

Matthew 16: 24 - 28 // Step by Step

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[0:00] I'm here or with anyone, but I'm always a little uncomfortable being called pastor.! And when I say that, it's not because I'm uncomfortable with the calling or the role.

I've always thought of it as like, I don't really call my realtor and say, Hey, Realtor Bob, right? Or, you know, Plumber Cory, can you help me out? It's a calling, and you can't help yourself but fulfill it, follow it, follow the Lord in it. And I have seen more evidence of someone saying, Call me pastor, as a barrier. And it shouldn't be like that. I'm a sinner saved by grace. I have no idea why I'm allowed to be up here other than just some really cool people that you entrusted, hired me. And until the Lord calls me home, this is what I'll be doing. But it's not a position that I look at and say, Call me pastor. Just, you know my name. And if you don't, you can come ask me or somebody else. Um, but I hope that I fulfill the role. I hope I fulfill the call. I hope I do it because it pleases the Lord. And, uh, and, and when I stopped doing that, then I don't deserve the title at all.

So that's my theory behind it though. Thank you brother for that. And it's interesting that we start with that because we're going to be in Matthew chapter 16 verses 24 to 28 today. So you want to open your Bibles or tap and swipe your way there.

There's a story that I, that I lived out that reminds me of this, uh, on a constant basis.

[1:42] And if you've ever walked in deep snow, you know exactly what I'm talking about. There's a certain sound that it makes. There's a crunch and a depth that your foot goes to, uh, that is, it's hard to shake. You know, exactly what I'm talking about. If you've been there.

And when I was really, really young, I was taken out on a hunting trip, uh, just a day trip. Cause where we lived, the hunting wasn't far from the house, so to speak. And, uh, and I was with my friend, Andy, his dad, Alan and his brother and a few other guys. And Alan was a, he was a big guy. He was a guy who had seen a little too much difficulty in life. And when I say that they're just, there's some stories you hear, it's like, well, you have not caught a break. Al was one of those guys, but he was a good dad. And I saw that because his sons were raised to be good men. And I, and I walked after Alan and all I could see was his big back, you know, and I'm, and I'm having to put my foot in his steps in the snow. Otherwise I'd sink in or fall off. Some of these trails had a bit of a cutoff, but the blanket of snow made it seem like it was even ground and it wasn't. So you had to follow the footsteps of the person in front of you. And I'm crunching along and I'm like, whoop, whoop. And Andy was behind me and we, we got where we're going and everything happened that was supposed to happen for that day. But it left a mark on me. I didn't know Jesus at this time. So when someone started to talk to me about Jesus, the idea of following Jesus step-by-step, this is often what comes back in memory, following Alan through the snow, trusting that I would be safe, that where we would going, we would be safe, trusting that we would come home by the same route and be safe. Following

Jesus step-by-step is much like that. We follow someone else who's following him. We follow him and someone else is following us. However you want to cut it, there's a follow that's involved and it takes trust and faith. And you imagine if you're competing with the person in front of you. Imagine if I said to Al that day, hey, I can do this. I would have sunk in the snow, fallen face first. He would have had to pull me up, right? But if when we're following Jesus, keeping in step with him, then I think this passage will start to make some sense. I hope it does for each of us.

So I'm going to read verses 24 to 26 and we'll just go verse by verse through this. I might also warn you too that my notes for today are incredibly short, which usually means the Lord wants me to share something personal and he's told me this and I'm resisting it with all get out right now. So this is a submission thing for me, okay? Pray for me that I don't listen to myself, all right? Verses 24 to 26. Then Jesus told his disciples, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

[4:49] 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? We may have to give up personal ambition, dreams. We may have to give up career in order to serve Christ. We may have to give up popularity, money, time, and most certainly pride. We may have to give up relationships and opportunities that the world has before us in order to follow after Jesus. There's a cost to discipleship. There is a cost to following him. And we all have to face that at one point. The decisions we make should be based on a simple question. What would Jesus do? That saying comes from a book, and I hope some of you have read it or have heard of it, from 1896, Charles Sheldon, called *In His Steps*. And it was about a group of people who got together one day, and I'm paraphrasing of course and shortening it quite a bit, that sat around and asked themselves this question, what if we made decisions for the next 30 days, and we made back here in 30 days, what if we made decisions within those 30 days, based on the question, what would Jesus do? Now you had a newspaper publisher, you had a work on home mom, you had a lawyer, you had a guy who was out of work. There's a few different people from all different walks of life that were a part of this group. And they started asking themselves in their day-to-day life, what would Jesus do? Well, they lost clients, they lost work, they lost relationships. But the beauty that they gained, the closeness to Christ, the clarity in who they are in Him. The purpose in life that they found as a result was far above anything, anything that they left behind. And when we start asking ourselves that question, what would Jesus do in this situation? I bet you our actions, our decisions, and our attitudes would be different. What would Jesus do? We may have to sacrifice time, recreation, and pleasure in order to serve God.

We may find that the place the Lord puts us in, that place that He calls us to serve in, is invisible, and no one will see the work done but Him. So it be. There's a cost to following Christ.

[7:27] Sometimes it's fame, ego. It's always pride. And step by step, as we follow Him, sometimes through that deep snow of life, we have to follow after and trust that He has our heart, our mind, and everything about our lives in the care of His hands and not our own. Because the Christian life is always a life concerned for someone else. Someone said to me once, and it was actually painfully simple, that Christianity, a life with Jesus, can be boiled down to two words, others first.

And when you start asking yourself that question, what would Jesus do? And you're surrounded by people who love you and people who you worship with, people you serve with, people you eat with, and you ask the question, what would Jesus do? How can I put others before myself? Our attitudes change. Our decisions change.

Okay? All of these things start changing because we start making decisions towards Christ. And at the time, everyone knew that the cross was an instrument of death. We've kind of domesticated it over the last couple of thousand years. It's a symbol of our faith. But when you really look at it, everybody knew in that first century the cross had one purpose and one purpose alone, death and torture.

So this idea of picking up your cross is not to champion the cause for Christ. It starts here, dying to yourself.

I bid you come and die with me. Let's lay aside all who we think we are, all the rights we perceive we have, all the titles this life may have given us. Let us lay them aside and ask ourselves, Lord, what do you want today?

[9:22] What would Jesus do in my actions and reactions to this or that or this person or that person? Deny yourself and take up your cross. Those two things have to go together.

And we use that word to mean doing without something. Well, I'm going to practice denial today and I'm not going to have coffee. You know, that's not really denying yourself.

Some of you hate coffee, so that's pretty easy, right? It might be, you know, I'm going to deny sweet tea, right? I'll just have regular tea. That's not really denying yourself. I'd be great if you want to. I'm not judging that.

But denying ourselves is an issue of authority. Denying ourselves means that there's a throne in our heart and we don't sit on it.

Jesus sits on the throne of our heart. Denying ourselves means that he is the royal authority in our lives and our decisions, our actions come from that throne, not when we're on it.

[10:28] That's denying ourselves. To deny oneself means that in every moment of life, we choose to say no to ourselves and yes to God. And that's a tough one.

Because we feel sometimes we have the right to something. And maybe we do and maybe we don't. But bring it before the Lord. To deny oneself means once, finally, and for all to dethrone ourselves.

To step off that throne. And that's not an easy one to do. And to deny ourselves means to make God the ruling passion of our lives.

We can be passionate about a lot of things. I know pretty soon on Friday nights, we're going to be really passionate at the Wheat Bowl. I'll be there, okay? Don't get me wrong. But that same passion, we have to seize for the Lord as well.

And we have to give him in all things. That same burning passion. Father, anything, anytime, anywhere. For you, always. That same burning passion.

[11:33] Because a person carrying a cross knew one thing. They couldn't save themselves. If you're carrying your cross, there's one direction you're going. Just one.

We're to follow in the steps of Jesus and live another's first life. There's a little exercise that I have that whenever I'm discipling someone, this is usually where I start.

And it's not meant to be a doom and gloom thing. So just bear with me for a moment. Psalm 90 verse 12 says, So teach us to number our days that we may get our heart of wisdom.

Be aware of how many days we have. How much time we have left. Now, for some of us, that's a long time yet to come. You have a lot of life ahead of you.

For some of us, it's different. So this is what I take someone through. When I'm sitting in a coffee shop, this is what I take them through. First and foremost. Okay? Teach us the number our days we might gain a heart of wisdom.

[12:33] There are 8,760 hours in a year. Okay? 8,760. So you've got to guess the average age at which people in your family die of natural causes.

For me, that's roughly 90. Okay? Just based on history. So if I don't get hit by a bus or traffic accident on busy Main Street here after church, not too likely.

All right? Then I will die of natural causes around that age based on family history. So you take that. Then you write down your current age. You subtract your age from that family average.

Multiply that number by 8,760. And that's roughly how many hours you have left. It's a sobering thing to do. So as I stand here right now at 55, I have roughly 300,000, it's 306,600 hours left if I die of natural causes.

A little over 300,000 hours. That's math. That's the sobering reality. Because none of us get out of here alive. That shouldn't be a shock.

[13:45] But for the Christian, this is just a door. This is just the beginning. For those of us who are in Jesus, this is just like a blip on the time chart.

We're going to so much more beautiful and wonderful things for eternity. And we can live that eternal life with him now. That life that bids us to come and die with him.

Because as a Christian, we die to live. But the world lives to die. You see the difference there. So with that heart of wisdom, now that I know that there's 300,000 and change, hours left, what do I do with that?

Because that doesn't involve food, sleep, right? Things that we do. But it sure changes perspective. I could go play a video game for three hours.

And sometimes that's thinking, chick-ching, chick-ching, chick-ching. What a waste that is for me.

Do you see what I'm saying here? Our decisions, the attitudes we hold, the bitterness that we hold on to, you are literally wasting the clock of your life on other things.

[14:56] Spend it on Jesus. Spend it on him. Roll hard those dice, forgive the term. All right? And bet on Jesus. Because that is an eternal reward that's coming to you.

The world will want things from us. The world will always tell us and ask us that question. What are you going to gain? How much are you going to make? What are you going to get out of this? Where Jesus is asking us, who are you becoming? This life, all the decisions we make, the forgiveness we extend, the mercy we extend, the forgiveness and mercy we receive, that is building us who we will become for the next stage.

So work on it now. Because we have to follow Jesus. We have to get good at obeying him. And we follow him wherever he goes, even when we can't see a couple of steps ahead.

I didn't want to share this. This is what I've been fighting, actually. But funny enough, Corey asked me this earlier in discipleship class, and I was kind of, I think the Lord just saying, buddy.

[16:11] So I'll just say this. We followed the Lord here to Oklahoma. We didn't need to come here. My church was and is thriving where it was. I left it with a great guy. I had no reason to leave. None. But the Lord was so very clear to me, a year before I left, that that would be my final chapter. I didn't have a plan. I had no idea where. If you asked me then, would it be Oklahoma? I said, probably not. I didn't even think the United States. And as time went on, the little nudges kept on coming.

And I realized, oh yeah, one of my close guys that I've disciplined for a while now lives outside Oklahoma City. All these little things just started, kind of starting to come together. You know, when the Lord starts showing you things, just like that phone. Is that mine? No, okay, good. Sorry. I was worried it was mine. Anyway, I have the same ringtone, by the way.

[17:23] Anyway, all of these things started to come together. All these threads started to tie together. So I thought, you know what? I'm going to do what I have never done before.

I'm going to apply for a pastor job. I've never had to before. I've started churches. You know, it's not something you apply for. Your association raises you up. You go through internships.

You're sent out. You're ordained. And so I went on this website, and I ended up finding First Christian Church. And you know, and I've said this before, but it's worth saying again, what really, really sealed it for me was that video that Zoe did that I think you guys made for this process.

At least that's what it seemed like. It was a heart and soul kind of movie. It was a video that wasn't too long, but it showed just who the church was. And I listened to your voices.

I saw what you were saying about the church, and there was a part of me that was just like, wow, these are beautiful people. But it wasn't quite that yet that stuck the landing. What it was, was when all of a sudden the summit was shown and the wall of verses that are written up there.

[18:33] Now, I've never seen that before personally, except for my office in Canada. Because anybody who would come in for counseling, anybody who would come in to talk, anybody who would come in with questions or anything like that, they usually knew the drill.

They would say, oh, I got a verse. Can I put it on? Yeah, yeah, you can put it on the wall. And they would put up the wall or a quote or something like that. And that's when I felt the Lord just say, that's where I want you to go. Texoma.

Okay. Never heard of it in my life. All right. So I went, I did this application process and good for you guys for hiring a reading company. I will say the process was very painful and long, but it was the right thing to do because they asked the right questions.

They had pastors as the interviewers. So they knew the questions to ask and it helps you cool your jets a bit, not be impatient, not try and rush or rush ahead of the Lord. The first one was simply on character.

Should you do this job? Then the next one was on theology. Do you have similar beliefs to the church? Are you going to be a mesh or are you going to be a disaster? Right? The third one was on the community, the chemistry of it.

[19:42] And can you actually work with this group of people? Can they work with you? The fourth one was with the board itself. And by the time I'd gotten to the third, the chemistry staffing of the company said, look, we have 14 churches that are reviewed to your file.

They want to go to the fourth interview. All right. And I said, okay, I only want this one. And the guy just said, we highly recommend you choose a top three because nothing's guaranteed.

I said, no, this is the one I think the Lord will have me at and I'll grieve if I don't get it. But this is, I got to put all my eggs in this basket. That was the sense I got. Be all in.

Right? So you know how the story went from there. Right? And I'm here today. But you were the only one that I chose. And here's the part that I struggle with.

We followed the Lord stepping off into darkness. We really did. We had no idea. You know, I mean, your board is a fantastic board of men. It really is.

[20:46] You guys have been through it. You've got steely faith. Right? This process of the paperwork was not easy. It really wasn't. We had to go through becoming a 501c3.

We had to do all of these things and keep up. And that stepping off in the darkness now became a shared experience where we're stepping out on faith. We were brought together.

Now we have to pray. We have to have faith that the Lord is going to keep us together. So with that, I do have kind of a, well, I hope it's an exciting update.

But if you've ever dealt with the government, and I will say this, this is government anywhere in the world, you know, love them. But sometimes it's like playing whack-a-mole to try and keep up with the different changes that happen in paperwork.

And that's what it was like for about eight months. And recently, one of the changes is deeply, deeply in my favor. The visa that I'm on right now is for a particular time, for about five years.

[21:45] And that's great, but it's renewable for five after that and five after that, which is great. But they've changed it so that all of my experience from Canada, which is about 16, 17 years, now counts towards getting my permanent green card in my category as a minister.

So that means that you're stuck with me for at least 16 years now, okay, before I have to do any other paperwork. So I hope that's good news, but it is news nonetheless.

And that's just as of the last couple of weeks. So that's what we're working on. But I wanted to share that. Well, no, actually, let me say, I did not want to share that, but the Lord put it on my mind to open myself this way because we stepped off into the darkness.

We've nicknamed it our shipwreck here. You know, we lost everything, right? We gave up our house. We gave up our car, even now again.

You know, I could go down the list. It's not meant to be a sorrow, sad thing. It's that look at what the Lord has brought us to. One of the most, for me personally, I can't wait to come into work.

[22:51] One of the most beautiful group of people that I've ever encountered. Some of you still look me in the eye and give me the time of day. And I'm praying for you guys. I'm praying for you guys.

Because I'll just say this. Because we are the body of Christ. What would Jesus do? He brought my family and me from another country to be here to weather the storm with you.

So what would Jesus do from now on? Let's work together at the next 10, 15, 20 years. Because I'm going to follow after Jesus.

And he told me to come here. And I know, I know, this is my last office as a pastor. And I'm not saying that I'm going to quit ministry. I will die my last breath preaching the word of God.

And I'm 55. And I'm in good health. You're stuck with me. Okay? So let's go on to this next 10, 15, 20 years together.

[23:56] Dying to ourselves. Pursuing what Jesus has for us. For Texas County. Okay? And I dare you, dare you to come and pray with me.

Because I am so excited to have the ability to pray with you. We gave up everything for the chance to pray with you guys. We gave up everything to be here in this moment right now.

No regrets. What would Jesus do right now in your life? What would he do? See, there's a person who plays it safe.

And that person who plays it safe may end up losing everything. We shore up. We make sure our bank account is flush. We've got all these protections in place.

You can still lose it. Because there's a time, or may come a time, when playing it safe may cost you a decision between your faith or not. And you think, oh no, no, that's crazy.

[24:55] Well, it's in the book of Revelation. It is also in history that there are people that if you just pinched a salt and put it on the bust of Caesar will give you a certificate that allows you to work and do all the stuff you need.

And if you don't have that, you can't work. Some Christians were in abject poverty because they wouldn't put the incense on the bust of Caesar.

So they didn't have a certificate that allowed them to work. They had to choose faith in Jesus over security in the world. So this can happen. The person who risks it all for Christ, well, risk is a part of life.

Anybody who knows anything about anything, we know risk is a part of life. It comes and it happens. I choose to place all my bets on Jesus. And I know you have too.

I guess what I'm daring us as a congregation is let's not stop. Let's keep putting our faith in Jesus. Every decision we make in life makes us into a certain kind of person.

[25:56] Who are you becoming today? Who are you becoming? Verse 26 says, 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? In Greek, we can read this verse. There's a word that we can read, antelagaima. And it means that there is no price which will buy a faithful friend or a disciplined soul.

Those things are priceless. A faithful friend or a disciplined soul. They're priceless. We owe all we have to Jesus.

We may want to think that we've built up our lives to be a certain thing. And you know what? You've worked hard with your hands as the Lord has given you talents, skills, and abilities and been good stewards.

I've done that. You've done that. But we have to recognize where that has all come from. And that's in Jesus. We are all we are. Someone can try to give Jesus his money and still hold back giving him his life.

[27:05] Well, I tithe. I go to church. I do all the right things. But are you asking today what would Jesus do within your family, your friends, your work? No condemnation.

I'm actually standing here and looking at myself thinking, wow, I got to do this a little more often. But maybe we can start together today dying to ourselves. What would Jesus do?

What would Jesus do? Because the only gift that we can give Jesus that matters at all is our lives, our hearts.

That's it. That's all he wants. Verses 27 to 28. 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. In all things there comes a day of reckoning.

[28:04] In all things. Where all our hiding and all our private works are brought before the Lord. A life review as some people call it.

I believe that there are, from what I can see in the word, there are two judgments. There is a judgment for those who do not know the Lord. And there's a judgment for those of us who are Christians. They're going to be very, very different.

Okay? Because Jesus has paid the price on the cross for the penalty that you and I have earned through sin. So it won't be that kind of judgment. I've heard it said before and I tend to lean on this a little bit.

I think it's going to be, have you learned how to love yet? Have you learned how much mercy I've extended to you? Have you been able to be gracious to those around you as I've been gracious to you?

I wonder if those questions will come up. I don't know. But I know it will be stuff about who are you becoming today? And step by step, are we becoming more like Jesus or more like the world?

[29:09] Are we becoming more like our pharisaical, legalistic self? Or are we becoming more like the gracious, loving, and just God that Jesus is? The person who selfishly hugs their own security and comfort in heaven's eyes is actually a failure.

No matter how much wealth we have here on earth, it isn't something we can take with us. Do you know one thing that we can take to heaven? One thing alone? Our character.

Who are you becoming? God prepares you for what you will become. That's the only thing that we take with us. And the person who spends themselves for others and lives a life for Jesus is the person who receives a reward.

And those rewards we have, we'll just simply cast them before Jesus' feet because he deserves all the glory. It's not ours. He deserves all the glory. It is the mighty work on God's kingdom that Jesus speaks about when he says some will not see death until it's a promise.

There are those who are standing there who saw the coming of Jesus in the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. There are those who were there to see Gentile and Jew swept into the kingdom of God together.

[30:30] They saw the Christian message sweep across Asia and even to Europe until it reached Rome. They saw well within their lifetime those who heard Jesus speak the kingdom come in power.

Jesus gives us incredible revelation of who he is and he asks us one thing here and that's to follow him. Are we following ourselves or are we following Jesus?

Because we follow him in his death in his burial and in a resurrection life. but you know to be resurrected you have to die.

So there's a death to self that takes place here. It is just simply where we begin in our hearts Father I'm going to choose you instead of myself.

I'm going to choose to love your children instead of myself. Father I'm going to choose to spend my time in grace and mercy and extending it to one another instead of selfishly sitting in my kingdom and saying no I deserve this and this.

[31 : 39] It's just simply death to self. I say simply like it's easy it's not. It's a day to day process. It's not a destination we can say I've been to that country.

No. It's a day to day death to self. What would Jesus do? Following Jesus isn't all about something amazing with lots of attention.

It's a thousand quiet little works that nobody sees. It's also all about being faithful in ordinary things. It's choosing Jesus when nobody is looking and when everyone is looking.

It's choosing obedience when it's inconvenient or it costs us something. It's choosing forgiveness when pride wants to hold on with a white knuckle grip.

It's choosing generosity when selfishness feels better and maybe even more justified. It's choosing to trust when worry wants to take over. It's choosing faith when circumstances are really scary and you're stepping off into the darkness not knowing where you're going where you're moving or what you're doing.

[32 : 48] It's choosing faith over fear. Yes, we die to self but we do not stay dead. There's a resurrection of the man of the woman that happens at this point and I'm not talking about resurrection from death to life.

I'm talking about a renewal that happens through the Holy Spirit. A time of refreshing that we can ask for repeatedly over and over because the apostles did and we can too.

So I want to close today with just simply that invitation. If you want to be resurrected from the inside out if you want to start asking the question in your life and more seriously what would Jesus do? Start today. What have you got to lose? And do it again tomorrow and the next day and the next. And just see what the Lord does in our lives in our church in our town in this county when we start acting and loving like that.

What an amazing amazing Lord he is. So as I can close in prayer just consider that for a moment. When we sing this last song consider that. What is it you have to die to today?

[33 : 58] What attitude do you need to let go of? What do you need to just simply release so that you can be filled with Holy Spirit? Let's pray.