

No cross, no crown

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Date: 04 June 2023

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[0 : 00] Matthew 16 verses 21 to 28. This comes just after Peter has confessed that Jesus is the Christ. So 16 verses 21 to 28.

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. Well good morning everyone.

It's good that there's three people awake this morning. My name's Dave. I've met you before. I'm one of the pastors here and I really hope you can stick around for lunch after the service. Why don't we pray as we come to God's word. Let's pray.

Father, you have words for us this morning that challenge us deep into our heart, to our very bone. And so Lord, if you don't help us have humility in hearing your word, there's going to be so many things that get in the way from hearing you. So I pray for your help for all of us to sit under your word and so that we might have life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

[2 : 47] Well, what does it look like to be a disciple of Jesus? What does it look like? Do you think of it in terms of making Jesus your top priority in life?

Is he to be first on your agenda? Put him first with your time, put him first with your money, put him first with your abilities, put him first. Trying to do that, I don't know if you found this, is super hard in a culture that is obsessed with self. But having Jesus as your top priority, first on your agenda, falls far short of what Jesus calls you and I to in our passage today. He's not going to settle for being first with first on your agenda. He wants to set for you a totally new agenda.

I want to do two things today as we try and answer the question, what does it look like to pledge allegiance to this suffering king? So Peter has confessed him as the Christ and then he immediately says, here's my plan, I'm going to submit and suffer and die.

What does it look like to belong to this kind of king? So first, I want to spend some time seeing that his call to deny self and to take up our cross is a call to come and die.

Die to self-rule. The second thing I want to do today is to see how this king motivates us. He doesn't motivate us through compulsion, he motivates us through choice.

[4 : 41] So that's where we're going. Let me just say one statement from the outset. Let's be clear on this. Jesus' words here are not a prerequisite for being a Christian.

You don't have to do this to become a Christian. That's totally based on confessing Jesus as Lord. The belief that confesses Jesus as Lord, you're a Christian, you're saved.

What's here is a description of what it means to live the saved life. It's not how you become saved, it's how you live being saved.

And it's a description for all disciples. This isn't just for keen beings. This is discipleship 101. Okay, so what does it mean to confess allegiance to a king who chooses to suffer and submit to those who are under his authority?

What does it mean to believe in the son of the living God who chooses to die? Verse 24. Verse 24. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

[5 : 59] I wonder what you're imagining by that call of deny yourself. Are you hearing something like, don't be selfish? Does it mean an attitude of when you're a youth group and not enough pizza has been ordered and there's one more slice and you are salivating and you're ready to kill, but you go, oh, you have it.

Is that what he's calling to, self-denial? Does it mean not living as luxurious a life as you possibly could afford so that you can give to the church and missions?

Is self-denial not being selfish with your time, that you are bone-weary after a week of work, but you choose to do your part in making church happen?

Don't be selfish. Is that what you're hearing? And what does take up your cross mean? Is it about the excruciating experiences of living in a broken world where someone's cross is that their adult children have turned away from God?

Is that their cross? Is carrying the cross of cancer or chronic fatigue, is that your cross to bear? Is that what it means here? I think what Jesus is calling us to is even more radical still.

[7 : 30] It's more radical than not being selfish. It's more radical than enduring the painful situations of life. The word deny can mean renounce.

Adam's introduction about high court's decisions. I was reminded of that saga, I don't know how long ago, it was a number of years ago, where the politicians had dual citizenships and the high court ruled that you can't stand in office if you've got allegiance to a foreign power.

And that put all these politicians in a very tricky position. They had to renounce their allegiance to a foreign power. Like, imagine if what actually happened was, I'm going to renounce my Australian citizenship in any right to be a person in authority.

That just wouldn't happen. But that kind of idea of renouncing allegiance is closer to what Jesus is saying here. Each person's natural-born disposition since sin entered the world is to think that you and I have a right to rule your life.

That's a delusion because God made us. Our life is his. And so Jesus is saying, deny that. Your allegiance to self-rule.

[9 : 02] Deny. Renounce. And to take up your cross. Crucifixion was not only a painful execution, it was reserved for the worst of criminals.

It was a public shaming. You were forced to carry the implement on which you would be condemned by the world. You were a dead man walking. As you carry that cross, you are losing your life, you're losing your reputation, anything in the world.

You are dead to the world. So if you confess that Jesus really is God's king, the son of the living God, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a writer during World War II, put it famously, when Christ calls a man, when Christ calls a person, he bids him come and die.

He's not exaggerating. He's saying, come and die. Renounce self in this world and give yourself to me.

I think we see the problem in Peter's reaction in verses 21 to 23 that we saw last week.

[10 : 18] He just confessed Jesus to be the Christ. They've been waiting generations for this guy, for this Messiah. He's just been told he's going to have this position of influence in the kingdom.

He knows that God has promised this king he's going to rule over everyone forever, bringing blessing. And after hearing Jesus' pathway to glory of suffering, he takes him aside and tells him off.

Why? Well, Jesus tells us, you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

Peter's devotion to this world's idea of life and success and victory and glory was blinding him to true greatness, to where life could actually be found.

Jesus is challenging us to see a very deep view of sin where it's allegiance to self is the problem and allegiance to this world.

[11 : 33] He isn't simply calling us to give up vaping or gambling or drinking or sexual immorality. Some of those things are very hard to be free from. But he's saying something so much more radical.

He's saying, give up allegiance to self in all areas of life. Your devotion to the things that this world can offer that you're clinging to as if you must have them to have life.

Because that self-rule and that idolatry of the heart is offensive to God. It is why he came to die.

So to deny self and to take up our cross is a call. Come and die. Die to self, die to the world.

That's discipleship 101. Again, it's not for keen beings. That's what it means to follow Jesus. So the second thing I want to do is notice how this Christ motivates us.

[12 : 56] It's not through compulsion. It's through choice. I think we see in these verses he gives us freedom to obey. Notice in verse 24 that you and I are the ones who are doing the actions of these verbs.

He doesn't crush self. He says, you must choose to deny self. He doesn't place the cross on us.

He says, take it up willingly. He doesn't compel obedience through fear. He invites us, follow me, imitate me.

It's choice. And then he gives us wonderful reasons to win over our heart so that we do this willingly. Verse 25, four.

For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. He's warning.

[14 : 06] Death and judgment is coming. You will lose it in the end. But if you choose to give it up for my sake, then you will find your life.

Notice that you don't save your life. He does the saving. You find it. You find your life. What is Jesus appealing to? You want to find life, don't you?

Don't you want life? This is the most selfish thing you could do. Renounce self and give your life to Jesus.

That is the most selfish thing you can do is give up self and hand it over to Jesus. That's what he's appealing to.

You want life, don't you? Here's where you find it. And he doesn't stop there. He convinces us why this is the case. Verse 26.

[15 : 06] 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? Take a good look at what this man-centered world that killed Christ wants nothing to do with him is offering you.

Take a good look even if you had it all. What will it profit a person? Now, to be clear here, soul is the same word as life in the previous verse.

It's not necessarily talking about the immaterial part of you. It's saying your life, your person. So put all the comfort and health, people's praise and popularity, being lovely and lovable, being important and powerful and successful, all the world's riches, no pleasure denied.

Put it all on one side of the ledger and you've got all it costs you is yourself. Jesus is saying just have a think about it.

You are being ripped off, man. It is a scam. It doesn't feel like a scam because the whole world is willingly buying into it.

[16 : 33] So if the man-centered world is a rip-off, we're given the true perspective in 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.

If you weigh up the value of following Christ's life of suffering only in terms of this life, even Paul says, I can't remember where it is, but where to be pitied.

That's not the reference point. That's not the right time frame to work it out. Like, a soccer illustration just came to my mind. The other week, we were winning 3-1 at halftime, but then we lost 6-1 at the end.

If halftime is not the reference point, you need the right reference point to work out what's actually going on. If we keep this eternal perspective that Christ is going to return, not to suffer again, but as judge, to repay, that's our reference point.

Now, I'm expecting that that verse, that idea of repayment is probably putting dread in some people's minds right now. according to what I have done.

[17 : 58] Oh, if that's causing you dread right now, can I just urge you to find your assurance of salvation not in verse 27, but in verse 21.

that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things and be killed and on a third day be raised. That's where your assurance is, verse 21.

Verse 27 is meant to be an encouragement to his people. It will be worth it in the end.

This really is the path to true glory. it's saying, make no mistake, this Christ who submitted to sinful men, this Christ who became weak and who was rejected and humiliated and defeated, this guy owns angels.

Do not miss the glory of this guy. He owns them. like, no one shares the glory of God, but this son does.

[19 : 19] You want, whatever glory he is offering you, you want it. With this kind of eternal perspective, it gives us resolve, it gives us joy and hope in the present, I think.

Because what loss have you really suffered if in the end, if the most important people, the closest people to you even, reject you, but in the end, the one who made you and owns the angels welcomes you.

what injustice have you really suffered if you forego vengeance for the king to avenge you in the end or to die for their sin and pay for it?

What pleasure have you really missed out on if at his right hand are pleasures forevermore? What pleasure have you, come on, forevermore?

what sacrifice have you really made in his service if he shares all the joy and blessing of his kingdom with you, knowing the father?

[20 : 38] There's a mystery, I can't even remember who it is, but David Livingston, maybe? He said, I never made a sacrifice. Because his point was, what Christ gave him totally outweighed anything he lost.

And he did lose a lot. This eternal perspective can count all things as lost compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ my Lord. We just need the right reference point.

He's going to come. Imagine that. You won't have to listen to me anymore. We're going to be before him. That day is coming. We need the right reference point.

And it's so hard to keep this eternal perspective, isn't it? I think it would have been sufficient for Christ to give us his word and his promises, and we should trust him in that.

But he even adds, verse 28, a guarantee, a foretaste of the glory to come. 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.

[21 : 52] This is like the promise to Simeon in Luke's gospel that he's not going to experience death until he sees the promised Messiah and he gets to hold the newborn in his hands.

So what did some of these apostles get to see before they experienced death? Was it the very next verse? Is that six days later, Jesus took Peter and James and John up a mountain and they saw Jesus transfigured?

And what they saw just blinded them. Everything in earth just looks dim and pathetic compared to what they saw. Is that what it's referring to?

Well, maybe it's referring to all the apostles except Judas, who saw Christ risen, him coming in his rule, who received his spirit to empower them on his mission to build the church.

is it his reign that came with his resurrection? I think it depends on what coming in his kingdom means.

[23 : 05] And kingdom is about Christ exercising his rule. So I think the promise is likely referring to every way that the risen Christ is exercising his rule.

And I think the transfiguration is just a little foretaste, a little window into heaven of who he is right now. He is at the Father's hand.

With the eyes of faith for us today, if we take the apostles' word for what they saw, especially that he is risen, that he is God's king, this testimony that they gladly laid down their lives for, with the eyes of faith, we can see him reigning now.

If you try and see Christ reigning only in the good things of life, so all the pleasures and health and all the relationships, if you try and see Jesus reigning in only the good things but not the bad things, the sin and sickness and shame and death, because of a warped idea of what Christ came to remove in this life, he came to remove, remember that self-rule, that's what he came to remove.

All those things are going to be removed later, but we've got to get his mission right, we've got to think of it right, because if we have a warped view of his mission, we will struggle to see his glory, like, is following Christ, is he really that glorious?

[24 : 51] If there's so much hardship and things not going well. But if we see this suffering in our risen Christ, if we understand his mission is to deliver people from the hell-bent allegiance to self in this world, then I think we can see tastes of his power at work in the transformed lives of his people, who people compelled by his love actually answer the call to come and die to self and live for him.

We can see his power at work, his kingdom is coming, we can see it in this room. We can see him reigning now because when people who once boasted in their accomplishments, they now boast in their weakness and they say that anything they can do is Christ through them.

What is that change? That's the kingdom coming. We see him reigning now when people who just dive headlong into the sinful pleasures of this world just go, I want to cut off my hand, I want to pluck out my eye because I found something better and more joyful and this is getting in the way of that.

What is that change? It's the kingdom coming. It's Christ ruling the heart. Christ. I think we see his kingdom reigning in people when people who once were bitter and demanding justice from those who wronged them now devote themselves to reconciliation and they want to give mercy.

Not just have to, they want to because they've received so much mercy themselves. What is that change? it's the love of Christ compelling a person.

[26 : 55] It's ruling the heart. When people once cling to house and family and land as their life, give it up. Hold it loosely.

Use it all for his sake and for the gospel. We can see him reigning. When people who once counted greatness as rising above others now see greatness as having faith like a child and being the servant of all others, that's greatness to serve.

What is that change? It's Christ reigning over the hearts of people. When people who once faced their death as losing their whole life can now face the loss of all things and all they're getting in return is Christ and they count it I'm gaining.

That's him reigning now. The kingdom is coming. So this call to follow Christ's path to glory, it must sound incomprehensible to our culture at the moment where pain is to be avoided at all costs and you depend on people's affirmation of my thinking and feelings and choices.

This just must be, it must seem the opposite to life. love. But if you confess this suffering Christ, what ought to compel you to have allegiance to him and renounce self isn't to try and pay him back for his death for you, it's not to try and pay him back, it's not to try and shore up your salvation, it's rock solid, you can't shore up your salvation.

[28 : 58] It's the love of Christ, a crucified Christ that compels us. I think we grow in our love for what he has done for us when we acknowledge the fact that we are in love with self.

I am in love with this world and he still chose to die to free me from that, to actually give me life. What compels us is his love for us, to make it a choice to deny self and take up cross and follow him.

I think the last stanza of one of William Cowper's poems, now this guy, he wrestled with deep bouts of depression his whole life.

Talk about weakness, severe depression. most of his life and yet he produced some of the most powerful poems of Christian literature.

I think this last stanza sums it up. To see the law by Christ fulfilled and hear his pardoning voice changes a slave into a child and duty into choice.

[30 : 31] If we believe he is glorious not just because he's not suffering anymore but precisely because he chose to suffer, if he's glorious because he laid down his life, we'll want to imitate him because we believe it's glorious.

We will count it such a high honour to join him on his mission. Doing our part to get the word out about this crucified Christ and living a cross shaped life so that people can see the hope that we have.

So his mission, it wasn't to die for a superficial level of sin to change behaviours so that he might become first on our agenda.

He doesn't want to be first on our agenda. His mission was to die for our allegiance to self in this world so that he sets us a totally new agenda.

He gives us the promise, whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. So I'll leave that challenge with you.

[31 : 52] Why don't we pray? Let's pray. Lord, even as I preach these words, I know how much my own heart is still, well, I know a little bit of how much my own heart still revolves around self and looks at life in worldly terms.

And so I thank you for moving towards us and laying down your life to free us from the love of self so that we might know the depths of your love for us.

Lord, I pray that you would help us as your people to have an eternal perspective. Help us to count it a joy to share your cross, not in saving ourselves, but sharing it in showing people that life isn't found in self and the world, but is found in you.

So Lord, convince our hearts. I know that my words have no power, but your words have all the power. So convince us. And Lord, if there's anyone who isn't sure where they stand with you, I pray that you would call them, call them to yourself to come and die and be raised to a life that you've never known, full of glory.

In Jesus' name, Amen.