

Resolve to be a Disciple

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- [0 : 0 0] So let's look at the confession that we looked at last week that was made by Peter when he says, Who do you say that I am? He says, Thou art the Christ of God, knowing that Christ is not the last name of Jesus, but it was the title, the anointed one, the chosen one. He is the Messiah. The promise had been given. And so when Peter, he speaks and he says, Thou art the Christ, the Messiah, he was saying so much in that statement. Peter being a representative of the group. And you find that so many times. Jesus is addressing all of them. Who do you say? Who do they say that I am? And then Peter answers the question. Jesus is answering, asking a question to the entire group, but Peter is the one that speaks. And we see that time and time again in the gospel records. Is that he is a representative of the group. Matthew 16, 17 says, And Jesus answered and said unto them, Blessed are thou, Simon, bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto thee, but my father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee that thou art Peter.
- [1 : 0 0] And upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And so you and I know that Peter was not the first pope. We know that Peter was married. As it's been mentioned to you before, who would have a mother-in-law that was not married? Nobody would take on a mother-in-law without having a wife, right? And we learn, I believe in 1 Corinthians 7, that he has a mother-in-law. So Peter has a mother-in-law because he's married. And by no means was he the first pope. And by no means was this passage saying that the church was going to be built upon him. But there's this word play that happens here. And he's a representative. And we also know that it's more than just a pun. How many of you love a good pun? Every dad in here raises their hand in here, all right? And Thatcher, he loves a good pun. Greg loves puns, if you don't know this about Greg. But we know there's a word play going on here where he is the rock, the big foundation Christ, and that Peter is the smaller rock.
- [2 : 0 5] But we know that there's more than a pun that would be happening, considering all the serious issues that are being discussed in this passage. God, man, heaven, hell, spiritual, war, death, resurrection, and Satan. We need to recognize that the doctrine that Peter is mentioning here is what Jesus is praising. It's the reality of who Jesus is. In one moment, Christ is named Peter Petros. In the next moment, he is naming him Satana, the occupant of the pit. In one moment, Peter is a powerful example of us disciples. In the next moment, he is an example of powerless failure. And it really comes down to him confessing and recognizing who Christ is, that Jesus is the rock that we are to build our lives upon. Jesus asked him, he's quoting Psalm 118, and he says in Matthew 21, 42, he says, Jesus said unto him, did you never read in the scriptures?

Did you not attend Sunday school at the synagogue? Did you not have anybody explain to you that the stone in which the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner for this is the Lord's doing and is marvelous in our eyes.

[3 : 17] The critical decision of life depends on one's relationship to the rock. So Peter is making the greatest of all confessions. Matthew 10, 32 says, Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

Peter is making the confession that thou art the Christ. You are the rock. You are the one that they have rejected that we will worship and we will build our lives upon.

You are the one in which the church is going to be built upon. That that confession is what brings us here today, that thou art the Christ. It's a big deal for us that we are asking people to give video testimonies.

David has been helping us with that. That when people join the church, we would say, we know that you are making the same confession that we have made, which is that thou art the Christ.

And that's who we are. One of our core values is that, and it's from God's word, is that Jesus is the owner and the ruler of this church. In visiting Kentucky, my family members would say, well, how's your church doing?

[4 : 23] That would be a common thing to say. And I get what they're saying because it would be appropriate for them to ask any of you, how is your church doing? Wanting to know because the church belongs to you. But I always make sure they know that this church does not belong to me.

That Jesus Christ is the owner and the ruler of the church. And it's built today upon this common confession that we have is that He is the Christ. That He is the one that is worthy of our lives.

That we center our lives completely upon Him and what He would want. Sometimes we need a confrontation like the disciples had in Matthew chapter number 10. Jesus reminds the disciples of the reality of following Him.

It says in Mark 10, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee, coming to Him saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.

What a very audacious statement. Hey, Jesus, we want you to give us whatever we want. Sounds like our kids around Christmas time, right? All right. I'm just going to ask a few things of you, but I'm going to want all of it.

[5 : 26] And so they come to Jesus and they ask. And He said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on the right hand and the other on the left hand, in thy glory.

But Jesus said unto them, You know not what you ask. Can you drink of the cup that I drink of? And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with. Now in many ways, the life that we live in modern society looks very different than the days of Christ.

As you would think about the automobiles and the things we have. But in so many real ways, nothing has really changed about mankind. We have the same tendencies. We have the same desire for our lives to be made much of.

They were asking, can I be on the right and can I be on the left? And it would just be a matter of days before the person that's on the right and the left of Jesus will be upon a cross. That they wanted, they said, in my life, I want you to make much of me as I follow you.

We need that same confrontation in our lives. In a book called Self-Esteem, Robert Schuller, who teaches very much this idea.

[6 : 40] He says, in a book called The New Reformation, referring to a new reformation that Christianity needs. He says, Then he goes on to say, Once a person believes, the quote goes on to say, Once a person believes he is an unworthy sinner, it is doubtful if he can really honestly accept the saving grace of God offered by Christ.

What a horrible misunderstanding of Christianity. What a horrible revelation that would be taking place. It's important that we understand our place in this world.

It's very important that you and I recognize ourselves as being unworthy sinners, having been unfaithful. This is not helpful.

I told the story before, but when I was in school, they invited me to stay after school for the Self-Esteem Club. And I said, Well, what's a Self-Esteem Club? And they were like, Well, you don't have much, and you don't have a dad, and this and this, and you probably have low self-esteem, so you need to stick around to feel better.

I'm like, I do feel bad now. Thank you very much. And they gave me an oatmeal cream pie and an orange juice, and I showed up every time, right? This Self-Esteem Club. People well-intentioned wanting me to feel better about my life.

[8 : 26] But honestly, they needed to let me see it for all that it was. That I was so utterly broken and in need that nothing in this world was ever going to patch my need for something that could only be met by Jesus.

I find that I could very much fall into this tendency myself. Because I love on a Tuesday night when people come and visit at our church and we look at God's Word, I love telling you that Jesus meets the felt needs of your life.

I love telling you that Jesus is the greatest of all gifts and that there's incredible joy in this weary world. And it's most certainly true. The Bible teaches it.

But the Bible also tells us that He is the King of Heaven and that you should submit to Him as the ruler. And that you came to Him unworthy and that He died in your place, not because you were good and worthy, but because He is loving to you.

That's also very much a loving message. And it's one that is not very popular, but it's very necessary and vital. There's a Christian narcissism, a self-love that is characteristic.

[9 : 42] The Bible tells us in 2 Timothy 3, 1 through 5, This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come, for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof from such turn away.

In these last times, in these perilous times, there will be those that are lovers of themselves. And this description is just not those of those that are out in the world that are trying to cause you to sin, but this is a description of false teachers.

This is a description of people that would stand up and say, Thus saith the Lord. I don't bemoan the fact that and say, What has the world come to?

I will leave that to the news stations. I will leave that to other churches to say, What has the world come to? But the message that we are to preach as, Who has come into this world?

That's the message of Christmas, is that we were in such great need and unworthy of his love that he died in our place. And for us to hide the fact that you're an unworthy sinner is to not be loving at all.

[11 : 05] So abandoning your life to honor Christ has been replaced by Christ honoring our lives. And let that not be said about us. We do not serve Jesus because of what we have been given.

We serve Jesus because he is the King of heaven. It is the reasonable way in which we are to live our lives. And it's this confession that he is the Christ, he is the worthy one, that unites us today as a church as we move forward together.

Funny story. I don't know. It's been probably four years ago. And many of you remember Miss Susan and Sujaya James. They attended here for some time. Live a little farther out in Canton now. But Sujaya had come to the Desi Bible Fellowship that Jeff and Mackenzie was leading and is doing a great job at it.

And I don't know if you were in the class at the time when he first came, Graham. But I know you were there for a time. And that Jeff was teaching through the book of John. And he was talking about being a believer and being a disciple of Christ.

And about putting your faith in Christ and following Christ. And Brother Sujaya asked the question. But Jeff didn't know this man. And so he says, I'm concerned. He didn't understand what I was saying.

[12 : 18] I said, okay, I'll have lunch with him. So I go to lunch with Sujaya James. And I realize that it's not Sujaya James. But it's Dr. Sujaya James. And that he had graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary.

He had written his doctrinal thesis on salvation and discipleship from the literature of the book of John. And that everything that Jeff was talking about, this man just knew so much about.

And that he loved. And I went back to Jeff and I said, yeah, if he ever questions you again, he's right and you're wrong. You need to listen to the man. All right. He knew what he was talking about. But what was very important to Brother Sujaya, which is important to me and should be important to you, is that there was not a disconnect between those that are followers of Jesus and those that had put their faith in him.

To be a Christian is to be a disciple of Jesus. There is no separate decision to be made. That when you put your faith and trust in Jesus, you're asking him to be the Lord of your life.

You're recognizing him as the Lord of the universe. We don't make him Lord, but we simply recognize that he is the Lord of the universe. And so we have said, I'm all in.

[13 : 28] I give my life to you. Now, there's many of us in here, all of us in here, that there's things about that we don't know about discipleship. That there's things that we're learning. That I have seen before a man come to know Christ and he says, hey, let's have a beer to celebrate.

And I say, I'm not going to. All right. But this man didn't recognize that that isn't how I celebrate things anymore. And so there's things in growing, but our heart is already set on yes. Yes, Lord, I want to follow you.

And when we say no, there's going to be the spiritual warfare inside of us to say, no, I've made my commitment to Christ. And so we are disciples of Jesus. Acts chapter 1, verse number 15, it says, And in those days, Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples and said, the number of the names together were about 120.

And that's significant because remember, there's the feeding of the 5,000 and of the 4,000. And I've told you before that a final graph doesn't appropriately show you how many disciples outside of the 12 would have been there with Jesus.

That there was hundreds and at times thousands of people. But once the party was over, once he had died upon the cross and they scattered, who was there when the party is over is committed lifelong learners and followers of Jesus.

[14 : 49] This is the picture of discipleship that we find in the New Testament. I love how A.W. Tozer puts it. He says, In every Christian's heart, there is a cross and a throne.

And the Christian is on the throne until he puts himself on the cross. If he refuses the cross, he remains on the throne. Perhaps this is at the bottom of the backsliding of worldliness among gospel believers today.

We want to be saved, but we insist that Christ do all the dying. No cross for us, no dethronement, no dying. We remain king within the little kingdom of man's soul.

And we wear our tinsel crown with all the pride of Caesar. But we doom ourselves the shadows and weakness and spiritual sterility. As that we sit upon the thrones of our heart.

And so here's some hard truths from God's word as we end the year about the reality of following Christ. And in a parallel passage of Luke 9, 21, 22, it says, And he straightly charged them and commanded them to tell no man that thing.

[15 : 52] And that thing is that he is the Messiah. He says, I recognize you are the Christ. You are the Messiah. But then he says, don't tell any man this message. And then this verse goes this roller coaster of emotion.

Peter's speaking on their behalf and he says, You are the king that we've been waiting for. You are the Messiah. You are going to set up an earthly kingdom. That's why they would want to sit on the right and the left hand of him.

Because he is going to rule and he is going to reign. Then Jesus said in verse number 22, The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected of the elders and the chief priests and the scribes.

And be slain and be raised the third day. Which is, don't tell anybody. Because their understanding of the Messiah is not what it's supposed to be. I did not come here to set up my earthly kingdom.

I came here to die. Don't tell anybody yet because the time has not yet come. But when the time has come, the chief rulers and the elders and the scribes and all those that are in power in this world, they are going to take me and they are going to crucify me upon a cross.

[16 : 58] And that was the message that the disciples were learning as they had made a decision to follow him. I love the stories from some of our missionaries years ago in North Africa as they would baptize them together, as they would meet together.

Or throughout history that upon a baptism that a person's life would now be at risk. Or Richard Warnbrandt in his story, Tortured for Christ, took the kids to the zoo and showed them the lions and said, Do you know that upon your baptism, upon acknowledging that you're now a believer, that your life will forever be at risk?

That's something in history, but it's something that's always been true. And we are told that even though we live in a different context and in a different time where there is a very little opposition to us, that the decision to follow Jesus is to follow someone who will suffer and die and that we would be persecuted as we follow him.

And so a cross awaited Jesus, and that's what he told them. And what should we think of and feel when we consider the life of cross bearing? When we think about a cross, when he says that there's a cross that's waiting for him, and then he tells us that we need to deny ourselves and we need to take up our cross.

If we were to think about the cross, we would think about opposition. A cross was used to execute criminals who had the state of Rome in opposition to them.

[18 : 29] An official opposition. Not just a cultural one, but one that would be mandated by the governing people in place. And an official opposition the cross would represent.

A shame. This execution reserved for the worst of criminals. Nobody was on a cross that said, you just misunderstand, I don't belong here. Everybody would hear that, they would see that, and they'd say, no.

If you're dying upon a cross, you deserve it. You have to be the worst of the worst among us. The victim was usually naked upon the cross for hours. It was not only made to kill you, but it was made to bring shame to you.

Suffering, the excruciating pain, that excruciating, you know that word comes from the pain that came from the cross that was made there. Designed to inflict the most excruciating, most horrible pain possible in the way that Christ was put upon the cross.

And then the aim of the crucifixion was death. Not tortured and then released, but to be killed. And so when they thought upon the cross, it hadn't lost all of its effect upon them in their day.

[19 : 38] Today we have decorations with it and we think about it and oftentimes we forget that it was a device for execution. It would be as speaking about the electric chair.

And so when we were told that we were going to take upon our cross, we're not talking about something that is small. The cross awaited Christ and the disciples would all taste death before they'd ever see this kingdom.

We know through history that they would be martyred for their belief. But not only did the cross await them and the death await the disciples, but the Bible tells us as those of us who have put our faith and trust in Him, a cross awaits us.

But it really makes us question, doesn't it? Because it just doesn't seem like it really does. I have not had anybody knocking upon my door. Nobody has tried to keep us from meeting today.

But the gospel is going to require and it's going to enable a self-denial. Matthew Henry says, self-denial is the first lesson in Christ's school.

[20 : 43] It's a message for all believers, this self-denial. And that's more than the self-discipline, which is inspirational even among unbelievers. One of my favorite stories is about a man who, in regards to self-discipline, is a man that won the Ironman competition.

And his diet was so stringent that he would take cottage cheese. How many of you like cottage cheese in here, all right? Or I like cottage cheese, but I don't like it at home. If I have it at a restaurant, it seems okay.

But something about when I bring it home, it just doesn't seem the same. But the cottage cheese, that this man would strain his cottage cheese. He would pour water over his cottage cheese to get rid of the excessive fat in it for his diet.

This is crazy. And somebody asked him, is this necessary? And he said, well, the man that got second place, he didn't do it, all right? And so we love stories about self-discipline. When I was in high school, I had all the muscles in my stomach were cut from a surgery I had.

And for practice, I would have to just jump and touch the bottom of a backboard. And sometimes I would fake it. The coach would be in the other room, and I would just pretend like I was jumping and not doing it. And he would come in there, and he would scream.

[21 : 51] And he would make me jump up and touch the board. And he would say, quality is not an act. It's a habit. And so I would jump up hitting the board, and I can't even jump anymore, all right?

I would try. It would be very embarrassing, all right? And I would jump up, and I would hit the board. And I would say, quality is not an act. It's a habit, all right? He was teaching me a self-discipline.

We all love stories like that. Those are good stories. But when we're looking at self-denial that is possible by the gospel, we're looking at more than just manning up.

We're looking at more than just running that extra mile at the end of the day. We're looking at something that is only possible because of what the gospel has done inside of us, because he has freed us to do these things.

And he said unto them all, if any man come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. There was not another path that was offered in following Jesus, but to all of us who today say that we are Christians, that we want to belittle Christ and follow after him.

[22 : 56] And so what does it mean to deny ourselves? It means that we renounce anything that challenges or trumps our allegiance to the kingdom of God. It means to be ready to bear afflictions in this life knowing that God prepared them beforehand.

Luke 9, 23. And he said unto them, if any man come after you, let him deny himself, take up his cross. And the next word is what? Daily. And so how do we respond to these afflictions?

Apparently it's not this rare occasion that's going to take place one time in our lives. And then even a person who dies a martyr's death, they didn't just have opposition on that one day, right?

There had to be day after day that they were making a decision that cost them, that led them to the singular occasion. So apparently we're talking about an opposition that in carrying our cross and denying ourselves is something that is daily part of our lives.

An example given from the life of Joseph, of a person who denied himself, who took upon his cross. Genesis 50, verse 20.

[24 : 04] And he said, this is Joseph. He's speaking unto his brothers. But as for me, as for you, you thought evil against me. But God meant it unto good to bring the pass as it is this day to save much people alive.

Joseph was saying, I take this up because this is God's will in my life. He has a purpose for me even in this. The sin is not his. The sin is the one who has done it against me.

But the purpose is God's. He has a purpose for me. I believe that he is working all things for good for me according to his own purposes. The forgiveness that Joseph was able to offer was only possible because of a self-denial.

To take up the afflictions. Say that God is not the author of sin. That God did not cause this. But I am going to take this in my life. And I'm going to praise the God of heaven. And I will take this cross and I will bear it upon me daily.

And I will honor him. Forgiveness requires a self-denial. A story of an escaped slave before the world between the states.

[25 : 15] The slave owner, when the man had escaped when he was young, later in life, the slave owner comes to know Christ. And the former slave comes to this man upon his deathbed.

And he tells the former slave, says to him, I must ask your forgiveness for I have harbored bitterness and hate to you in my heart for the way that you treated me. And the two men actually argued with each other for a bit who was in need to be forgiven more.

And they were reconciled. Do you understand that the reconciliation required self-denial on both parts of these men? The former slave had the humblest pride to even grant forgiveness, the one who had done him wrong.

And the slave owner had to see in his pride what he had done wrong in order to seek forgiveness from his man. Forgiveness requires self-denial. So when we're talking about denying ourself and taking upon our cross, it does not mean dying a martyr's death daily.

But there's a way in which we live our lives of self-denial that is completely foreign to what this world knows. But it's completely possible to us that now we know Jesus Christ.

[26 : 24] How did that conversation ever happen between those two men? It happened because the gospel allowed a man to ask for forgiveness. And it allowed another man to give the forgiveness that was there.

So when you hear these things about self-denial and taking upon a cross, you're probably thinking, be miserable, lose everything you love, take a little portion of your happiness and trample upon it. And this is exactly the way that Satan would want you to interpret Scripture as we see in the garden.

He always wants to take what is good and twist it for bad. So there's four arguments for self-denying that are given here. The Lord doesn't have to ever give us any reasons. He could say, deny yourself, take up your cross.

Period. And the story. But he's so loving and kind and gracious to us that he gives us four promises, four incentives, if you will, of living this life. He says, if you'll lose your life, you will find it.

That you must lose your life to find it. This means that if you would save, if you're trying to save your life, you're trying to live where you avoid opposition, shame, suffering, and death, that's the opposite of taking up your cross.

[27 : 29] If you were ever to say yes to hard things, it's because we trust Christ. So if you live your whole life trying to hide from the shame of your faith, if you tried to live your whole life without ever denying yourself and saying no to your pride, you're trying to save yourself.

You're trying to save your life. And in that way, you're going to lose it. If it's given what we do not, what is given is that none of us want to lose our soul. We have just went all wrong in our approach to saving our lives.

When we work to keep our lives from his hands, we're running towards our own death. And so what would be some of the great things that you could lose us here going into a new year?

What are some of the ways in which you think that you're trying to save? Or if I could say it like this, you're trying to make a life for yourself, and in so doing it, you're not making a life for yourself. Or you are making a life for yourself, but you're not making a life for Christ, which is what you've been called to do.

That constant need for human approval, for honor, and for comfort. Taking up our cross and dying to these things will bring a joy that most people will never know.

[28 : 38] Taking up our cross means that our old praise-craving self has died. You know, being a pastor allows me many luxuries and benefits that other people don't have.

For example, there's never a conflict with my work schedule and work, all right? I'm always available to be at all the services. There's no conflict that is there. I have absolutely no excuse to not be in the Word every day when there's a church that says, your time is to be separated for Word and prayer.

But I'll tell you one way in which I struggle as much as anybody with any occupation ever is this desire for praise and for craving to be respected and honored by those around us.

And the more that I fight for it, the more that I desire it, the more that I would actually lose my opportunity to minister the people. So when I'm trying to make a life or to save a life for myself, I'm actually losing my life.

I should deny myself and live in the way in which he would call us to do. Number two, the whole world is not sufficient to give you what you need. For what is a man advantaged? If he gained the whole world and lose himself or be a castaway?

[29 : 48] This is a rhetorical question. The soul can't be bought by all the wealth of this world. The assumption Jesus is addressing is that the worldly effort to save your soul will succeed if you can just amass enough of the world's provision and protection.

And so if I can just have enough stuff, if I can just have enough influence, if I can just have enough wealth, I can make a life for myself outside of Christ. And then we try to merge these two things together.

But he says, no, deny yourself and take up your cross. Those who refuse to deny themselves, instead seek their own satisfaction, will never find it. Jesus is saying that when you deny yourself for him, you do not lose the satisfaction that you would have had, but you gain a satisfaction that you couldn't have except in him.

An example, some of you in here probably have loved ones. They do not know the gospel. And that your desire and love for Jesus, which says would be greater than your love for your own family, and that your love for Jesus would even at times make your family feel hated, because in contrast, your love and priority for Jesus is so high, they wonder, I'm in second place to Jesus, and my second place feels hated, because you just seem to love him so much.

But in trusting in him, these people now have done the will of the Father, and they have put their trust and faith in Jesus, and you have a stronger bond than ever.

[31 : 18] And so not allowing this of false unity among you and saying, I don't want to deny myself, I don't want to take up my cross, I don't want the stigma of being a Christian among my family, I'm just going to have this fake unity, and I'm just going to kind of save my life.

I'm going to save my reputation with them, and there's not going to be any kind of disagreement, but in that you have lost out on what is best, which is to go in there and to share the truth of the gospel with them.

And some of you have realized that in denying yourself and taking upon your cross and living among your family, you now have been given this incredible relationship with them. And then even if they never put their faith and trust in Jesus, that following Christ is what is always best.

Number three, nothing can buy your soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? And the answer is nothing. Absolutely nothing in this created universe can purchase a soul.

There's not a price that could be paid on it. There's nothing that you could have that would ever allow you to save your own soul. Ashamed of Jesus, verse 9, 26. For whoso shall be ashamed of me, in my words of him, shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come into his own glory and his fathers are the holy angels.

[32 : 29] Notice that the categories, they shift here from being rich with this world to being ashamed of Jesus. The contrast there, being rich in this world, but also being ashamed of Jesus.

No amount of riches can save the soul on the day of judgment because Christ will be ashamed of people on that last day that were ashamed of him. So there's this unspoken assumption that makes this work.

That the pursuit of riches in this world goes hand in hand with being ashamed of Jesus and his words. The Bible never tells us that it's wrong that those that are rich, but it says he that will be rich.

Those that live their lives constantly trying to amass as much of this world that they can, refusing the cross, thus saying that saving our lives in this world is pursued mainly by amassing so much prosperity and protection as we can.

Living a life looking out for number one. Living a life where we're at the center of everything. Gaining a large hunk of this whole world, we think we can save our lives from the opposition, shame, suffering, and the death of the cross.

[33 : 38] And that is no way to live a life. If you live your life like that, it's going to get smaller and smaller. It's going to be wrapped up in itself. And that position that you have on the table for Christ will become smaller and smaller.

And the happiness that you're pursuing is going to be farther and farther away. It's going to become less attainable and not more attainable. It's not going to need \$10,000 more to buy it.

It's going to require \$10 million more to do it. And the protection that you have for your family, it's not going to make you feel safe because you're going to realize that the world we live in is more and more dangerous.

That you're going in the wrong direction when you try to build a life outside Christ Jesus. A deep desire to avoid being shamed in this world is a huge reason that people try to accumulate wealth.

And wealth no longer just means money. It also means influence. If you were to ask a kid today if he would rather have a million dollars or a million YouTube subscribers, he's going to take a million YouTube subscribers.

[34 : 42] Because people have realized that wealth is only valuable if it gives us influence. And influence is powerful because it provides us protection. And protection is good because then it allows us to gain more wealth.

I mean, all it is is trying to gather up all the things of this world around us so that we feel safe and centered. And Jesus says, let all of that go. Deny yourself completely.

Take up your cross and find all those things that you need in me. To submit your life completely to Christ. And to follow him as a disciple.

So it's not a popular opinion as we end the time and we say that Jesus is the greatest gift. But I'll tell you as a follower of Christ, your life ought to be fully given over to him.

And that this life of joy may not mean that we have all the things that you set yourself for. That you should die to selfish ambitions. You should die to some of those goals. And so I really think this is a timely message for us.

[35 : 39] As we would end a year and we would start a new year. Because I would just like you to ask yourself. In all of your goal setting. In all of your planning. In all of your desires and your dreams next year.

What are you more of? Are you more a disciple of Christ? Are you more of something else that is just simply a selfish ambition in yourself? If you were to get all your prayer requests.

And you were to get all your resolutions. Would this world be a better place? Would anybody know the gospel? If you had all your prayer requests. Would anybody come to know Christ? Would the gospel be furthered in any part of the world?

Would anybody in your family know the scriptures in a better way? Or are all of your desires for this new year simply centered on yourself. Being more of something that you probably weren't even designed to be.

Which would be a self-centered person living life only for themselves. So in closing here. What's the cost of discipleship? Taking up your cross and denying yourself and following after him.

[36 : 36] What a wonderful joy. Because I remind you who it is that you're following. And whose cross is being bared. Because you're suffering with him in his presence. If you won't take up your cross and you won't deny yourself.

The Bible makes a promise. Matthew 28 20. Teaching them to observe all things that I've commanded you. And lo I'm with you always. That you're missing out on the peace and grace power. And mercy. And the presence of God.

And discipleship. What does that look like in your life? What are some of the decisions that you can make. To be a. As you follow Christ this year. It may just simply be. Reading the Bible daily.

That my day is going to start with following Christ. Because I'm going to hear his words. I'm going to get involved in this type of study. I'm going to give myself and being obedient to what he's called me to do. When it comes to ministering.

This is the year in which I am going to not let this besetting sin follow me into. That I'm going to leave it behind. I'm going to repent of these things. That the decisions I'll make are going to be following him.

[37 : 33] But to not follow Christ is going to cost you personally. To have that table like that man filled with many other things. It costs him personally. But it also costs our community. There's lives that need to be changed in this community.

Because they need to see people living life by a different standard. And if we don't follow Jesus Christ. Then they will never see it. And the world needs this. It will cost the world.

The greatest thing that we can do as a church. Is to teach people what it means to follow Jesus. Wherever it takes them. I love that it takes some of our young people. And older couples around the world.

But they have to learn here what it means to take up a cross. And to follow him. Some of you would know this old song. But it says must Jesus bear the cross alone. And all the world go free.

No there's a cross for everyone. And there's a cross for me. You may have many resolutions for a new year. Are any of them with respect for the fact.

[38 : 29] That you have been called to follow Jesus. This is a great time to examine. How you primarily view your identity. And need for growth. I need to be a better everything.

Everything. But first and foremost. I need to be a better disciple of Jesus Christ. I need to follow him in my life. I need to ask him. What areas of my life do I need to deny myself?

What areas have I lived very self-centered? How should I live? What home should I live in? What should I give? What should I do? What should my week look like? And as a follower of Jesus.

He gets to make those decisions for us. And I'm so grateful. I'm going to pray here in a moment. I'm going to give you a moment to respond. There in your seat or here at the altar.

And then we'll stand and sing together. But I am excited to be part of a church that knows that Jesus is the owner and the ruler of it. That a group of people that meet together on Sunday mornings who says, This is not a game to us.

[39 : 29] This is real. This is our identity. This is who he is. Let's make decisions in regards to discipleship in this last week as we get ready for a new year.

How would Christ have you to follow him as he leads us into a new year? Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. Thank you for allowing us to follow you. Lord, you have come to us and you have beckoned us and you said, Follow me and I will make you.

Lord, it is your desire to make us into fishers of men. Lord, as we deny ourselves and we take up our cross, we would be fishers of men. Father, I come to you with a heavy heart knowing that I have fought you many times throughout this year.

And you making me and not allowing you to make me the fisher of men that you would have me to be. To not live out my life as you would have it. And Lord, I recognize your rightful place in my life.

Thank you.