

Matthew 16:21–28

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Date: 03 September 2023

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[0 : 0 0] scripture text is Matthew 16, 21 to 28. Please remain standing for the reading of God's word. 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 on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him saying, far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you. But he turned and said to Peter, get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

Then Jesus told his disciples, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would 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 shall a man give in return for his soul? For the son of man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the son of man coming in his kingdom. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning. Good morning. Good to see you this beautiful Labor Day weekend this morning, and welcome to our new series, Following Jesus as King. Fifteen lessons to be learned along the way.

[1 : 5 9] This Sunday represents our first lesson in the series, and it's simply titled, Get In Line and Follow. Get In Line and Follow.

Ranking right up there with Hide and Go Seek, Red Light, Green Light, Mother May I, Tag, The classic children's game, Follow the Leader, has been played by kids for generations. The basic premise is simple. Kids would line up in a single file line. Someone was selected as the leader, and in order to stay in the game, you just had to imitate everything the leader does. Your success at this game was determined by the degree to which you are able to stay in line, copy, or follow the leader.

Now, there was always that one kid. You know him. For us, it was a kid named Junior.

[3 : 3 0] I know that wasn't his actual name, but that's the only name we knew, so we just called him Junior. Junior would never stay in line.

He had to walk outside the line just to see how far he could go before he got in trouble. He complained about who the leader was, what direction the leader was going.

One time, he just sat down in the middle of the line and refused to move. Needless to say, Junior never won follow the leader.

Junior is now the warden of a large correctional facility in Alabama, where his job is essentially to keep people in line.

Just go figure. All of this, however, embodies the main idea of our text this morning. Jesus outlines here what it's really going to mean to get in line, stay in line, and follow him.

[4 : 4 5] Follow the leader. If you're here today, you want to follow, but don't yet have a personal relationship with Jesus, this text offers a great opportunity for you to join the line.

If you know Jesus, but maybe you have the tendency, just like Junior, to get out of line, this text challenges you to get back in line.

And if you're one who finds yourself today perhaps weary of walking the line, may you find encouragement today to stay in line.

Wherever you are, whatever position you find yourself, the objective is the same. Follow the leader. Follow Jesus as King. Now we've come to this point in our text in the book of Matthew where we're clear about who Jesus is.

[5 : 58] As Pastor Bing put it so well last week, we're clear that he's the Christ. The disciples are clear on this, that he's the King. He's clearly established his credibility through all the work, teachings, and miracles he's done for these past 15 chapters.

We know that Jesus is the answer. And he's worth following. But now what does all of that actually mean?

What does it look like? Well, here our text takes a sobering turn from our previous passages as Jesus for the first time outlines the mission of the leader.

The mission of the leader. Peter has just identified Jesus, rightfully so, as the Messiah. And Jesus blesses him for his confession of faith.

But then starting here in verse 21, Jesus says, Now let me explain to you what me being Messiah really means.

[7 : 11] Let me explain what my mission is all about. Here it is. I got to go back to Jerusalem where I'm going to suffer.

I'm going to be killed. And on the third day, I'm going to rise again. Wait a minute. This was completely, absolutely, totally not what Peter and the others expected to hear.

They still think of the Messiah as a warrior king like David, a gladiator who was going to overthrow the government and seize power. They saw him as the embodiment of power and strength instead of some suffering servant who would be killed.

What is all this talk about death? How can a dead man save anybody? Jesus' prediction of his own death is so shocking that it takes all the oxygen out the room.

It absorbs all the attention. It seems unlikely that the disciples were even still listening to Jesus when he also proclaimed that he was going to rise again on the third day.

[8 : 29] They were still focused on this suffering thing and him being killed. They had finally gotten who Jesus was, but they still didn't fully understand what that actually meant.

I used to love and hate running errands with my dad. I loved it because I enjoyed spending time with him. I used to hate it because of where we'd often end up.

I would see my dad getting dressed, throwing on some sweats, grabbing his keys, and I would immediately say, Hey, can I go with you? He would say yes, and I would excitedly jump in the car, and we would head off, and a little later we would pull into the parking lot of his job.

Then he would say these dreaded words. Hang tight. I have to run in the office for just a few minutes, and I'll be right back.

Translate it. For the next hour, you're going to sit here in this car and wait for me while I actually work. It was actually my fault because in my eagerness to go with him, in my eagerness to follow him, I neglected to find out where he was going, what the destination was.

[10 : 09] Jesus, here in our text, says to his disciples, Okay, you get it, and you want to follow me. Let me first make sure you understand where I'm going.

I'm going back to Jerusalem, and there I'm going to suffer. I'm going to die, but I'm going to rise again. This leads, secondly, to what I'll call the misguided effort to change the rules of the game. None of this is acceptable to Peter. Peter, who in verse 22, just like my friend Junior, gets out of line and decides to pull Jesus to the side and address the situation.

This can't be, Lord. How can you topple Rome and establish your government if you suffer and die? Peter challenges the Lord's leadership, moves to the front of the line, and repudiates in the strongest possible language what Jesus has just said.

The disciple who has recently deified the Lord, back in verse 16, now defies him. The truth is, I can relate to Peter.

[11 : 42] Perhaps you can too. I have a picture in my mind of how things should go. How plans should pan out.

And when things get in the way, inconveniences, surprises, blindsides, it bothers me. I know that God is sovereign, causing all things to work together for the good of those who love him.

That he'll never leave me or forsake me. Yet even with all of that being true, when I'm met with the reality that God's plans and purposes don't always align with mine, it can be confusing and frustrating, irritating.

Looking back, I've probably gotten pretty close to rebuking God myself. And you have too. Maybe you can relate.

God, I thought he or she was the one. That job would have been perfect for me. Why aren't my kids walking with you?

[12:49] Why am I struggling financially, Lord? Why would you allow that sickness into my life? God, you're not operating like I expect and I want you to operate.

Questions like these aren't necessarily sinful or irreverent. In fact, they can be worshipful declarations of dependence on God.

However, church, we must be careful because we too can step out of alignment when we try to lead the Lord instead of following him.

When we think we know what's best, we know the best direction to go. When we've got it all figured out and we've marshaled all of our resources and made all our phone calls and just informed Jesus along the way.

Proverbs 3, 5, 6. In all your ways, acknowledge him so that he can direct your path. Then in verse 23, Jesus responds to Peter with a quick, sharp, stinging rebuke.

[14:06] Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me for you are not setting your mind on things of God, but on the things of man. No, Peter wasn't Satan.

But Jesus was saying your thinking is more in line with the adversary than the almighty. You are being influenced by the things of man trying to superimpose your vision over God's vision.

And you're in my way. Peter, the rock upon which the church would be built back in verse 18 is now a stumbling block in verse 23.

Attempting to place himself between Christ and the cross. Jesus is saying, in essence, Peter, you can't change the rules of the game.

Your place is behind me, not in front of me. It's your place to follow me in the way that I choose, not try to lead me in the way you would like me to go.

[15:22] Well, Peter failed to realize at that time and what we must always remember is that the suffering and death of Jesus had to happen.

Had to happen for these two reasons. Because one, of man's sin. And secondly, because of God's love. While his death was the ultimate example of man's sin against God, it was also the supreme expression of God's love to man.

So Jesus reveals his mission as the leader. And then he pushes back the misguided effort to change the rules.

Now he turns, starting in verse 24, to outline what is really the primary emphasis of this text. And it is this.

It's the mandate of discipleship. It's the mandate of discipleship. What does it really look like to follow Jesus?

[16:36] To commit yourself to serving him and becoming more like him. This mandate really involves just three things according to our text.

Deny, carry, and follow. Deny, carry, and follow. Let's take a look.

First, to deny. The denial of self. The denial of self. In other words, giving up ownership of your life. Like when you sell a car or house, you get payment, you sign the papers, and hand the keys over. Following Jesus means handing the keys of your life over to him who bought us.

It involves sacrificing one's own interest in favor of serving Christ. Jesus says, if you want to come after me, you must give up your right to your own identity, your own sense of morality, your own desires, and submit yourself to me.

[17:53] Let me let you in on a little secret. In truth, this denial of self is really a denial of a false self anyway.

It's a false self in that it's governed by the world's standards. It's the self that equates success with happiness.

It's the self that believes the one who dies with the most toys wins. The self that thinks things like more money, more power, more pleasure, are what will bring more peace.

This is all our false self. And the only way we can become our true self is to deny it.

That's the only way we can become the person God has created us to be. We'll never discover and accept who we truly are until we deny that false self.

[18:58] All of us have a little love. Yeah, I know. It's easier said than done. Those of you who've ever been on a diet can probably attest to this.

It seems the more you deny yourself, the better every piece of food looks. You don't even like Big Macs from McDonald's, but you'll take two right now if they were offered to you.

But you know that the only way to achieve the desired result is for you to stay on track and follow the plan. The only way you're going to be the disciple God is calling you to be is to deny yourself and say, Not my will, Lord, but yours.

This next critical component of discipleship is carrying, cross carrying, carrying your cross.

Many people interpret this cross to be taken up as merely some burden they must carry in their lives.

[20 : 14] And some of that is true. The phrase, we all have our crosses to bear, is casually applied to a variety of difficulties from being used as a joke.

I've got a conference in Palm Springs this week. We all have our crosses to bear. To describing some truly difficult situations.

Temptations, long-term sickness, difficult co-workers on a thankless job or strained relationships.

The problem is that we as believers can tend to interpret any unpleasantness as a cross.

And then spiritualize it as a part of discipleship. When a person carried a cross in Jesus' day, no one thought of it as persistent annoyance or symbolic burden.

To a person in the first century, the cross meant one thing and one thing only. Death. To carry a cross was to face the most painful and humiliating means of death human beings could endure.

[21 : 31] The Romans forced convicted criminals to carry their own crosses to the place of crucifixion. One was about to die.

And that one would face ridicule and disgrace along the way. Now, 2,000 years later, Christians view the cross as a cherished symbol of atonement, forgiveness, grace, and love that we beautifully adorn around our neck.

And rightfully so. But know that in Jesus' day, the cross represented a torturous death.

Understanding that, Jesus' command to take up your cross and follow me carries so much more weight. Such a deeper connotation.

This is a call to self-abasement and self-sacrifice. One must be willing to die in order to follow Jesus.

[22 : 44] Die to self. Dying to self is an absolute, total surrender to God. It is the essence of the ultimate self-denial.

It's the final completion of that. It's death to self itself. Some things, brothers and sisters, you just have to kill.

You can cut the weeds in your yard or you can kill them. Cut weeds, eventually grow back.

There's a whole sermon there, David. You can take a break from what you know is a bad relationship.

I think we just need some space. Or knowing that it's the wrong relationship for you, you can kill it.

[23 : 55] You know, this just isn't going to work. And I think we should stop seeing each other.

Death to self is a necessary part of discipleship.

And, sorry to say, it's a continual process. You die daily. We often speak of whether we are willing to count the cost of discipleship.

But the real issue is not the costliness of following Jesus. It's our willingness to follow him regardless of the cost.

The greatness or littleness of the cost is no longer the emphasis. Rather, all of life, all that you are, is to be completely surrendered to him.

Jesus further amplifies this in verses 25 and 26 when he says, Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

[25 : 02] 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? Tell me just how much is your soul worth?

There is a warning and hope in these verses. Those who spend their lives chasing things, consumed by earthly pursuits, driven by materialistic endeavors, will ultimately find themselves on a lavish train bound for nowhere.

You've amassed great wealth, great knowledge, great pleasure, only to find you've lost everything. British missionary Jim Elliot, who was killed by natives in Ecuador in 1956, once famously said, He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

If you're willing to seek first the kingdom, if you're willing to make him the priority and lose it all, you will find it all.

[26 : 17] Because God's plan was never to deny us life, but to give it. Look, all this discipleship is extreme.

The seemingly harsh language Jesus' call here is intended to make this very clear. There are no halfway measures in following Christ.

It's all or nothing. By definition, it's not a hobby like following your favorite sports team. It's complete allegiance to him in every corner of the heart.

Now, you know the rules. You know this is a spiritual high-stakes game of follow the leader.

You know the mission. You submit to deny yourself and you've picked up your cross. Now, Jesus says, simply follow me.

[27 : 21] Imitate me. Be just like me. Walk after me. Be my disciple. Don't be like my friend Junior and just sit down in the middle of the line refusing to move.

Believe. Being a Christian, being a disciple, isn't just about what you say you believe. It's about who you follow.

Here's the great thing about following Jesus. When you follow Jesus, it's the fact that following him means Jesus will always be there.

Everything here in our text, every single thing he's asked you to do, he helps you to do. That's the only way denial of self is even possible.

It's with his help. We grew up saying the person is known by the company they keep. Those of you who are parents can always tell who your kids were hanging out with.

[28 : 31] All you had to do was watch their behavior. They would tend to take on the traits of those who they were following.

So when your 10-year-old comes home, calling you by your first name, So Claire, what's for dinner? You know something is up. Likewise, it should be easy to tell who we're following.

There's something about the way we walk, about the way we talk, about the jokes we don't find funny anymore, about the way we handle our business, about the way we care for others, that says we are followers of Jesus Christ.

You want to be a follower and don't have a relationship with Jesus today? I want you to know you don't need the perfect moment to come to Christ. You don't need to get yourself cleaned up before following him.

[29 : 43] Jesus has and will take care of the sin. You simply come to him as you are. To follow Christ is to have a simple, honest conversation with him.

A conversation that confesses sin, apologizes for the sin you've engaged in, and asks for forgiveness. You invite Jesus into your life and you commit to follow him.

No, following him isn't promised to be easy, but just like I said a little earlier, he does promise again and again through scripture that he will be there with you.

Trust your life into the hands and care of a loving God. As I prepare to close, Jesus here in these last verses provides us finally with the motivation for discipleship.

The motivation for discipleship. For the son of man is going to come in the glory of his father with his angels and will repay every man according to his deeds.

[30 : 54] As would be the case for Jesus himself, so it is for those who get behind him and follow after him. Mark this down.

Glory follows suffering. Glory follows suffering. When he returns in glory, those who followed him, those who denied themselves and carried their crosses will be rewarded according to their faithfulness.

They'll see his glory. Romans chapter 8 verse 16. The spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. If indeed we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory.

This is the wonderful, wonderful paradox of Christianity. The paradox of discipleship.

[32 : 05] We're asked to lay down our identity only to find we gain a brand new identity later. We're asked to sacrifice our desires only to find that they don't even compare to what he has already prepared for us.

We're asked to lay down these temporary lives only to find in the end we're going to live forever. Yes, commitment to Christ, being a disciple of Christ, means taking up your cross daily, giving up your hopes, your dreams, possessions, and if need be your very life for the cause of Christ.

But the reward is worth the price. Remember, that as Jesus called his disciples to take up their cross and follow him, he too bore a cross.

Our Lord led the way. All you've got to do is just get in line and follow the leader.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for being our prime example. Thank you for giving us what we need to follow you.

[33 : 32] strengthen us, enable us, equip us to follow you more closely, to follow you more dearly, to not allow ourselves to deviate from the path, but in all our ways to acknowledge you so that you can direct our paths.

We give you thanks, honor, and praise in your son's name. Amen.