

Take up thy cross and follow me

Matthew 16:21~27

²¹From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. ²²Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. ²³But he turned, and said unto Peter, *Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.* ²⁴Then said Jesus unto his disciples, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* ²⁵For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. ²⁶For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

It is here in this passage that Jesus declares, (in my opinion) what I believe to be the greatest definition of what Christianity is all about. *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”* It is in that single, short and simple statement, Jesus defines for us the very essence of what it means to be a Christian. Contrary to what many believe, to be a Christian is not to merely “believe” certain facts about the bible, or to attend church on occasion, or by adhering to the moral principles that the bible teaches. Even though all those things are an important part of the Christian life, they do not define the essence of what it means to be a Christian. What separates us from the rest of this world, and defines us a true believers, is when we turn from our own will and desires, turn from living our lives in this life, to ourselves, and humble ourselves at the feet of Jesus, serving His will and desires in our life. That’s what Jesus is saying here, and as we shall see, the true, genuine Christian Life consist of three things...It is a Life of **SELF-DENIAL**...a Life of **SELF-SACRIFICE**...resulting in a Life of **SUBMISSION** to Christ as Lord of your life...

In order to fully understand this passage, we must back up to the previous verses, leading up to this statement, where we find Jesus asking His disciples a very interesting question...

(Vs 13~14) ¹³ When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, *Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*

Jesus says, guys, you’re out there among the people...what are they saying about me? Who do they say I am? And look at the answer they give Him...¹⁴ *And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.*

Now that’s interesting... Note, what do all these responses have in common? They are all DEAD. All great men of God, who had died. The answers the people were giving were very revealing. They tells us that the people, at the very least, considered Jesus to be this supernatural man of God, one that had come back from the dead. Notice they didn’t say He “resembled” or “reminded” them of one of these men. That He had come back from the dead... The question we must ask here, is WHY they would say that? These folks had never met any of these men (besides possibly John)... Well, this is the interesting part. It’s because Jesus reminded them of these men, they had read about in the Holy Scripture. He exemplified these men. To some, the pages of Jeremiah came to life in Him, to others, Elijah, others...one of the other prophets. Listen, bottom line, the writings of the Holy Prophets came to life before their eyes... Jesus “Characterized” each one of these men. Listen, as John put it, *“The WORD became flesh” ...and dwelt among us...*

Jesus then turns to His disciples, the ones who knew Him most intimately, and asked them, *“Who do you say that I am?”* And as always, it’s Simon Peter who is the first one to respond...

*16 And Simon Peter answered and said, **Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.***

Peter realized, this wasn't just a man from God...another prophet come from God...but rather, this was the "Chosen One," the "Anointed One"...the *promised Messiah of Scripture*...the very SON of God.

Now, this passage is often referred to as "*The Great Confession.*" But I disagree, true Peter realized WHO He was, He was the Christ, He was the Son of God...but Peter never figured this out on his own. This is not something he had concluded out of his own reasoning... God had opened his eyes to this great reality! The FATHER had revealed this to Peter! Look at what Jesus says in verse 17...

*17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, **Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.***

In other words, Peter this is not something you've figured out, or learned from other men. Men didn't teach you this, but it was my Father who revealed this to you. Now I need you to listen closely, because this truth here, sets the precedent for the rest of the passage...

The point here is, "**God's revelation of Divine TRUTH to men!**"
"**The Spirit of God...revealing TRUTH to men!**"

Beloved, don't miss this... "*Spiritual Regeneration*" is a "*God Thing!*" The truth Jesus is speaking here is almost non-existent; it is all but lost in our day. Now days, men are trying to teach or convince men that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We share the "*Facts*", read a few verses, and call for a "*DECISION*". We asked them a few questions, to which if they answer correctly, then we pronounce them saved! Beloved it's wrong, and I'm convinced it's destroying the lives of people, making them feel they are ok with God, when they're not! I'm convinced our churches are full of "Lost people" because of this very thing! People who one day "Made a DECISION"...but there's no real change. Oh, they know all the right answers, they know the stories of the bible...but they still continue to live for this world, and this life...

Beloved, to come to the "*revelation*" of Jesus Christ as Lord, takes a "*Supernatural*" *encounter with the Holy Spirit.*" This is something we can't teach men. This is something you can't learn from men, (vs 20b, **for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.**)

We are to share the word, preach the truth of God's word...but the rest is the work of God in the hearts and minds of men. I'm telling you, this is something that's almost lost in our day. Today, if you'll just walk the isle, repeat a pray, and get baptized...then you're good. Not so! Matter of fact, I'm convinced it's damming more people than not, making them feel they're ok, when they're not...because there's no real regeneration of the heart!

Now, having said that, I want us to look at what Jesus goes on to say here... (Vs 17~19) ¹⁷ *And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.* ¹⁸ *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, **and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*** ¹⁹ *And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

Now Jesus makes a fascinating statement here...¹⁸ *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, **and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*** Now, this is where the Catholic Church gets their doctrine of the "Pope." They say that Peter was the first one, and that the church was built on Him. That he was given "authority" over the church. (Still true in our day...Pope has power over scripture...) But God forbid! That's not what we see happening here, not at all! God wouldn't base His things ON MAN! The reference Jesus is making here, is not to Peter, but listen...but rather to the "*Divine Revelation of Divine Truth to MEN!*" The reference here is to the "*Spiritual revelation of God's TRUTH to men!*" They would no longer need "*Priests and Prophets*" to mediate between God and

man...for God's Spirit would now commune with man. That is what Jesus is referring to here. That is what the "Gates of hell would not prevail against!" If it were "Of Men..." then the gates of hell would prevail, but it's not! It is the "*Spiritual Revelation of God's Truth to Men*" that Jesus is talking about here! The "authority" Jesus spoke of Peter having in verse 19, stems from this fact. It speaks of the authority given to God's people, given they possess the revealed, divine TRUTH of God!

Now I want us to move to the main point for this morning...verses 21~26...(emphasis verse 21)

21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Don't miss this...here we see Jesus "*Revealing*"...more Divine TRUTH to His disciples! Here we see Jesus revealing the things that were going to take place in the days ahead, that no one could have possibly imagined happening! Here He tells them with great detail, the events leading up to His death on the cross, and His resurrection! He is revealing to them the "Divine Plan of God," the "Divine WILL of the Father"...to these men! Something that was completely HIDDEN from the religious leaders and scholars of the day! Even with all their knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, with all their learning, they didn't have a clue. But here, Jesus REVEALS the Divine WILL of the Father, to these "Outcast!"

The MAIN POINT of the whole passage revolves around Peter's response to hearing the "REVEALED WILL of the Father!" Look at his response...(Vs 22) *22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.* Peter says, "No way, not going to happen! I won't allow it!" Then notice how Jesus responds to Peter...(Vs 23) *23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, **Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.***

Get thee behind me, Satan? That's strong words don't you think? That's strong language, Jesus is literally referring to Peter as Satan himself! Why would He do that? Was Peter being evil? Was Peter's intentions devious, or mean spirited? No...Peter said this out of complete love and devotion for Jesus. Then why does Jesus rebuke him so strongly? Well, herein lies the "**Whole point of this passage.**"

Jesus takes the situation, and uses it to teach "The GREAT TRUTH of the Christian Life!" The TRUTH Jesus reveals here, defines the "*Very essence of what it means to be a Christian.*" And that is, "*A turning from this world, and our own lives in this world...to live our lives to Jesus Christ, and to the WILL of the Father.*" You see...Peter's response to Jesus' revelation of what was going to happen to Him, was from the "Flesh," his OWN WILL and DESIRES! Which was contrary to the Father's WILL and DESIRES Jesus had just revealed to him. I want to make sure we understand this... That's what Jesus meant in verse 23b, when He said... "*23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, **Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.***"

Peter had just heard the "*Divine revealed WILL of God*"...and Peter rejects it's it for HIS OWN! Which made him an enemy of God! Whoever opposes the will of God, is His enemy! Even though Peter's intentions were good, and he meant no harm...he was defying God's will in his life.

Jesus uses the situation to teach what has to be, the greatest definition of what it means to be a Christian. What is required of men, who set out to follow Christ.

Read Vs 24...²⁴ *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, **If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.***

Again, herein we find the clearest and most definitive explanation of what the Christian life is...

- 1) It is a Life of **SELF-DENIAL**...
- 2) It is a Life of **SELF-SACRIFICE**...
- 3) It is a Life of **SUBMISSION** to Christ as Lord of your life...

I want us to take a few moments and look at these this morning...
The first two, though separate things, work hand in hand.

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself... This one needs no explanation, only obedience. For any man to follow Christ, to be one of His disciples, it requires that he live a life of “**Self-Denial**.” That’s the first step in following Christ, without it, you can’t follow Him, right? To “*deny yourself*” basically translates to no longer living our lives to OUR OWN WILL AND DESIRES! We willingly give up, our own desires, our own goals and ambitions, our own longings...to serve HIS! The simple truth here is, you can’t serve BOTH! You can’t live your life to your will and desires, and God’s will and desires at the same time! (Which are contrary to one another, as the example we see here with Peter.) One must be “Sacrifice” in order to serve the other! Thus the call to “DENY YOURSELF!” You can’t live your life to YOU...and GOD at the same time, it’s impossible! (Many try...many try and straddle the fence...but there is no such fence! Many “*Do the Church thing*” every Sunday...but then go back out and live to SELF the rest of the week!) That won’t get it! The call is to REPENT! To TURN from your own WILL and WAYS to serve Christ and His WILL in your life.

So we see the “first step” in following Christ is a Life of **SELF-DENIAL**... This is followed by living a life of **SELF-SACRIFICE**. That’s what Jesus means by “*take up a cross*”. The cross was an emblem of DEATH! The only purpose of a cross in those days, was an instrument of DEATH! Men DIED there! And that is the point Jesus is making here! Not only must we “DENY” ourselves of our own will and desires, but we are to day by day, be “*Putting them to DEATH*.” We are to be “**Crucifying**” the DESIRES and WILL of the FLESH...each and every day. Ours is to be a life of “Putting to DEATH the OLD MAN...that the NEW MAN might live in us! Listen, I want to make sure we understand something here. God is not calling us to LIVE our lives to HIM...but the contrary...He is calling us to DIE! (Romans 12:1) The Christian life is not “*Living our lives for God*”...but DYING...so that the Spirit of God might live in us!

That’s where the last part Jesus mentions here comes in...“...and follow me.” By denying our own will and desires, by continually putting those things of the flesh to death...we are freed to “Submit ourselves to Christ”...to live our lives in submission to His Will, His Desires in our lives!

The simple TRUTH is... **We must SACRIFICE the one, to serve the other!**

Each one of us, have but ONE life to live, the question is, WHAT or WHO are you living it to? You will either “Keep it to yourself” and live your life to you...or...you will “Give it up,” and live it to Christ! It’s one of the two. In verse 25, Jesus speaks to this, in a way of a warning to those who “understand what He’s saying, what He’s asking for...yet are struggling with giving up their life.

(Vs 25~26) ²⁵ *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.* ²⁶ *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

Beloved, this is serious stuff...we need to make sure we grasp what He’s saying here! The man who continues to live for this life, to live for this world, for SELF...need not think, he’ll ever see the kingdom of God! Jesus makes that crystal clear here. Let’s read that again...²⁵ *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.* Now either this is true, or it’s not. He either requires this of all men...or He’s lying. I can’t begin to tell you how concerned I am for MANY in the “Church” today! They’ve made some “DECISION” years ago, but yet, they clearly are still living their lives to THIS WORLD, to THEIR OWN WILL AND DESIRES...etc. And the tragic part is, they feel they are OK...because they attend church on Sunday, or because they’ve been baptized. Beloved, we’d all do well to carefully consider what Jesus is saying here, this is serious stuff...life and death!

Now, lest any consider this “*too much*”...and struggle with the actual DOING of this...Jesus asks what has to be one of the most heart searching questions...

(Vs 26) ²⁶ *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

He says, “What if you do KEEP YOUR LIFE”... What if you decide to keep it, and live it to your will, your desires, living it to this world and the things of this world... What if you did that, and you succeeded, and gained everything your hearts desired...what would you have? What would you actually gain, in light of losing your soul!

Listen...the call of the gospel is not to “Clean up your lives, and live morally good, and attend church occasionally.... The call of the gospel is to REPENT... to turn from living to your SELF and to this life, and to this world, to humbly submit yourself to Jesus Christ as LORD of your life! Here Jesus’ asks, if you never really do that, and continue to live your life to SELF...in spite of knowing this truth, what will you give GOD in the end? When it comes your time to die, and to enter into eternity...what will you give God for your soul? Remember, HE has asked for YOUR LIFE...and you’ve squandered it, and lived it for yourSELF!

Each one of us here this morning, better carefully consider this passage here, and take an earnest look as to WHAT or WHO we are living our lives too! Because, according to what Jesus says here, our “empty profession of faith” won’t help us at Judgment day! Our “Superficial Commitment” to religion, will do us no good in that day. According to what Jesus says here, Jesus is going to judge us based on WHAT or WHO we’ve lived our lives to. Look at what He says in verse 27...*27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*

There are many who struggle with that statement...they argue that goes against the teachings of scripture, that it’s not by works, but by faith. Listen to me, rather than conflicting with that truth, it actually confirms it. What do you mean preacher? The way you and I live...reveals what we truly believe! To say we will be judged according to “our works,” is not contradictory” to salvation by faith, but rather a confirmation to that. If I believe that all who do not repent from living to this world, this life, from living to my will, my desires...to living to Christ and His will, His desires...that will be evident in the way I live my life on a day to day basis! Right? You see, TRUE faith, GENUINE faith is REVEALED...by living a life of SELF-DENIAL...a life of SELF-SACRIFICE...and SUBMISSION to Jesus Christ as LORD!