

THE BLESSING OF DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew 16:24-28

INTRODUCTION

We read this in Matthew 16:21-23,

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Matthew 16:21-23)

Peter's objection to Jesus' death and resurrection was satanic in origin. Nothing would keep Jesus from His cross. He **MUST** go to Jerusalem. Jesus said in John 4:34,

"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work." (John 4:34)

When Jesus was 12 years old, and Joseph and Mary were frantically looking for Him, they found Him in the Temple. When they rebuked Him for giving them so much concern, He said,

"Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" (Luke 2:49)

John writes that after Jesus had forcefully cleared the Temple,

His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house will **consume** me." (John 2:17)

It was not enough for the Lord Jesus to possess that kind of driven passion Himself. He expects it from His disciples. Jesus went on after rebuking Peter,

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay each one according to his deeds. Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” (Matthew 16:24-28)

TRANSITION: Let’s consider what Jesus says about genuine disciples.

GENUINE DISCIPLES

Matthew 16:24

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.” (Matthew 16:24)

We see that a genuine disciple longs for Jesus Christ. He or she wants to come after Jesus. That is, they want to be in His presence. What He does matters. What He says matters.

It’s easy to promote discipleship as pure discipline; the words are related, after all. Legalists wrongly make the first element of discipleship obedience to the Lord. But discipleship begins with love and longing for the Lord Jesus Christ.

We see that a genuine disciple denies himself or herself. This doesn’t mean suicide or a lifestyle of suffering. Neither does it mean the abandonment of personality or self-awareness. It does mean being shaped and defined by our union

with Christ. A true disciple of Christ will happily change to please the Lord.

We see that a genuine disciple will follow Jesus Christ into the grave.

Jesus Himself demonstrated this sort of devotion. Philippians 2:8 says,

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8)

We are not told that Jesus humbled Himself BY dying, although that would be true. We are told that Jesus humbled Himself to the point of death. He would not let anything, death included, interfere with His submission to the Father. That is how we are to be as well.

And we see that a genuine disciple follows Christ. They trust Him so much that they obey Him in every aspect of life. What He believes, they believe. What He values, they value. Where He goes, they will go. What He does, they will do. The text makes it clear that this is an ongoing, uninterrupted following. No one is following Christ if they are not walking in His footprints. No one is following Christ if they live for themselves and only try to mention His name in prayer once in a while.

Some want to say that being a Christian only means saying you believe. A changed life is not necessary. But Jesus warns us that He does not know those who call Him Lord but refuse to obey Him.

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. (Matthew 7:21)

Others will say that they work hard to obey Him and never miss a thing if they can

help it. And to them, Jesus says that mere obedience is also insufficient.

Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, in Your name did we not prophesy, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' (Matthew 7:22-23)

What does the Lord want from His disciples, then?

He wants our faith to be placed fully in Him.

He wants our devotion to be solely for Him.

He wants our obedience to serve only Him.

This is what it means to be a disciple of Christ: we long for Him with all our hearts; we deny ourselves the primacy that we sinfully want; we happily commit ourselves to Him even if He leads us into the grave; and, we actually follow Him in faith.

DISCIPLESHIP MAKES SENSE

Matthew 16:25

For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 16:25)

Self-preservation is within every human being. Even babies in the womb will try to escape the abortionist's instruments.

So at first glance, denying ourselves, accepting the reality of death, and following Jesus everywhere sounds like an awful thing to do. There was a time when I knew why I was a Christian, but I couldn't think of why anyone else would want to be. It was hard for me. The Spirit of God crushed my conscience. My circumstances were so hard that I sometimes broke down in weeping or broke into anger. I felt that God opposed me every step of the way. I thought I was trying my hardest to follow Him, but He played these cruel games with me and weighed me down so that I could barely move.

The problem was I wasn't denying myself at all; I was in love with myself. I didn't want death at all; I wanted success. I was willing to follow Jesus anywhere that I would be successful.

What I was trying to do was what Jesus warns us against in Matthew 16:25. I was trying to save my life and make it something worth living. It took me a long, long time to understand that the kind of life I wanted WASN'T worth living. Only a life lived for the glory of God is worth living.

So I see that Jesus is supremely practical. The man or woman who insists on making their life about themselves and not Him is going to lose that life in the end. They spend all of their time and energy building what seems to them to be a magnificent mansion. They don't realize that what they are laboring over is just a sand castle, and the tide is rising every day.

I also see that Jesus is supremely kind. He doesn't make sinners wait until judgment day before they find out that they had invested their lives wrongly. He tells them in His Word, and especially here: if the aim of your life is saving your life from

all harm, then you will come to the ultimate harm.

And He makes a wonderful promise. If we will trust Him, we will be safe. He even defines what it means to trust Him: longing for Him, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Him every day. Christian discipleship is the most sensible thing any person can do with their lives.

All of this is by faith. We have not yet experienced the eternal aspect of life. This world is all we know. Jesus calls us to trust Him and live according to the eternal reality He sets out before us. He assures us that longing for Him, denying self, obeying to the point of death, and following Him daily is not a waste of time but the best investment of self that we can possibly make. The world says it's a waste of time; Jesus says it is how we are saved for eternity.

TRANSITION: We need to understand how God's Kingdom functions. How does God measure the value of something? What is God's economy?

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S ECONOMY

Matthew 16:26-27

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay each one according to his deeds. (Matthew 16:26-27)

A single soul is worth more than the whole world. I think it would be safe to say that a single soul is worth more than the entire universe. Someone could own the entire universe, but it would not be worth the value of their soul. What if that soul is guilty of sin and faces the righteous judgment of God? Many people think, "As long

as my good works outweigh my bad works I'll be ok." But Jesus says that even if you owned the entire universe, it would not be enough to redeem your soul from judgment.

What would a man give in exchange for his soul, Jesus asks. It's a rhetorical question. Since everything combined is not worth a human soul, it just stands to reason that nothing LESS than everything is worth a soul, either.

We read in Hebrews 11:24-26,

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, regarding the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. (Hebrews 11:25-26)

Moses had access to the pleasures and treasures of Egypt, but it wasn't worth his soul. His eyes were not on the short-term benefits of power but on the eternal benefit of knowing his God.

TRANSITION: Jesus measures everything according to God's economy. That means that our very souls are worth far more than anything we can possess or experience. God's economy also works on a very different calendar. God's calendar is not limited to days, weeks, and months. It covers ages and eons and even all of eternity.

RECEIVING THE INHERITANCE

Matthew 16:27

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and

will then repay each one according to his deeds. (Matthew 16:27)

Being repaid according to your deeds sounds foreboding. Jesus certainly describes judgment here. But He is also speaking of the day when His people are rewarded for their faithfulness.

Romans 2:5-8 says,

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will repay to each according to his works: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and anger. (Romans 2:7-8)

The day of judgment is not a fearsome day for the children of God, “those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality.” He will reward them with eternal life. But it is a fearsome day for the wicked, “those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness.” God will repay them with wrath and anger.

We must take Jesus’ Word for it because we have no personal experience with this kind of reward or judgment. We don’t receive it now. It will only be when Jesus returns that the value of being His disciple will become fully apparent.

CONFIRMATION

Matthew 16:28

Our Lord knows that we are weak and easily distracted by the things and issues of our world. So He gives us confirmation of the truth of His promise.

“Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” (Matthew 16:28)

He is speaking of His transfiguration, which would take place in just a few days, being witnessed by Peter, James, and John.

I would love to be able to tell you that the Lord gives each and every one of us the same powerful confirmation He gave to Peter, James, and John. The truth is that the other apostles didn't receive that confirmation. We certainly don't. But the Bible tells us that

at the mouth of two or three witnesses a matter shall be established (Deuteronomy 19:15)

Peter was one witness. James was another witness. John was the third witness.

So the matter of Christ's glory and Kingdom is established by Jesus' transfiguration. We'll look into that passage next week.

TRANSITION: In the meantime, let's bring this passage home.

BRINGING IT HOME

We can make some observations from Matthew 16:24-28.

First, discipleship requires our active participation. Jesus commands us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and be following Him. He makes it clear that

those who refuse to do this and instead try to find life's meaning and purpose on earth, will lose their lives in the day of judgment. He also makes it clear that those who do follow Him as His disciples will find their lives with Him in eternity. They will receive abundant, everlasting life.

Second, we need to accept God's value of things. People generally want to know what's in it for them. That isn't necessarily wrong, but it's disastrous if we only use our own understanding to give value to life and the things of the world. For the most part, people think the faster the payoff, the greater the value. That's why "Your Best Life Now" is such a successful lie. Yet it takes nine months for a baby to be fearfully and wonderfully made in its mother's womb. I've learned that a healthy diabetes diet is not about how I feel tomorrow but how I hope to feel twenty years from now. Those who wait on Him – and the wait can feel very long – will receive the full inheritance.

Third, a single soul is worth more than all the riches and experiences of the world combined. I believe it's more valuable than the universe itself. Nothing and no experience is worth your soul. Human beings alone are made in the image of God. What would a person give in exchange for his soul? No experience, no possession, no thrill, no sensation, no drug is worth your soul.

Finally, Jesus is coming again to bring all things to an end. He will repay the wicked for their sin, and they will pay a terrible price. But He will also repay the righteous for their faith and obedience, and they will receive far more than they earned. The truth is that we earn nothing, even as Christians. It all comes by grace and mercy, through faith. Beloved, the wicked will receive exactly what they have earned. The laborer is worthy of his wages (First Timothy 5:18), and the wages of sin

are death (Romans 6:23). But we who know the Lord will receive not what WE have earned, but what JESUS has earned. We are co-heirs with Christ. He is not sharing OUR inheritance; we are sharing HIS. Let's trust Him to fulfill His promises. Let's be patient with Him as He works in our lives and the world.