

Matthew ch 16 vs 24-27

The 3 Keys of discipleship

Now to set the context for this teaching, just earlier in this ch Peter had received a supernatural revelation of who Jesus Christ is, “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” and Jesus consented to that fact and then He began to explain how that as the Messiah He had to go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and on the 3rd day rise again. and Then Peter who had just been a vessel of divine revelation, took Jesus aside, and began to rebuke Him saying, spare yourself Lord, there’s no way this is going to happen to you. Didn’t we just establish the fact that you’re the Messiah? There’s no way that as the Messiah you’re going to hang on a cross and be ridiculed and put to death. and So this man who had just moments earlier been a vessel of divine revelation, suddenly became an instrument of Satan. Satan (my friends) does not care who he uses to try and thwart the purposes of God in your life. As a matter of fact if he can manipulate someone you trust into giving you bad advise, or encouraging you in ways that are contrary to God’s will in your life, that’s even better. But Jesus being able to discern, that which was from man and that which was from the enemy rebuked Peter, and said, (vs 23).

In other words, Peter; that’s the philosophy of hell, you are advising Me to do something that couldn’t be more contrary to the will and purpose of God for My life. As a matter of fact the cross is so central to the plan of God for my life that any suggestion otherwise finds its roots in the pit of hell. and The same is true for any Christian; the cross is central to the plan of God for your life. and Anyone who tries to advise you otherwise is being used and manipulated by the enemy to try to get you to live in ways that are contrary to God’s purpose for your life. Indulge yourself a little bit, take the easy road, go along with the crowd, you’re being legalistic, be careful, there is a big difference between legalism, and wisdom.

In vs 24 Jesus says, not only was the cross an essential part of His life, but it’s also essential to ***anyone else*** who desires to follow Him and be where He is. Peter has just said, spare yourself Lord, and Jesus says Peter that advice is Satanic, if anyone wants to come after Me, he can’t spare himself, Notice

Vs24

He has to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Jesus. And at this time Jesus was on route to Jerusalem in order to suffer the death of the cross. and Anyone who *follows* Jesus will wind up at the cross. Now Mark tells us that at this time Jesus had called the people to Himself along with His disciples, so this wasn’t something that Jesus wanted to be kept secret by any means. OR something that was for the immediate 12, but rather this is something that is foundational for anyone and everyone who desires to be a disciple of Jesus Christ So the 1st principal in becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ is denying self, the denial of the self-life. But understand that He’s not speaking here of denying yourself things; as if to say if you own anything or have nice things you can’t be His disciple.

He's speaking of denying *yourself* period. The pathway of discipleship is that of totally surrendering my own ambitions, my own goals in life, and the desire for my own self-gratification and that, which is of benefit to me. And this may come as a shock to many of you as it did to me, but God's supreme objective in this world is not to make me happy and comfortable. God's purpose is to glorify His Son Jesus Christ and to see as many people come to know Him in a personal way as possible before the end of the age. Because God's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Now, it's not that God desires for me to be miserable throughout my entire Christian experience either, because that's not true, so many people are afraid to surrender themselves completely over to God. Because they're afraid, that (well I hate spiders and insects and I just know that as soon as I say OK God here's my life take it and do what ever you want. That God's going to say "Oh boy I've been waiting for this, you need to go to the deepest parts of the jungle and live there the rest of your life teaching the natives about Me in the midst of 10" cockroaches and giant tarantulas.) Or single people are often scared to wait upon God for that person that God has for them because they just know that as soon as they say OK God I don't want my choice for me; I want your choice for me. That God is going to bring them, the weirdest, geekiest person that walks that planet, but hey, they've got a good heart. As if God lives to dole out to his children things that are going to humiliate them or embarrass them; but that couldn't be farther from the heart of God. God loves you, he wants to take care of you and provide for you and lead you in the way everlasting.

Maybe you didn't have a good example as a father growing up, but your Father in heaven loves you unconditionally and wants to heal your hurts and be there for you. But you've got to give up your own ideas about what's best for you and let God dictate that. You've got to crucify the flesh and the flesh life, reckoning that old life of the flesh to be dead, crucified with Christ knowing that those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Why, so that you might lead a new life, a life led after the Spirit, a life that's found only in the person of Jesus Christ The bible says, "*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*" 2 Cor 5:17

No longer leading a life after the flesh, with your sights set only on you and looking out for #1, that's the natural inclination, or desire of man, to serve yourself, what's in it for me, how will this benefit me? But as a follower of Christ you're to deny yourself, you're to lead a life that doesn't seek to exalt you, but one that seeks to exalt Jesus. Because it's no longer about you and what do you get out of the deal, it's about Jesus, and seeing Him glorified in the deal. J.B. put it like this, "*I must decrease, and He must increase.*" That's the never-ending ambition of the life of the disciple, getting yourself increasingly out of the picture, that Jesus Christ might take up increasingly more of the picture. So that when people look at you they don't see you, they see Jesus. They're not drawn to you, they're drawn to Jesus, "*If any one wants to come after Me let him deny himself.*"

You've got to decrease and He's got to increase, you say well Jeff, that sounds real good in theory, but where does the rubber meet the road, how am I to live out this life that Christ would have me to live, practically? You can't, apart from the power of God's Holy Spirit empowering you; you can't lead a life after the Spirit with out the empowering of the Spirit. And it's impossible to lead a life after the flesh and after the Spirit at the same time, you've got to reckon the old man dead, and that's a daily process, because that old man, your old nature will fight and fight and fight to be on the throne in your life. But that's where the 2nd principal of discipleship comes in, you've got to take up your cross, and these 2 principals go hand and hand.

Again that's a daily decision; Luke has you have to take up your cross *daily*. In other words it's not something you do one time and then it's over, no it's a day-by-day purposed choice to deny your own selfish ambitions and way of life and to pick up your cross. Because again the natural tendency of man is like that of electricity, to take the path of least resistance, we don't want to rock the boat, or suffer the ramifications of not going with the flow. But as a disciple of Jesus Christ you're no longer afforded that option, you're to deny the natural inclinations, crucify the flesh and stand for righteousness. So often we minimize the force of this statement by saying things like, "well we all have our cross to bear" in regards to minor discomforts or things we're not happy about in our lives. Our work situation, or our responsibilities at home. Or we look at the cross as a beautiful piece of jewelry that stands for love and sacrifice. and No doubt the cross does stand for those things (because it was Jesus' love for us that held Him to the cross). I

It was our sin that nailed Him there, and His love for us that held Him there. But don't think even for a minute that when Jesus said that in order to be His disciple, you have to take up your cross that He was in reference to a sentimental thing of beauty. And I'll guarantee you that everyone with in ear shot of His voice knew exactly what He was in regards to, because in that day when you spoke of the cross, you spoke of one thing and one thing exclusively, death. And not an easy going painless death either, but rather one that was very gruesome, very painful, and humiliating. As a matter of fact death by crucifixion was so utterly detestable and painful, that the Romans made it law that a citizen of Rome couldn't be crucified, it was against the law to crucify a roman citizen.

It was reserved exclusively for their enemies, or criminals who weren't citizens of Rome. So when Jesus spoke of taking up your cross, they knew that it was the prelude to crucifixion. The cross speaks of the utmost in self sacrifice, no longer concerned for your own interest, but for the interest of others. Even as Jesus didn't go to the cross for His own benefit, He went to the cross for your benefit, and for my benefit, in denial of His own will, the cross speaks of death to the self centered will. Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane prayed 3x if it's possible, let this cup pass from Me. But nevertheless not My will, but Your will be done, and He went to the cross submitting His will over to the will of the Father. Paul said, "*Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.*" Jesus said, "*If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.*"

Those types of comments go against the grain of all that we are, and they're absolutely repulsive to the flesh. Why, because we desire to be served, not to serve, we desire to be 1st, not last. But flip over to Matt ch 20 vs 24-28

Jesus pointing to His own life as a model, or a standard for us to live by, in crucifying the self-life and every form of self-seeking. and There's no avoiding this aspect of discipleship; if you want to go after Jesus you will have your cross to bear. Don't miss the force behind take up *his* cross, there was no, "deny yourself if you can, and if it happens to come your way your going to need to take up your cross," no these things aren't options for the disciple, they're essentials. It's just the way of life for the one who desires to go after Jesus and be where He is, but again God won't violate your free will, and you have to make the choice daily to follow through with what the life of discipleship requires. It's sort of a mystery or a paradox, because you have to assert your will, to give up your will, you have to make the choice, to give up your choice, but those of you who are of a spiritual heart and mind know exactly what I'm in regards to.

It's a daily struggle, it's a daily battle to deny yourself, and crucify the flesh-life. If you're finding it easy to deny yourself, it's because you're not denying yourself. If you find it easy to crucify the flesh, you're not crucifying the flesh. Why, because the old nature that was crucified with Christ tries at every given moment to rear his ugly head, and so there's this constant struggle known as the war that rages between the flesh and the Spirit. and These 2 are contrary to one another, sometimes it seems like every fiber that's with in you wants to sin so bad you can taste it. and All you can do is, force yourself into solitary confinement (find a room, lock yourself in it) and cry out to God for the strength to make it through each minute. Hey you're a Pastor, you're not supposed to have struggles like that, I'm being transparent before you, I don't walk on air. I'm flesh and blood just like you, and don't think for a second that Satan wouldn't love to see me fall so as to place a stumbling block before each one of you.

We're all in this together, and there is a war that goes on in each of our beings, the war between the flesh and the Spirit. Paul the apostle knew this struggle all to well, let's look together at a passage of scripture that's all too familiar no doubt to many of us. Rom ch 7 vs5-25

VS 22

Surely we can all identify with that, we can see the divine ideal and we consent to the fact that it is good and how we delight according to the inward man to do those things that are pleasing to God. But the strength to follow through with those things I find lacking in my life. Those things that I promised I would do I don't do. and Those things that I said I'd never do again I find myself falling back into. And I'm in this constant tension that's tearing at my very soul.

Vs23

In other words I find that I'm enslaved to the flesh, and the law of sin.

Vs24

You know what Paul just said, I'm at the end of me, I don't know what else to do, I've tried all the self help programs, and nothings worked, the 10 step program, the 12 step program, how to be a better me none of it helps me in the war against my own sinful appetite. Oh it may've reformed me outwardly but the problem is still there I can feel it in my heart. and So now he's throwing off all the self-help formulas. And how can I change is no longer his cry, and as long as the cry of your heart is how can I change, how can I do better, doesn't anybody have any dietary aids to help me, I've tried them all and nothings worked. Your efforts will continue to be futile, Paul came to the end of all that he's no longer looking for self-help programs, now he acknowledges that he can't help himself, and he needs outside help. (*Who* shall deliver me, I can't do it myself, and there in lies the answer.) And when you finally reach the end of you, and you begin to cry out for outside help you'll see, like Paul, that your only hope lies in Jesus, He's the only one who can deliver you from the bondage of sin and death. The answer doesn't lie in mind over matter of self-help programs, those things may be great for reformation, but they do nothing for transformation, only turning from myself to Jesus will do that.

(Ch8 Vs 1)

You see there's a common thread that's woven through the 7th ch of Romans, and it's that little word "I". And here's something for you remember, when you look at the word sin, what is it that is central to it? That little letter, "I", sin pivots around "I", in the 7th ch of Romans there are in those 25 short, little vs 45 references to "I" or "me" or "myself". In Romans ch 7 you find Paul being mindful of himself, and we see such futility in it, as did Paul, to be mindful of myself is empty and it's to be contrary to the mind of God, who would have us look outside of ourselves. One has said the trinity of Satan is me myself and I, not being mindful of the things of God, but the things of men, the trap that Peter fell into. But when you get to ch 8 of Romans, that word "I" disappears as he reveals the victory that's found only in Christ, and begins to talk about the life led in victory, by the power of the Spirit.

The word I is used over 30 times in ch 7, in ch 8, twice. and In neither case it used in reference to pitying himself, or the futility of the self-life, but both of them pointing to the glory of God. (Read vs 18, 38-39)

So we've examined 2 of the 3 basic principals of discipleship, #1 we're not to spare ourselves, or serve ourselves, we're to deny ourselves. #2 Goes hand in hand with that we're not to live for self, we're not to look to self, we're to take up our cross, reckoning the old man to be dead, indeed crucified with Christ and we're to die to self. Paul more or less summed it up when he said, *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."* Gal 2:20 Really this 2nd aspect of discipleship we can see as a progressive intensity of the 1st.

Then finally Jesus said follow Me, or walk the way I walk, live the way I live, do the things I do, which we could spend all day on, a disciple of Christ will seek to emulate everything his Master and Teacher does, he'll strive to live Christ like. Which as we already seen wasn't to be served, but to serve. He didn't come to take from people, He came to give of Himself to people, Jesus said no greater love has anyone than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

He laid down in His life, showing the ultimate example in love that we might learn from Him. He requires the same thing from His disciples today; that we lay our own lives down for the sake of others. Maybe not literally, though there are those that are called to that honor as well, but all of us as followers of Jesus have been called to lay our own wants, and desires, aside. and Place His desires 1st in letting your light so shine that people might see your good works and glorify your father in heaven. Sometimes that may be a painful process, but as Paul said, the sufferings of this present time aren't even worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us. But you've got to be willing to let yourself go, that's what Jesus is talking about in vs 25 as He continues on.

Vs25

In other words you're either going to be God centered or self-centered. and To be self-centered is death, because that way of thinking and that way of living is what the bible calls carnal, it's fleshy. Jesus just got done saying that the flesh life; the self-life of looking out for only you has to go, why because it's contrary to the things of God, it's ultimately Satanic reasoning. Because vs23 told us that that's the things that Satan is mindful of. The things of men and not the things of God, Paul goes on in ch 8 of Romans to explain that the self-centered life, the carnal reasoning, is to be at odds with God. *"For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God."* So, you want to live for yourself, look out for #1, only interested if it benefits you, fine, but be warned, that's the pathway to death. You might live high on the hog in this life, but your casting off eternal life. and Believe me when I tell you that this life is but a vapor, and eternity means forever, with out end.

Life (contrary to popular opinion) does not consist of the abundance of possessions. Read the parable in Luke ch 12 sometime about the rich man who had his barns overflowing with goods, and he said what shall I do, my barns won't hold any more goods? I know, I'll tear down these barns and build bigger barns, (wanting the bigger better) and I will say to my soul, *"Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."* But God said to him, you *"Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?"* and Jesus said, *"So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."* You don't know when your soul will be required of you, don't be foolish, don't hold too tightly to the things of this world. But rather lose your life for Christ's sake, that you might enter into age abiding life.

Jesus isn't speaking about some masochistic activity here; you aren't to jump in front of a Mack truck for the sake of Christ, thinking that that's your ticket to heaven. That's a complete twisting of the scriptures, the only thing that ensures any of us entrance into heaven is faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross, the shedding of His blood for the atonement of our souls. But what He's speaking of here is the one who puts their service to Jesus Christ before everything else, and they don't compromise that. Considering everything that has to go in their own lives in order to accomplish that as but rubbish anyway, in order that they might serve Christ and others for Christ's sake. A man by the name of Leon Morris said this: "That person will find life. He now finds that the life he lived before giving up all for Christ was not really life at all. Full and abundant life is the life of service, the life in Christ, the life that takes anyone out of concentration on merely selfish concerns and puts the ultimate meaning into life."

Paul the apostle realized this same truth as well, (turn quickly to Phil ch 3 vs3-11) He realized the key to life was losing his life in Christ that he might gain everlasting life. I believe it was Jim Elliot who said, "One is no fool to give up what he can not keep, to gain that which he can not lose." The things of this life are passing away along with the glory of them; wisdom dictates that there is nothing in the temporal that can be measured in value up against the eternal. That's Jesus' next point, (the rationale)

Vs26

If you could have anything your heart desires in exchange for your soul, what would it be? As far as God is concerned even if you were offered the whole world, you would get the raw end of the deal, why, again because your soul is eternal. This world is temporal; it's going to pass away. To trade something that is eternal, for something that is temporary is sheer stupidity. What would a man give in exchange for his soul? Name your price, because I'm certain that the enemy is willing to pay it, but if you follow Jesus' reasoning you realize that anything this world has to offer is cheap in comparison to the eternal. He's making an air tight case for following Him, He's saying hey follow Me, because any other path you choose is only going to cost you eternally, and if you're thinking about all the carnal pleasures you can experience in exchange for your soul, you need to stop and consider the eternal ramifications. Because even if you gained the whole world, but lost your soul, you'll have eternal regret, because nothing this world has to offer is even a drop in the bucket of the everlasting ecstasy of being in the presence of God. There is nothing in this world that can compensate for the loss of one's own soul.

Vs27

In other words grace is available now, you would be wise to receive the grace of God and accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, because judgment's coming. And then Jesus will settle all accounts. If you lived for self, you'll be rewarded accordingly, if you lived for Jesus Christ denying yourself, crucifying the flesh, living as He lived, walking as He walked you'll hear those words that we all long to hear. *"Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."*

Again it's not the easy way, and it's a day-by-day decision, and a life long process, but it is the only way to everlasting life. Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*" So if you find yourself struggling this morning, seeing the ideal and not finding the ability within yourself to deliver it. Look outside yourself to Jesus Christ, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him, choose the pathway of discipleship.