

Matthew 16:24-28 | David Baumgartner

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[0 : 00] There's a Lutheran pastor out there. He recommends for all speakers to check their mics before they speak.

! He had this tradition, you see, that he would begin every sermon with these words, ! The Lord be with you. And the people would answer, and also with you.

Well, this one particular morning, he was trying to get his mic off. He would like to work, and it wouldn't. And so he says to everyone, this microphone is not working. And all the people said, and also with you.

Well, I truly hope everything is working this morning. And that's including me, because I need all the help I could get. We have a wonderful passage this morning.

But as wonderful as it is, it has been for centuries misunderstood, misinterpreted, and misapplied. And I'll speak about that a little bit later here.

[1 : 06] But if you have your Bibles, please turn with me to Matthew chapter 16. We'll be looking at beginning in verse 24. It's a short passage.

It's only five verses. But it's about a topic that's of discipleship. What it means to follow Jesus Christ. You'll notice at the very beginning, it says, Then Jesus said to his disciples.

So I'd like to pay particular attention at the outset here as to how this passage connects with our passage from last week. Last week, we saw how Jesus told his disciples, When I get to Jerusalem, I'm going to be killed.

And on the third day, I will rise again. I'm kind of paraphrasing that a little bit here. But then we read that Peter responds, Lord, that's not going to happen. Well, Jesus didn't appreciate that comment. And so the Lord Jesus rebuked Satan, who was no doubt there, right there with Peter, suggesting that thought to Peter.

[2 : 13] Friends, that's how Satan works. He plants thoughts in our minds. Just like he did during the wilderness temptation, Satan desperately wants Jesus to abandon his plan and to offer himself as a sacrifice.

And so Jesus says, You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

So we can stop right there and see Jesus is talking about two paths here.

There's the things of man and there's the things of God. Now, we know what the things of man are, don't we? Don't we see that all around us today?

Corruption, violence, wars, rumors of wars, hatred. But I want to ask, what are the things of God? I would answer that this way.

God wants you and I and everyone to be in a relationship with him. To walk with him in salvation, but also in fellowship.

[3 : 20] To enjoy him. And so what does that mean? What does that require? Well, first it requires forgiveness. And we may think of that as salvation.

In fact, that's the main reason Jesus came to this earth. Was to give his life as payment for our sins. But it doesn't end there. Because God wants something else too.

He wants us to enjoy him. To walk with him. And we call that sanctification. That's where we see ourselves as actually set apart from the world.

Radically different from the rest of this world. He wants for us to follow Jesus as his disciples. And that's to be seen in our love.

Our devotion for him. Our obedience to him. Let's read our text this morning. Starting in verse 24 of chapter 16. Then Jesus said to his disciples.

[4 : 19] 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. Shall lose it.

But whoever loses his life. For my sake. Shall find it. For what will a man be profited. 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 recompense every man 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 into his kingdom.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Our heavenly father. We are so blessed to be able to be here. And to enjoy singing to you. And enjoy the fellowship we have with one another.

[5 : 22] We enjoy most of all Lord. Your presence with us. And we ask through the ministry of your word itself. And through the power of your spirit. That these words would.

That we would understand them. That we would employ them. That we would bring them into our lives. And that we would please you in all of our ways. We thank you so much Lord.

Thank you for today. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Let's look at our text here. Verse 24. Then Jesus said to his disciples. If anyone wishes to come after me.

Let him deny himself. Pick up. Take up his cross. And follow me. I see there's three things there.

That Jesus identifies. First notice. Let him deny himself.

You ever thought about self-denial? It's really hard. Isn't it? Very difficult. I think you could say that it goes against just the grain of our flesh.

[6 : 22] I would say most of our time is dedicated to taking care of ourselves. Would you agree with that? When you think about it? Here's some stats on the average amount of time we take care of ourselves.

It's 3.6 hours a week. Or 31 minutes a day. Just for personal hygiene. Well, we can go on and on there. But I don't think Jesus is talking about that kind of thing.

I think he's referring to our will. To our agenda. He wants for us to set aside our will.

Our desires. Our aspirations for Christ. And his will. His purposes for our lives. And here's the thing that we learn from scripture.

And I believe just in life. Jesus doesn't force us to do that. No, it's our choice. He, it's, he's, it's like saying here, if any man is willing, let him deny himself.

[7 : 27] So what might that look like? Well, here's a few things. People may ridicule you. Make fun of you. Because your life doesn't look like theirs.

You don't drink. Or you don't do drugs. Your, your house and your possessions. They may not be as impressive as others. Because you've placed your time and attention on what God's will is for your life.

You pay more in taxes. Because you don't cheat. You may leave a lucrative job to serve the Lord in some capacity. So you might want to say, yes, but how?

Well, I really like what Paul says in Romans chapter 6. He says, consider yourselves dead. Yeah. Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to Jesus Christ.

I think maybe the best commentary on this concept here is found in Galatians 2.20. Paul says this, speaking about his life, I have been crucified with Christ.

[8 : 33] And it is, and it, it is I who no longer live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me, who delivered me up for himself, himself for me.

So instead of pursuing our own agenda, our own will, we're to set aside our agenda and agree with God, agree with him and seek to do his will in his lives instead of our own.

You might ask, what's the motive? Earlier in chapter 10 in Matthew's gospel account, Jesus says this, he who loves his father or mother more than me, get this, is not worthy of me.

Wow. And he who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Maybe some of you know people who would actually, would rather side with their family members in doing something that's against God's will rather than following what God says.

It happens, friends. Let's say, wow. We're to love the Lord with all our hearts and minds and souls. We're to love him more than anyone.

[9 : 58] Mary Ellen tells me I'm second in her life. Yeah, I'm glad of that. I am glad because I know the Lord is first in hers. That's how it ought to be.

So we're to say farewell to self, self-indulgence, self-way of life, and choose God's way. And we do that out of love.

We do that out of thankfulness. Isn't that what we remind one another of every Sunday? Okay? That's what we do. Here's the second element. Notice he says not only follow him, but he says take up his cross.

When the disciples heard that word cross, what do you think they would have thought of? How would they have understood what crosses were about? Well, friends, it's a call to prepare for death. There's a historian named Josephus, and he writes about this Roman proconsul by the name of Varus. And something happened some 35 years prior to what we read about here.

[11:05] When Herod the Great died. What happened? When Herod the Great died, the Jews actually revolted against Rome.

And that revolt was crushed. And Varus ordered for Jewish men to be not only executed, to be crucified.

And his history tells us there were some 2,000 men that were crucified at that time. It was an example. Don't mess with Rome.

Boy, what an example. And so when Jesus says to his apostles, take up your cross, no doubt they would have seen in their mind's eye some 2,000 men.

These poor condemned souls marching along the road, carrying these cross beams on their shoulders, strapped to their backs, on their way to death.

[12:07] That meant that you're on death row. And so taking up a cross is actually identifying with Jesus. Identifying with his rejection, his shame, his suffering.

It's a willingness to endure persecution. The pain that comes along with associating with Jesus. In fact, in Luke's account of this, Luke says that we're to take up our cross daily.

Every day. Every day. We can look at it. It's a way of life. We read in Acts chapter 5, Peter and the other apostles were arrested for sharing Christ.

And so there was a big discussion there among the Jewish religious leaders. They were beaten and the apostles were released. And it says in verse 41 of chapter 5, Wow.

So they, the apostles, went on their way from the presence of the council, rejoicing because that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for his name.

[13:17] Wow. Here's what Peter would write later. He says in 1 Peter chapter 2, You have been called for this purpose since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps.

So if God chooses, we'll suffer. And that even goes to the extent of martyrdom. Dying for Christ. And for most of the apostles, at least 10 of them, that very thing happened. Recently, many of us got to witness water baptisms at Pinecrest.

Wasn't that great? It was. These are public declarations by those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. As far as I know, none of those who were baptized died.

They didn't. But I'll tell you what. If you were raised in a Muslim family and you went through such a thing where you testified to your faith in Christ, that may mean, in fact, there's a good chance it means that you will die.

[14:32] You'll be put to death. I've heard in the past some strategies of various believers about how, well, how can I keep from this?

I'm just going to keep my head down. I'm not going to make any waves with anybody. And no one's going to. I'm not going to. I'm going to avoid persecution.

I'll tell you what, friends, from experience, that will not happen. It doesn't work. You will be forced to declare which side you're on.

Mark my word, you will be. What's the third ingredient here? Notice Jesus says, follow me. The text actually literally, you could say that it says, let him be following me.

Again, representing a way of life. Christ becomes a pattern of living. I really like what the Grace Evangelical Society says.

[15:32] They say, discipleship is best viewed as a journey, a direction, or an orientation in one's life toward becoming like Christ.

I like that definition. So here we have three descriptions from Jesus Christ of what it means to follow him, what it looks like.

And so now he gives three logical reasons why we should do this. Why should we deny ourselves? Why should we take up our cross?

Why should we follow him? Each one of these begins with the word for. So there's a lot of logic here. Notice verse 25. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it.

But whoever loses his life for my sake shall find it. And then in verse 26. For what will a man be profited if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?

[16:37] Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? Two great questions. There are hypothetical questions here. Rhetorical questions. As I said earlier, I believe that these verses have been greatly misunderstood over the years.

Some people view these two verses here as saying that self-denial and cross-bearing are necessary for one's salvation.

This is what's called the lordship salvation position. It emphasizes obedience and the cost of salvation in contrast to what's called cheap grace.

Which supposedly is found in what's called easy believism. But friends, that can't be right. Because this passage is dealing with sanctification.

I'll give you three reasons why. First, Jesus noticed he's speaking specifically to those who already believe. We know in John's gospel account.

[17:45] In chapter 2. This is at Jesus' first miracle that took place. At the wedding of Cana. Some two and a half years before this account in Matthew.

It says, verse 11. This is the beginning of his signs that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. And manifested his glory. And then it says this. Besides, Peter has already just stated his view of who Jesus is.

You're the Christ. You are the son of the living God. So that's the first reason. Here's the second reason. Coming to Jesus is a regeneration concept.

But coming after Jesus, as it is here, is a discipleship concept. A disciple comes after his teacher. As a sheep comes after his shepherd. As a servant comes after his master. As a soldier comes after their captain.

[18:54] And here's a third reason. Nowhere in the New Testament do we see our eternal salvation being conditional upon self-denial or cross-bearing.

The only requirement for salvation is our faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, faith is not even mentioned in our text here. Well, those are three reasons why this is speaking to those who believe.

Well, then, how should we understand these verses? I'd like to give three considerations here. First, who is Jesus?

He's a master teacher. And in the Gospels, we find that he uses a variety of what we'll call literary devices to teach.

He uses symbolism. He uses parables. He uses allegories. Here, we see something called paradox. Paradox.

[19:55] Paradox. This is where two statements are made that appear contradictory to one another. I know you're familiar with many of these. Here's some examples.

The first shall be last. Does that make sense to anyone here? Now, how about this one? Greatness is measured by how much a person serves.

Not how many servants he or she has. Honor comes from humility. Honor comes from humility. Gain comes from giving.

Liberty comes from losing. Success comes from surrender. Notice. Notice. Notice. Notice. We're dealing with something called paradox here.

Secondly, Jesus often uses hyperbole when he teaches. Let me give you an example here. How can a person gain the whole world?

[20:55] Who's the richest man in the world today? Elon Musk? Yeah. Could we ever say that he has gained the whole world? I know he doesn't own this church building.

He doesn't own that place that we were at yesterday down in Merrimack Caverns. No. This is another way of referring to those who have invested everything in life.

Those who have invested their whole lives in this life. Here's another example of hyperbole. How can a person lose or forfeit their soul?

Doesn't that sound really bad? I'm going to lose my soul? Well, our soul refers to our inner person. It refers to our personhood.

And that's something that lives on and on, even into the next life. A person cannot lose their soul unless you cease to exist, which is a doctrine called annihilationism.

[22 : 04] And that's not right. No. A person cannot lose one's soul. What I believe it is, is this is a way of saying that to lose one's soul is where you diminish your capacity in the next life.

Notice you have this life and then you have the next life. And here's the third paradox. Or third thing about paradox.

Is that they often contrast two paths. God's way and man's way. Deny yourself. Live for yourself. Take up your cross.

Ignore the cross. Follow Christ or follow the world. Lose your life for Christ's sake. Or save your life for your own sake.

Keep your soul or lose your soul. What I believe this is saying here is that the Christian who fails to follow Christ in this life.

[23 : 04] Weakens. Diminishes. His reward in the next. We see this in the very next verse. If you look with me, verse 27. Jesus reminds them.

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels. And will then recompense every man according to his deeds. Jesus is speaking prophetically here about his second coming.

When he comes with the glory of his Father. Notice. He will recompense everyone. For their deeds. Recompense means reward.

We see that in many other scriptures. We'll be rewarded for our deeds. Paul writing in his second letter to the church at Corinth.

Uses virtually the identical language here. Let me read it for you. Second Corinthians verse 5. I'm going to say chapter 5 verse 10. For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

[24 : 08] That each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body. According to what he has done. Whether good or bad. So as far as salvation goes.

It's not something we earn. It's not something we maintain. No. Our salvation is a free gift. Upon faith in the finished work of Christ.

But as far as our sanctification goes. We have a choice. We can agree with God. And follow his word.

And friends if we do. We'll be rewarded. Jesus is talking here about. Realizing the full potential of our eternal life. In the time to come.

And he's urging his listeners. Lay up treasure in heaven. To make investments. That will yield eternal rewards. Several New Testament writers.

[25 : 09] Spoke about these rewards. As crowns. And you know. That we will one day. Lay at the feet of our Savior. Peter writes in his first letter.

To the degree that you share. The sufferings of Christ. He says keep on rejoicing. So that also at the revelation of his glory. You may rejoice with exaltation.

As believers. We walk in God's strength. Don't we? We don't walk on our own strength. Peter writes. That his divine power has granted to us.

Everything pertaining to life. And to godliness. Through the true knowledge of him. Who called us. By his own glory and excellence. But friends. Isn't it also true.

That as believers. You and I don't always do what the Lord says. Do we? No. No. No. We still fight against our flesh. We still war against the devil.

[26 : 10] We still fight against the world. But here's the key thing. Friends. As believers. We remain in his family. Amen. But for those who are not in his family.

There's a different path. It was mentioned earlier this morning at our Lord's Supper. About what it means. What we see in our society today.

And we talked about two paths. Those who follow Jesus. And those who don't. And it seems like this time of year. Doesn't it just seem to just really bring out.

That kind of thing. You know. This morning we were talking about Halloween. And all the speculation. And interest in things of the dead.

As the musicians come. I wanted to tell a story here. About a guy. About such a guy. He's a 19th century French author.

[27 : 14] By the name of. Gilles Dumas Poisson. I know. I had to listen to how that was pronounced. He was one of the greatest.

Short story writers. Ever known. Within 10 years. He rose from just complete. obscurity. To great fame.

He. And he had a life. Of utter affluence. He had anything. And everything. A person. Could ever want. He had a yacht.

In the Mediterranean. He had a large house. On what's this portion. Of the coast. Called the Norman coast. He had a luxurious. Apartment. In Paris.

He was. It said that he was. Criticized. By. I'm sorry. He was praised. By his critics. It said that. That men admired him.

[28 : 10] And women. Worshipped him. The historians. Say that he was. What you call. A naturalist. Now. A naturalist. Doesn't believe in God.

Doesn't believe. That God exists. Let me give you. A quote. From his writings. This is from. G. Dumas. Dumas. Pissot. We breathe.

Sleep. Drink. Eat. Work. And then what? Then we die. The end of life is death. What do you long for? He writes. Love.

A few kisses. And then you'll be powerless. Money. For what? To gratify your desires. Glory. What comes after it all?

Death. Death alone. Is certain. Well at the height of his fame. He went insane. He actually.

[29 : 06] It was brought on by what was. What they said. A promiscuous life. And on New Year's Day. He tried to cut his throat. With a letter opener.

And he lived out the last few weeks of his life. In a private insane asylum. On the French Riviera. He died at the age of 42. Of syphilis.

But before his death. He wrote what would become his epitaph. Here's what his epitaph read. I have coveted everything. And taken pleasure in nothing.

How sad it is. I'd like to contrast that with a quote. From the Apostle Paul. Who says. In his second letter to Timothy.

I have fought the good fight of faith. I have finished the course. I've kept the faith. In the future. There is laid up for me. The crown.

[30 : 06] Of righteousness. Which the Lord. The righteous judge. Will award to me. On that day. And not only to me. But also to all those.

Who have loved his appearing. Friends. Let that be a description of us. Those who are looking for the soon coming of Jesus. His arrival.

To love his appearing. To desire his presence. To desire all the things he has for us. Because of our love for him. Because of our gratitude.

For what he's done. Let us walk as those who are different. Sanctified. Let us leave here today as a changed people. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father. Thank you so much for all that you have done for us. Lord you have done it all. You have made a way for us to be reconciled to you.

[31 : 05] And Lord you have given us these promises. That you will reward us. In ways that the scripture tells us.

That we haven't imagined yet. In ways that are glorious. But Lord we do fight our battles here on this earth. And we pray that we would not trust in our own smarts.

Our own wiles. Our own intelligence. Our own wit. But rather that we would place our trust in you. And walk in the power of the spirit.

Thank you Father for these words. Thank you for who you are. And what you've done. Please bless us with your strength today. In Christ's name. And God's people said.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.