

A Ministry of Death

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[0 : 00] This message was recorded at Vision Baptist Church in Alpharetta, Georgia. This is the next message in our series on the book of John, entitled, Jesus is God.

Take your Bibles and turn to John chapter 11, if you would. John chapter 11. Let's read verse 16. If you have time later, go back and read from verse 7 down to verse 16.

In verse 8, Jesus says that 70 is going to take them and they're going back to Judea. In verse 8, the guys say, Lord, they're going to try to kill you. Isn't that where they've sought to stone you before?

And we're going down there. And then they find out what we saw about Lazarus being dead today. And in verse 16, Thomas speaks. And he says a very sad thing, and it sounds pretty pessimistic.

He says, then said Thomas, which is called Didymus unto his fellow disciples, let us also go that we may die with him. That we may die with him.

[1 : 06] And I wish you would take the time tonight to think about the fact that he has called us to a ministry of death. Did you hear that?

He's called us to a ministry of death. Thomas was right. A ministry of death that we may die with him. Jesus knew he was about to die.

They didn't have to remind him of that. He knew he lived on Jesus' timetable, our father's timetable. He knew that nothing was an accident. He knew that he walked according to the plan. That's why he said if you walk during the day, you won't stumble.

If you walk in the light, you won't stumble. And he knew that. But just remember that when Jesus was working in Thomas' life and everybody else's life, there's a truth that you need to know tonight.

And that is that Jesus called his disciples to follow him into a life of death. Man, this will change your life if you'll get this. Look in your Bibles at Galatians chapter 6 and verse 14.

[2 : 07] Galatians chapter 6 and verse 14. Thomas said, let's go with Jesus and die too.

But that's nothing new to us. It is the way we ought to understand what's going on. And in plentiful, bountiful, prosperous America, we get so far removed from that that we take a few minutes to have the Lord's Supper.

We focus in and think about death and dying. We don't even like funerals. You know, they've changed in my lifetime. In the old days, you know, you sat with the body the whole time.

They never went home. Nowadays, the funeral home helps us, man. We don't have to stay there for two hours at a time. And they do everything they can to help us to kind of get over death.

And the things are just done to help us get over death. But when Jesus called people, he called them to go die with him. And you've been called to die with him.

[3 : 10] Paul sums it up for himself in Galatians 6, 14. But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross the death instrument.

The death instrument of our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world. He said, if I brag, brag on one thing.

The electric chair. The hangman's noose. The cross. The thing that cuts you out of this world and puts you into the next world. And he says, by the cross, I am crucified.

The world is crucified to me. The world is dead to me. The world no longer is attracted to me. It doesn't apply to me. It doesn't appeal to me. It's not the same for me.

The world died to me. And I died to the world. The world's not important to me. And I might not be important to the world. But the cross is important to me.

[4 : 09] Thomas said, let's just go die with him. Look at Matthew 16, 24 through 26. Look, I just picked a handful of verses to show you.

I'm only going to show you a couple of them. But Matthew 16, 24 through 26. Jesus said to his disciples. Now listen to what he says. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

That's a wild statement. If you guys want to follow me, if you want to come after me, then you deny yourself. You deny your plans, your goals, your aspirations, your future.

Whatever you had in mind, it no longer counts. You have one thing now. That's me. Say no to you and yes to me. Say no to your plans and yes to my plans.

Deny yourself. You know, when you, there are certain groups, elite groups of soldiers, maybe elite groups of sports, elite groups of businessmen, that when you really get in, they own you.

[5 : 18] They own you. This is what Jesus said. You want to follow me? Forget anything. It's yours. Deny yourself. And then he said, take up your death instrument.

You want to follow me? Let's go die. It wasn't a pretty picture when he was talking to those people.

It was a reality. He is less than three years from dying when he says that. This is Matthew 16. We just read in the last parts of Matthew 26, 27.

That's where our story is tonight. 26, 10 chapters later. He said, hey, you guys, you want to follow me? Well, just say no to your plans. You know, when they formed the United States of America and they signed the Declaration of Independence, they said, we give everything, our lives, our fortune, our future.

We don't care. It's worth it to die for the cause of starting a country. And you seem to honor them. But Jesus said, hey, if you want to follow me, deny yourself.

[6 : 22] Deny yourself. Deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow me. In case you didn't understand what he said, verse 25. The next verse.

Because if you save your life, you'll lose it. For whosoever shall save his life shall lose it. And whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? So just get the picture with me real quick.

When you decided to follow Jesus, you moved into a ministry of death. Thomas said, let's just go die with him.

Thomas said, let's just go die with him. That wasn't anything strange. That's what Jesus said to them when they first started following him. Deny yourself. Take up your cross.

[7 : 19] And follow me. I'm on my way to a cross. John chapter 12, verses 24 through 26. In God's economy, life only comes through death.

Look at John 12, 24. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.

If a corn of wheat does not fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. Here's the deal.

Most of us want God to use us, but fail to realize that the step towards being used and the step towards our life counting for something is dying.

That little grain of corn can produce a lot of corn. But for that little grain of corn to produce corn, it has to die.

[8 : 22] In John 12, 25, he said, he that loveth his life shall lose it. And he that hateth his life. Hateth his life. Shall keep it. You know what Jesus was saying?

Peter, I want you to hate the fishing business. I want you to hate everything about your life and choose the life I offer you.

I'll make you a fisher of men. Something's wrong. We haven't caught on to this ministry of death. We hold on to both sides of the fence.

We hold on to the world with a frenzy. We will not let go of it. We love our life. And I'm not talking about our life of loving Jesus. We love all the physical things a lost man loves.

And then we want to hold on to Jesus. We're much more willing to give. Man, we're more willing to give to the PTA than we are to serving God. We're more willing to give to the little league team than we are to serving God.

[9 : 26] We have more time to educate people than we do to serve God. I mean, we've not gotten it. Thomas says, they're going to kill us.

We know they're going to kill us, but we signed up for it. Let's go with him. Let's go die. Nothing new. True joy comes when you quit running your own life and give up your purposes for his.

The difference, the truth is the difference between a joyless Christian and a joyful Christian and a defeated Christian and a victorious Christian is who you're living for.

Paul took that death to himself when he counted all things that he had to be but lost. You read these verses all the time and here's what was happening. They were dying to their stuff. They were dying to their things.

They were dying to everything. You know, one of the things that scares people about being a missionary, when God is really dealing with a guy about being a missionary, it's like, but what about my mom? What about my sister? What about my family?

[10 : 26] What about my house? What about my favorite places? I don't know if I can give it all up. And when it comes time to total surrender, most of us are like, I would surrender, but I'm not sure what he would want from me.

And he said, I called you to a ministry of death, not to how you could get a better life, how you could die to your life.

Philippians chapter three, verse seven. But what things were gained to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ.

Do you understand what he said? He said, stack up all the checkbooks, put all the gold in a pile, put all the titles to my houses, put all my name and how my mama and my daddy and my grandparents and everybody else were in a good line.

Put everything, put all my education, put my degree from the fancy college. I sat at the feet of Gamaliel, put it all in one pile and I tell you what I counted as, dung. Filthy, off-scouring feces.

[11 : 50] That's what it is. Thomas said, they're going to kill him, but we signed up for it.

Let's go die. Verse nine, Paul said, and found in him, and be found in him not having my own righteousness. It's a hard thing.

I think most of us are Christians by the skin of our teeth. We're not all in. Your wife wouldn't want to be married to you with the kind of commitment you have towards Jesus.

Your husband wouldn't want to be married to you with the kind of commitment you have towards Jesus. Let's be honest. We need Jesus as a scotch so our car won't roll down the hill.

You know, the rock you put under the back wheel to keep it from rolling down the hill. We need Jesus to get us out of trouble. We need Jesus to keep us out of hell. We need Jesus to be willing to settle for his hour or two a week that we give him.

[13 : 00] But Jesus, know your place. Know your place. Do you understand your place? I've got a life to live, and I'll work you in when I can.

What's in it for me, Jesus? I mean, if I do decide to follow you, it looks to me like I've been serving you, and you haven't been being all that good to me. I hear that all the time. What are you doing to me now?

Here's what Jesus would have said. I called you to die when we started. Thomas had it down, didn't he? Thomas goes, Oh boy.

We're going to Judea. That's where they want to kill him. All right, boys. Pack it up. Let's go. We're just going to go die with him. That's what he said.

You say, well, that's pessimistic. No, that's realistic. By the way, over the next few years, most of them are going to end up dying. I'm not sure what happened to John.

[14 : 04] He's one of the few they say may have escaped, and others say he was boiled in oil after he'd been put on the Isle of Patmos. We know that James was running through with a sword.

Just before Jesus' minister, there was a guy named John the Baptist, lost his head. We know that several of them were crucified. There's a whole book called Fox's Book of Martyrs. It just tells you they knew they were taking the ministry of death.

But here's what we're taking. The good housekeeping seal of approval. I want Jesus to put his seal on me and bless me. Call Joel and get a smile.

I'll give my money, but I want some honey. And that's the way we serve him. But Thomas understood something. You can walk confidently as long as you're walking in light.

That's what Jesus said in verses 9 and 10. But I would challenge you for us to get an attitude like Thomas, and I'll close with this. Look, if you would. Back to the verse.

[15 : 09] Look, if you would, to verse 16. Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples. Hey, guys. Let's go.

That we may die with him. Get an attitude like Thomas. The truth is that men on earth are more remembered for their failures than their successes. We remember David for Bathsheba and Rahab for being a harlot.

And we remember Thomas for being a doubter because in John chapter 20 and verse 25, he said, I will not believe unless I see and touch. But on this day in the story, Thomas was a hero.

They're standing around saying, Lord, you want to go to Judea? They want to kill you there. Do we need to remind you?

And Thomas says, Pack it up, boys. We signed up to die. It might seem that Thomas is pessimistic, but there was real danger if they returned.

[16 : 19] What sounds pessimistic was really something else. It said Thomas was honest. He was scared, but he was committed. You see, it was a statement of loyalty.

I signed on to the end. Till death do us part. Have you ever known the jerk of a husband that loves his wife until she gets a crippling disease and then gets a lover or divorces her?

Have you ever known that guy? That's how most of us are with Jesus. Love you, Jesus, as long as you treat me good. Love you, Jesus, as long as nothing goes wrong. Love you, Jesus, as long as there's money in the bank.

Love you, Jesus, as long as there's no crosses on the way. Love you, Jesus. Thomas said, We signed up for it. Let's go die.

It was a courageous thing to say. It was a commitment, a statement of commitment. Are you honestly so in love with Jesus that you're ready for whatever might come?

[17 : 25] Are you ready to live dying to what you want and living to what he wants?

We don't face it like the great heroes. When Jim Elliott and his boys died, attacked by the savage Indians that were called Alka Indians at the time, they actually had a gun with them.

They could have defended themselves, but they chose to die. When the Stamm family, I believe it was, were caught, and little Helen Stamm's their baby, and they pulled the Japanese, I guess it was, pulled them out in the street and chopped their heads off because they wouldn't run and they wouldn't deny.

But we don't face those exceptional circumstances, you know. But let me tell you what we do face. Every day you decide, do you live for you or do you live for him?

You don't have time for discipleship. That says something, doesn't it? Because you do have time for TV. You don't have money to tithe and to give and to support missions, but you do have money for everything else, don't you?

[18 : 48] You don't have time to be faithful to church, but you do have time for whatever you like. Isn't it time that you said, for me to live is Christ?

I only live for Jesus. Isn't it time you said that? Father in heaven, I love you.

And I praise you and I thank you and I ask you to work and move in the lives of your people. I pray that your name would be honored and glorified and I'll give you praise for all you do. You have been listening to Austin Gardner, pastor of Vision Baptist Church.

For contact information, location, service times, or more audio and video recordings, log on to www.visionbaptist.com. God bless you.

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[20 : 04] God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you.