and I want to ask him forgive me of my sins and become my Savior today.

Would you slip your hand up if that's you? Say, I'd like to do that today before I leave. Thank you. What about the rest of you? Is there someone who says, God convicted me about something this morning and I need prayer?

Would you slip your hand up and I'll pray for you? Anybody? I need prayer. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

God, you just move in the hearts this morning. Church, if there's anybody who needs to come down in front and pray with me, I'm here and available for that. Jared's going to lead us in a song. If you'd like to stand and sing, you're welcome to.

[40 : 46] If you'd like to keep your seat and pray, that's up to you. We're just going to have a couple of minutes where God has the liberty and freedom to move in our hearts. Let's enter into that now.