

## **Discipleship on Jesus' Terms**

### **Jesus' Terms**

In our passage this morning Jesus is straight forward and yet, what he commands is often an area neglected in the life of Christians. Oswald Chambers who is best known for his book of daily devotions *My Utmost for His Highest* wrote, “All heaven is interested in the cross of Christ, all hell is terribly afraid of it, while men are the only beings who more or less ignore its meaning.” This statement rung true a hundred years ago when it was written, it was true during the forming of Christ’s Church centuries ago and unfortunately it still rings true this day. Next to the question of, “What do you believe about Jesus?” which determines one’s eternal destiny I cannot think of a more important question than, “What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?”

Many when they accept Jesus as their Savior just add him to the other aspects of their life; job, marriage, kids, mortgages, bills, sports, entertainment and on and on. They live their lives as they had, but now Jesus is added to the many elements that make up daily life. They change a few things; they now go to church when it fits their schedule, the radio in their car has a pre-set memory button for a Christian station and they learn to speak “Christianese”. However, little of the meaningful things, spiritual things have changed. They have not changed the primary focus of why we live and because there is not biblical doctrine guiding their lives, this often leads to accepting twisted doctrine such as “prosperity Christianity” because of America’s material wealth. But as Martin Luther said so plainly, “A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth

nothing.” Being a Christian is not a religion, it is a belief system that has a high cost, a soul burning desire to live for the glory of God who by his grace reconciled you from the walking dead and gave you spiritual life. God gives you a life of blessing; blessings found in peace and joy, and blessings found in difficulties and hardship. This is not the life often taught or lived here in America or most of the world for that matter, even within churches.

Today, we are going to look at a text of Scripture that is one of the most challenging passages in the entire Bible. It is a call for the followers of Christ to love Him and His people more than they or more to the point, more than you love yourself. It is a call to examine ourselves and our treasures to see just how we line up with God’s standards. This is a passage that leaves little ground for self-deception. Jesus is pretty clear with his terms of what it means to be his disciple.

It is striking that the Lord’s call to discipleship means changing from an American style of life to a radical self-denial life-style, even if it means to be faithful to his calling in one’s life to the point of death. It is a call to live a life in complete obedience to his commands and teachings found in the Bible. This is a call that is in sharp contrast with much of what is said to be Christian; the “name it and claim it” or the self-fulfillment Christianity with the message of just how special God has made you and called you to be popular and successful. The life of a Christian is to be lived with the focus of being “God-centered” and not the “man-centered” theology of self-esteem. The worldly approach promotes self-love, seeking to elevate one in spirituality above others and it is a path down the broad road that uses God the Father and Jesus the Son as a front for worship of self.

Praise God there were problems and difficulties in the early church, for God inspired the letters of the New Testament to instruct the early church and us today

on how to deal with Satan's efforts to derail the church. Paul wrote to Timothy, "understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. <sup>2</sup> For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God," (*Do you see any of these traits in our society or in the world at large? They existed at the time of Paul and they are obvious today for those with spiritual eyes. This has been a problem since the beginning of the church and it is still present.*) Paul continues his instruction in verse 5, "having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people." Paul is telling Timothy to avoid fake Christians. Those who have the outward appearance but are inwardly still firmly in the world. He continues, <sup>6</sup> "For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, <sup>7</sup> always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth." False teachers creep into the household of Christ, his church, and into our homes through media and societies' fallen standards with the purpose of keeping us from believing in Jesus of the Bible and luring us away from God with pleasures of the world. Paul finishes, <sup>8</sup> "Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. <sup>9</sup> But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men." (2 Timothy 3:1-9) Paul says their folly and false teaching will be plain to all, by "all" Paul is referring to all true believers. Those that believe in man-made religions and those of the world, they are spiritually blind and do not see. Because Jesus knew that the church and believers would be attacked openly and by stealth and the evil one would work to blind people's hearts to God's truth and many

people would have a false security leading to eternal death, so Jesus speaks clearly of the cost to being a true disciple.

## **Deny Self**

Reading from Luke chapter 9 verses 23 and 24, Jesus “said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”<sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” Taking up the cross means surrendering one’s life of self and to live a new life for God’s glory by God’s standards. John Stott, one of my favorite authors wrote, “Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us, we have to see it as something done by us.” One must clearly recognize their sin and need for the Savior because it was by their sin that Jesus was placed on the cross. Taking this to the level of the church Stott said, “The Christian community is a community of the cross, for it has been brought into being by the cross, and the focus of its worship is the Lamb once slain, now glorified.” Your salvation was paid for by Jesus’ life, the perfect sacrifice. What is the price to be his disciple? Verse 24 is clear, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” This theme is repeated throughout the New Testament and Jesus repeats this theme because it is important –

Matthew 10:32-33 & 38-39, “everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,<sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.” Jesus spelled out what is required of true believers, not just those who say they believe. Then he adds, “whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”<sup>39</sup> Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Matthew 16:24-26, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” More verses are found in Luke and John for this is an important principle taught by Jesus.

Today is not a message that is light hearted, but it is as serious as salvation and damnation. Jesus defines for us what true believers are; first let me say what they are not, **they are not** casual, half-hearted, believers in half-truths or false or twisted scriptures. To be Jesus’ disciple means to deny your ownership of your life and to surrender to Jesus and this is evident in one’s obedience. Only through faith that denies self and is obedient to Jesus does one live eternally. My prayer for my life, for my family’s lives and for all of us as a community of Christ is that through the power of the Holy Spirit, God increases our faith so that we live in self-denial and surrender to Jesus as not only the Savior but as the Lord over our life and that we would be obedient to anything he commands. When we stumble and fail, for we are sinners who he has saved, he will show us mercy and lift us up sending us out for his ministry once again. Let me be clear – if anyone thinks they have gained eternal life through Jesus but they continue to live by the world’s standards and systems, and they have not surrendered to Christ, they do not truly believe, so therefore, they are not secure in their salvation. As A. W. Pink said, “**Taking up my ‘cross’ means a life voluntarily surrendered to God.**” A concept so simple and yet, not easily obtained and in truth an impossible objective to obtain without God’s gift of his Holy Spirit to dwell within and strengthen us beyond ourselves. The question you need to soberly ask yourself, “Is my life all about Christ or all about me?”

I would like to explain as clearly as I can what self-denial is. What does Jesus mean when He makes the statement, deny yourself? He has in mind that as his people, his followers, we are to forsake anything that would stand in the way of embracing Christ with our full allegiance. We are to forsake possessions, power, favor of men and human glory. We must deny our natural bent toward earthly treasures and strive to make Christ our treasure. Also, in this, we must deny our self-reliance. I know our American ideal has been to be self-made people, but we must forsake relying on our abilities and logic and seek spiritual wisdom. We must forsake relying on our human sense of righteousness and totally cling to Christ for righteousness, we must live lives that continually accept grace and glorify Christ.

I think if I could leave my children and now also my grandchildren with two phrases they would be, *“Follow hard after Christ, pursue him with all your strength and secondly, lean not on your own understanding, but seek God’s wisdom.”* This is key to a life of purpose and fulfillment. John Calvin states that self-denial is the sum of the Christian life. The first condition given by Jesus to any would-be-follower is to deny yourself. Secondly, He commands that if one is to be a follower, this person must not only deny-self but then die to self. Jesus says *“take up his cross daily.”*

### **Die To Self**

Jesus’ disciples are to be ready to bear afflictions in this life, to know that God has designed these challenges for our Christian growth and maturity. Disciples are to respond to afflictions in a godly manner. Bear up to afflictions for the glory of God. Jesus tells us to be people who welcome death to self as a disciple, for a true disciple will rise to live in the presence of Jesus’ glory. A disciple begins by dying to self on a daily basis. Whatever suffering God has

purposed for one of his children to endure they must daily accept it, knowing that it is for their good and God's glory. With this heart centered on Jesus one is then ready to follow Christ. Jesus words this morning make clear what it means to keep on following Christ. Just as one commits daily to submitting their will to Christ's, one also continually, daily, follows where He leads. We walk as He walked, we love as He loved and we are to speak as He spoke. As followers, we trust, walk with in his steps, obey, and remain daily grateful for salvation to Christ.

Please stand and hear the Word of God spoken so that those with spiritual ears may know his will.

Reading Luke's gospel account, chapter 9, beginning in verse 23, Jesus "said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. <sup>27</sup> But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." This is the Word of God, let it penetrate your heart. Amen. Please be seated.

As we continue to dig into the Word of God, let me pray. Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name, for you are the Creator of all that exists. Through your power, your Spirit we ask that you enable us to die to self and submit to Christ's Lordship and to live for your glory. Open our hearts and minds to your Word this morning. Amen. I chose to read our study passage this morning in the middle of the message partly because I am overwhelmed with the importance of what Jesus is instructing and commanding his followers, his disciples to live. I

wanted to prepare our hearts before God's Word was read. I cannot over stress the importance of this passage.

In this passage Jesus answers the question some might ask. Why would a person want to give up themselves? Jesus says by doing so we will receive far greater than what we give up ... **“whoever loses his life for my sake will save it”** surrendering your life to Christ brings eternal life with God.

Following Jesus means loving him more than material goods. Verse 25, **“For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”** Jesus is clear – people who live for their own gain, who desire material wealth for their own comfort - in truth are pursuing the wind and, in the end, they retain nothing of real value. On the other hand, those who live for Christ's glory rather than themselves will be blessed with the lasting value in peace, mercy, grace and a love the world does not understand resulting in life eternal.

Jesus is very clear here. Those who live for themselves never get what they desire – they are always wanting more but in fact end up with nothing. Those who deny themselves and live for Christ do find what they desire. Jesus, God the Son, while in his human form said, **“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.”** (John 5:30) Just as Jesus lived and died to serve the will of God, so too, our lives should be lived in the same manner. Losing one's self for Christ's sake gives lasting wealth compared to the worldly wealth that is ever fleeting.

Steve Jobs launched Apple Computer from his garage in in 1976 at the age of 21. Two years later in 1978 he was worth over 1 million and at his death in 2011 he had an estimated worth of 10.2 billion. During his life he was drawn towards Buddhism and New Age teachings and had seemingly gained the whole world –

wealth and fame, but in truth he forfeited his soul in the process. Steve was a very good businessman, promoter and inventor. However, when it comes to eternal issues, he was a poor investor who was spiritual bankrupt in the end. Jesus makes it very clear that if we do not give ourselves away for the Gospel and for Him, we will lose eternal life.

Reading verse 25 again, **“For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”** Jesus is pressing home the fact that He alone must be our treasure. If we love ourselves, if our treasure is us, then we will not deny ourselves and die to self. We will always cling to our treasure. Jesus also challenges our other potential treasures when He speaks about worldly profit and worldly riches. What is real profit? It is lost if you are so concerned with material goods that you forget that the most important commodity is your soul? What good is it if the founder of Apple Computers died a multi-billionaire but forfeited his soul? In other words, he leaves all his wealth behind and will exist bankrupt in hell having forfeited his soul. Jesus’ logic goes like this; if all we do while on earth is build up things for our life now, we eventually will lose everything. But if we build on the foundation of eternal faith and Christ as our treasure, we will save our lives forever.

### **Follow Jesus**

If Jesus is our treasure, we will not be ashamed to live the gospel. Reading verse 26, **“For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”** The human heart is never ashamed of what it truly treasures. Jesus makes clear for his disciples and followers and true believers that he is the only lasting treasure. As believers we must choose wisely. I remember in the movie

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade where they searched for the holy grail and towards the end of the movie Indiana and his archenemy Walter Donovan were in the room with the ancient knight and the room was filled with cups and beautiful chalices. The knight says the right cup will bring life and the wrong choice will bring death. Donovan chooses the wrong cup and dies to which the knight says, “He choose poorly.” All people must make choices, as Christ’s disciples Jesus says we must choose to take up our cross, deny ourselves and not be ashamed of bearing Jesus’ name, of being Christian. In Matthew’s gospel record Jesus gives us a warning, “everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,<sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32-33) Both in our hearts and publicly we are to follow his teachings and daily strive to make Jesus our only treasure. If Jesus is our treasure when struggles and persecution come, by the power of the Holy Spirit and our commitment to make Jesus our treasure, we will have the strength to deny ourselves, serve others, glory Jesus – even unto death. This is one of the greatest testimonies of who Jesus is to the lost world. The world should have no problem in seeing who our treasure is.

Verse 27 speaks that not all Jesus was commanding is for the future, “But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” Not everything is waiting for eternity, there are blessings to be received while one lives their life, a life of denying oneself and glorifying Jesus. Jesus said there were disciples who would not die until they saw the kingdom of God. How can this be? Peter, James and John saw the kingdom of God when Jesus was transfigured. Many saw the kingdom of God when Jesus was resurrected and many experienced the kingdom of heaven at Pentecost when they received the

Holy Spirit. From this time forward people have experienced the kingdom of God and when they surrender their lives, die to self and the Holy Spirit fills their soul.

Jesus' point is - as his disciples we begin to live the kingdom of God because of his atoning sacrifice and his gift of the Holy Spirit now. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:17-21) Live the kingdom of God now, live as his ambassadors proclaim the gospel to the lost.

What are Jesus' terms of discipleship? What are Jesus' terms for your life if you call yourself Christian? Surrender your right to your life and live to serve Christ and his people. Do not be focused on amassing earthly material wealth. Jesus commands, "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself." (Matthew 6:33-34)

If you desire to be Jesus' disciples you must live by his rules not yours. They are so simple and yet require surrendering daily.

- Deny yourself
- Take up your cross daily
- Follow Christ with your heart, mind and soul
- Do not ever be ashamed of Jesus and his gospel

- Proclaim the kingdom of God; acknowledge Jesus before men
- Enjoy God's blessings now

Today's teaching takes me to the foot of the cross for my sins placed the Savior there, but God's grace and mercy raised him so that you and I may live eternally with Christ. Praise God! Amen and amen!