

# Who is this Guy? - "If anyone would follow me..."

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Date: 09 July 2017

[0:00] If you would open up your Bibles to Matthew chapter 16, we're going to be looking at verses 24 through 27. I'm going to pick up on 28 next week, but I'm just going to read 24 through 28.

And let's hear what our Lord Jesus is calling us to. Then Jesus told his disciples, He's 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. And if you look down to verse chapter 17, he's referring to the transfiguration.

When you wake up in the morning, what are the first things that come into your mind? Here's typically what happens with me in the morning. I wake up and I look at my watch, and it's usually glowing in the dark because I'm a notoriously early riser, and I'm asking this question, oh, what time is it now?

Or maybe you're thinking, oh, I hope the coffee maker's on. What's for breakfast? If you're like me, you're saying something like, what day is it?

[1:48] Is it Friday? Saturday? Monday? Monday? And then when we start thinking about what day it is, usually an agenda starts coming in as well, right? What do you need to get done that day?

Who do you need to talk to? What needs to happen? What would happen if the moment you wake up in the morning, there is something else that comes into your mind?

It's a question. It's a question like this. You wake up and your first thoughts are, what is the most important thing this day?

What is the thing of greatest importance today? Just imagine Jesus' words, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

Every day you wake up, you are faced with a decision. A decision of what matters most. Of who you're going to live for.

[3:01] And what Jesus says is there's basically two options. You're either going to live for yourself or you're going to live for Christ. And what Jesus is going to call us to this morning is, come live for me.

The call this morning is the call of the Christ to follow me. And not only was it true back 2,000 years, it's just as poignant today.

Our Christ is a risen Christ. And he's calling you to follow him. In this passage, we see two moves. We see the call of Christ to follow him in verse 24.

That's where we're going to spend most of our time this morning. And then in verses 25, 26, and 27, Jesus provides a rationale. Three reasons to follow him.

And you can see they're all signaled by a word for. You can see it at the beginning of each sentence. So this morning, what we're going to do is, we're going to look at the call to follow Jesus.

[4:10] And then we're going to look somewhat briefly at his rationale. The reasons to follow him. What I want you to understand this morning is the point Jesus is making here.

In order to follow him. In order to live for him. In order to be his disciple. In order to be his disciple. You're going to have to die to yourself.

In order to live for Christ, you must die to yourself. And in Christ, you will find life. So if you look at verse 24, we read this.

If anyone would come after me. Let me give you a little background on that word me. On Jesus. Remember, it's in verse 16 of chapter 16 that Peter has just confessed to Jesus, You are the Christ.

The son of the living God. And what he means by that is saying, You're that Psalm 2 guy. You're the 2 Samuel 7 guy. You're the one, the king that was promised. The anointed one of God who would come and take up David's throne and reign forever.

[5:24] You're the one. You're the one. And Jesus responds by him saying, Blessed are you, Simon Peter. You didn't figure that one out on your own. That was God's kindness in revealing that to you.

And then if you look down in verse 21, Jesus clarifies the work of the Christ. He says to his disciples from that time, Or we read from that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

What Jesus is saying here is clarifying for his disciples. He's like, hey, you got it right. I'm the Christ, but let me just help you understand. I've come to do something you're not expecting.

I've come to go to Jerusalem. I've come to suffer. I've come to die. And I've come to be raised from the dead. Peter, of course, says, no, never.

No, it's not going to happen. Peter, and then Jesus says, get behind me, Satan. You're hindrance to me. You're not thinking God's thoughts. You're thinking man's thoughts.

[6:37] And every time we wake up in the morning, we usually default into mankind thinking, don't we? So this morning, as we think about that me, if anyone would come after me, you got to realize who it is.

It's the Christ, the one who would come, suffer, die, be raised. He's the one born of a virgin. He's the one that was tempted by Satan.

Everything he could get to throw at Jesus, he withstood it. This is the one when he came, he said, I didn't come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. This is the one who came and exercised his authority over sin, so that you may know that your sins are forgiven.

Get up and walk. He came and exercised his authority over disease and over demons, over raging deeps of the Sea of Galilee. He even exercised his authority over death.

This is the one that's saying, if anyone would come after me. He's the one who said, your greatest problem isn't outside of you. Your greatest problem is inside of you.

[7:47] Your sinful heart, which defiles you. That's why he came. He came to save sinners from their sin. He's the one that miraculously fed 5,000 Jews, Jewish men, and miraculously fed 4,000 Gentile men, probably 20,000 people altogether.

This is the one who is the long-anticipated Christ, the son of David, who would come and take up the throne, and he established and came to take up his throne through suffering and being crucified and being raised from the dead.

It's Jesus, the Christ, who is God's plan for the fullness of time that he set in motion before the foundation of the world. That's who this is that is speaking.

It's the Christ with all authority on heaven and earth. What does this kind of backstory show us?

This is no ordinary guy calling us to come follow him.

This is the risen Christ, God incarnate. And so his words carry weight. And so in looking at this call, if anyone would come after me, anyone, he turns from Peter and he turns to his disciples and he speaks very generally.

[9:13] If anyone, if someone would come after me, the invitation, the welcome is wide. If anyone in this room would come after me, if anyone living around Lincoln Square would come after me, anyone living on an uptown, Frank neighborhood, anywhere in Kenosha, if anyone would come after me.

And that word would, if you look at that word, underneath it, is this sense of desire, willingness. If anyone would choose to come after me.

That two word, those two words, come after, in a literal sense, it means get in line, right? I'm not sure if you, this happened to you growing up, but when I grew up, I would have to get into all sorts of different lines.

And I would have to get into lines with kind of different ways. For example, get in line, Michael, according to alphabetical order. And so, Salvati is at the end and it always comes after an R.

Or I would have to get in line according to my birthday, which is in December. So I would always have to come after November. Or I'd have to get in line according to my height.

[10:31] And so I would come after someone who is shorter than me. What is Jesus talking about when he means come after me? Is he calling you to come after him in terms of your height?

Your birth date? Your last name? The relationship that he's talking about is one of discipleship. It's a discipleship relationship.

He's calling you to come after him is a master calling his follower. A teacher calling his learner. Come after me.

And so what this is is a call to discipleship. And what that means is that when you become someone's disciple, you submit yourself to that person's authority.

You listen and learn from that person's teaching. You obey that person's commands. You live according to the way that person lived their life.

[11:42] And so this call to follow me has everything to do with Jesus. to come under Jesus. To follow after Jesus.

Everyone on the planet is following somebody. You're a disciple of someone. You're coming after somebody. You are submitting to someone. You're learning from someone.

You're obeying someone. You are living your life after somebody. The question is, who is it? Who's your Lord? Who's your master? Who's your teacher?

The chief rival for living for Christ is you. Living for yourself. You cannot live for yourself in Jesus simultaneously.

You can only have one master. You can only have one Lord. And Jesus is saying, I'm the one. I'm the Christ. Come follow me.

[12:46] In order for you to live for Christ, you must die to yourself. And so here's the invitation. If anyone would come after me, and now Jesus is going to turn this to three commands.

If you're willing to follow me, if you're willing to come under my leadership, if you're willing to become my disciple, then you must deny yourself, take up your cross, follow me.

There are three commands. There are three, they're called imperatives. Do this. If you're going to follow Jesus, you must do this.

It's not optional. In the English version, in the ESV at least, it says, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself. And it kind of softens the force of the command.

Jesus is saying, if you're going to come after me, you must do this. You must deny yourself. You must take up your cross. You must follow me. So let's be clear on what he means by denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following him.

[14:01] What does it mean to deny yourself? Well, at a basic sense, it's this. You cannot follow Jesus without first denying yourself.

You can't live for yourself and Christ. It's one or the other. Now, the temptation here is to read something into the command to deny yourself that's not there.

So for example, you may think, well, in order for me to deny, to follow Jesus, I need to deny myself eating Oreo cookies or binging on Netflix or gossiping about this person.

Now, those things may be true. But what Jesus is saying here, he's not commanding you to give something up.

He's commanding you to deny yourself who you are. It's a call to relinquish all claims on your life.

[15:07] That's what he's saying. That word deny means to disassociate yourself from someone. Jesus is saying, disassociate yourself from living a life for yourself so that you can associate with Christ and live a life for him.

That's what he's saying. Do you remember in Matthew 26, Jesus and Peter, Peter's like, I'm going to go to my death for you. And Jesus is like, actually, Peter, you're going to deny me three times. And the word deny, Jesus used in Matthew 26, is the same word deny Jesus is using here. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself.

So remember what happened in Matthew 26, the Peter's denials, someone comes up and says to Peter, hey, you also were with Jesus.

And Peter says, I don't know what you mean. He's playing dumb. I don't know what you're talking about. What do you mean? He's denying Jesus. He's disassociating himself from Jesus.

[16:20] And then a girl comes up and says to him, this man was with Jesus. And what does Peter do? I do not know the man referring to Jesus.

He denies him. He's disassociating himself from Jesus. And then we read this. Certainly you too are one of them, one of the disciples, for your accent betrays you.

He's from Galilee. And what Peter does is this. He calls down a curse, he swears, and he says, I do not know the man.

He denies him three times. He disassociates himself from Jesus. And the irony is, is that Jesus is commanding Peter right here to say, deny yourself and follow me.

And what happens in Matthew 26 is, Peter denies Christ for himself. The point I'm trying to make is this. To deny yourself means to disassociate yourself from yourself, from living for yourself, in order to live for Christ.

[17:32] You deny any claim on your life. It's saying, I'm not in control of my life anymore. Jesus is. I don't own my life.

Jesus does. I do not claim to know what's best for me. Jesus does. That's what it means to deny yourself. To disassociate yourself from living a life unto yourself.

Another way to say it is this. It's to reject a self-centered life for a Christ-centered life. It's to reject a self-determined life to live a Christ-determined life.

You can't have it both ways. Jesus is saying, if you're going to follow me, you must deny yourself. The Apostle Paul captures this in Galatians 2.20 where he says, I have been crucified with Christ. And it's no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me in the life I now live in the flesh. I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me.

[18:50] Denying himself. So in order for us to follow Jesus, we first must not deny ourselves and then second, we must take up our cross.

And again, here we've got to be careful of not reading something in that Jesus is not saying. What does Jesus mean when he says, take up your cross?

cross. Now, all of us have burdens to carry. There are people in this room who are carrying burdens of a terminal illness.

Who are carrying a burden of a strained relationship. Maybe it's a spouse or maybe it's a wayward child. trying to make ends meet.

Carrying the responsibility for a lot of people. That can be a burden to carry. And what people can say in those moments is something like this.

[19:53] Oh, I'm so sorry. You know, we all have our crosses to carry. We all have our crosses to bear. Is that what Jesus means here? The question we ask to get what Jesus is actually saying is by asking this.

How would his disciples have understood what he's saying? How would they have received his words to deny themselves and to take up their crosses?

How would they have responded to it? And any first century resident of Palestine would have understood Jesus to be commanding them to prepare to die.

To take up your cross. Do you remember Dietrich Bonhoeffer? I was introduced to him when I was a new follower of Jesus in college and he wrote this book called The Cost of Discipleship and he's famous for saying when Christ calls a man he bids him come and die.

In our day when we see a cross somewhere we think we think of Christianity we think religious stuff.

If you see kind of a cross around somebody's neck you think well maybe they're a Christian or a tattoo on their arm it's like maybe they had some kind of religious experience or they got a cross kind of sewed into their leather jacket you're thinking okay you know there's some kind of connection with the Christian faith and so nowadays when we hear about the cross we tend to think about Christianity right we think that it's religious but in Jesus' day the cross was not religious it represented a horrific shameful death by execution and so in order to try to capture that for you I thought of a modern day equivalent of kind of the first century understanding of the cross it would be the electric chair think about an electric chair maybe you've seen the green mile a wooden chair straps on the sides and then this kind of skull metal skull cap that would go over your head that runs the voltage through to put somebody to death what Jesus is talking about here when he talks about the cross it's equivalent to an electrical chair it's like Jesus is saying this if anyone would come after

me he must relinquish all claims on his life take up his electric chair and follow me when we read [22:29] Jesus talking about the cross he's talking about death if you're going to come after me be prepared to die and so in that first command if anyone would come after me he must deny himself relinquish claims on your life if you're going to follow Jesus take up your cross you relinquish all claims to your death now I've been asking myself a question all week long and here it is if I had known 20 something years ago that by becoming a follower of Jesus that I was opening myself up to the possibility of suffering and even death would I have still followed him would I still have chosen to say yes Lord I will follow you anywhere and my answer is

I think so but now fast forward that today knowing what I know about Jesus having this command put squarely in front of me as if Jesus himself is calling you and me to say hey if you follow me deny yourself take up your cross and come after follow me would I do it today and the answer is a resounding yes you know why oh he's worth it who he is what he's done what he's doing now what he will do when he comes back it's all worth it it's all worth it how about you today knowing what Jesus is calling you to to deny yourself relinquish all claims on your life and to come and take up your cross even if that means suffering and death to follow him are you still willing to follow him are you willing to suffer and even perhaps die to take up your cross in order to follow him if anyone would come after me let him he must deny himself he must take up his cross and follow me let's look at this last command follow me to follow

Jesus is to live for Jesus to follow Jesus is to become his disciple and in order to live for Jesus you must die to yourself daily so this command to follow me it is an all consuming life comprehensive call to discipleship and there's two mistakes we can make mistake number one is this to hear this call to discipleship as like a call to a kind of special unit in those who are Christians you know how the navy sailors there's this thing there's people called the navy seals this elite group of people who do amazing hard things what we can do in our minds is we can kind of put some kind of distinction between being a Christian and being a disciple like a disciple is the navy seals of being a Christian we make a subset out of that like okay there's the everyday

Christians and then those then they're the people who really kind of give up their life for Jesus Christians that's not biblical Christianity if you look at Acts chapter 11 verse 26 what you read is this it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians you know what that means disciples of Jesus are Christians they're one and the same there's no distinction if you are a follower of Christ a disciple of Christ you are a Christian and if you profess to be a Christian you are to obey Jesus in all respects the second mistake that we can make is to kind of make my discipleship a subset of my life so for example I'm a husband I'm a father I also like to play golf every once in a while and then 10 hours a week I am a disciple of

Jesus Christ and what we're saying there is you know I've got my place in my life to follow Jesus but that doesn't really bleed into these other areas that that that's not biblical Christianity either to be a follower of Jesus is to follow him all the time in every area of your life to follow me means to follow him everywhere every week I start up the week by doing a thing called roles and goals I lay out what are the roles God has called me to and what are the goals I need to hit for each week it's just a way of organizing my life you know the first one is a disciple of Jesus it governs everything it governs my being a husband to Jenny it governs me being a father to my four children it governs me being a pastor of this church

[28:04] I'm a follower of Jesus first and a pastor second absolutely not am I growing Lord willing yes to be a disciple of Jesus means you follow him in every aspect of your life yesterday I was walking from the building and I was walking down 8th avenue here and I crossed 58th street that's where the heritage house is and as I'm walking by I see this group of people walk out from behind heritage house and I say well this is rather interesting so there's like 12 to 15 people there very diverse grown men boys grown women little girls you know a very diverse group and in the middle of it is an Asian guy and I hear him say line up and all these 12 15 people they line up and what they do is they all in unison said yes sensei you're going to sprint down to the sidewalk and back yes

sensei go down and back this karate sensei had brought his disciples out into the side lawn of the heritage house to have them do some exercises for their good and so these disciples were following their master they were trusting and obeying him when we follow

Jesus he's our sensei and we trust and obey him and all that he is and all that he calls us to do we say yes Lord Jesus yes Lord Jesus gladly Lord Jesus and so what it means to trust him is this we trust that he's sovereignly at work over the entire world and universe that by his word he's upholding the whole cosmic forces of all things and so his timing is always perfect his purposes are always good and his words what he speaks you can build your life on them they're trustworthy they're reliable and not only that when his words put a claim on you and they call you to obey the answer is yes to follow

Jesus is to say yes Lord when was the last time you encountered a command from the Lord Jesus from God's word and your response was yes Lord I'll do that yes Lord I'll obey you are you claiming something in your life right now as kind of like your own Jesus I'll obey you here and here and here but when it comes to this area that's still mine is there a command in your Bible that you conveniently kind of just kind of walk around that you do not take it to heart because you don't want to change you don't want to obey when Jesus says you cannot have two masters man cannot serve both

God and money when you read something like this are you kind of like that's good but I'm not going to think about what that means for me Jesus wants you to take his words to heart he wants to align you to align his life with who he is and what he says and in every area of your life I've got another question for you this call that Jesus is calling us to is a costly radical call if you're hearing it right you should be saying whoa he's asking me to give up everything for him and that's right because he is so let me ask you do you dilute the call are you diluting the call on your own life so when Jesus says deny yourself are you somehow thinking in your mind well sort of deny yourself sort of take up your cross sort of follow me or are you saying no

I will do all of it are you diluting it for your children when you talk about Jesus to them are you talking to them about a Jesus who just kind of finds his little place in their heart or you are talking about a Jesus who requires this child of yours to give up their life to follow him there's a big difference when you talk to non Christians and you talk about the faith to them are you kind of like let's not talk about the cost yet yet we'll wait till you profess Jesus and then we'll come back and we'll talk about what it really means to cost to follow him we don't need to dilute the message here it's Jesus calling it it's Jesus saying deny yourself it's Jesus saying take up your cross it's Jesus saying follow me and so this call this invitation to follow him it comes at cost and the question is is it worth it is it worth it to deny yourself to follow

[34:22] Jesus is it worth it to take up your cross to suffer and possibly die for Jesus is it worth it to follow him in all that he commands all the days of your life yes yes it is yes it is with every ounce of every fiber of your body yes it's who he is he's the one he's the Christ he alone can make this call on your life in order to follow him you must die to yourself now I'm going to point you to these three reasons why he gives to follow him and I'm going to be lickety split through him I want you to feel though what he's saying and so in chapter 16 verse 24 if anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me verse 25 the first word is what for look at verse 26 the first word is what for look at verse 27 the first word is what for will will will will will will find it it's referencing something that's going to happen in the future and one of the things that is kind of woven throughout this these three reasons is a future orientation

Jesus is saying something like this deny yourself now take take up your cross now follow me now for then it will go well with you but if you don't follow me now if you don't deny yourself if you don't take up your cross if you don't obey what I'm calling you to it will not go well for you so if you look at verse 25 you could read it like this for whoever would save his life now will lose it then but whoever loses his life for my sake now will find it then and so when you look at whoever would save his life when we hear the word save we think positive we think salvation right that's not how Jesus is using it he's using it negatively it's in contrast to denying yourself taking up your cross and follow him and

so what he's saying is hey if you're clinging to your life now and trying to protect your life now and trying to live a life that you think is going to bring you the greatest happiness that's separated from Jesus you do that now you lose it then but if you give you give you gain life then you gain life then so the first reason he gives is this follow me now and it will go really well for you for the rest of eternity but if you don't follow me now you will suffer for all of eternity the second reason he gets at is you follow me now because the world does not have anything to offer you that will give you any hope on the day of judgment verse 26 for what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul on that day or what shall man give in return for his soul on that day you choose not follow Jesus you are a 20 year old and for the next 60 years of your life you are acquiring all sorts of houses and cars and money and people all around the world

God calls you to himself one day and you are standing before the judgment throne of God and you have got all this stuff in the bank and you are looking at your judge Jesus what are you going to look at my bank account look at my stuff what would it profit you on that day it's a rhetorical question no profit none what can a man exchange for his life there's nothing that this world offers that will be able to exchange for your soul on that day Jesus is saying life is not found in this world life is found in me follow me and the last four is in verse 27 Jesus says follow me now for

I'm coming back and when I come back I'm going to judge everyone look at verse 27 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 so those people who have rejected Christ and have just lived after this world he will repay them they will stand before them and give an account Jesus this is why I rejected you on earth and he will repay them he'll carry out judgment but for those of us who bow our knee now and are saying I'll follow you deny myself take up my cross I'll obey you in all things when he comes back he knows that we've been living for him we've responded in obedience and faith and on that day he'll say well done good and faithful servant come into the joy of your master the call that

[40:38] Jesus makes is to deny yourself take up your cross follow me and the reasons he gives are all future oriented follow me now because judgment is coming and I'm the judge tomorrow morning when you wake up what will be your first thoughts how about this you wake up and your first thoughts go something like this oh today Lord today it's my joy to deny myself take up my cross and follow you for you Lord Jesus are where it's at you are the one who matters most your mission your fame your glory and so today I deny myself take up my cross and I'll follow you wherever you go let's pray

God in heaven would you press this call to discipleship God would you make us to God would you make us a people whose greatest desire is not for our own gain but for the glory of Jesus in our life in this city and among the nations God would you bring great joy into our hearts when we call people to give it all up to follow Jesus because Lord Jesus you are worth it would you press that into our hearts it's in the name of Christ I pray amen