

We are continuing in Matthew 16:21-28. Our primary focus this morning is on one verse, verse 24. Then, Lord willing next Sunday, Communion Sunday, we will finish out this section.

As we said a couple of weeks ago when we started this section many believe this is the heart of the gospel right here in Matthew chapter 16. And it is very powerful, very important.

In verses 21-27 we are studying The Principles of Discipleship. As I have said to you before, I will remind you again, Jesus did not call people to become Christians. He called people to become disciples, individual disciples of Christ. And when we assemble together as the body of Christ, we assemble together as individuals who have a one-on-one relationship with Christ in order to come together and to be a whole. So these are The Principles of Discipleship.

When we get through the section you will understand why it is easier for people to believe what the Bible says about Jesus and to attend church two to three times a week, but then go their own way the rest of the time. Why it is easier just to believe and not be a follower. Because Jesus lays down some pretty hard principles of what it takes. And you do not hear them today but the Lord's drawn you here so that you can hear them.

Verses 21 through 23 we have The Conflict in Discipleship. It says, **From then began Jesus to show to His disciples that it is necessary** for Him to do something.

(1) The King James text says *from that time*, literally *from then on, then forward*. Jesus now introduces suffering into the mix and will continue to do so all the way up to the time of His crucifixion. He is now going to say, "Okay, we have ministered now for two and a half years in public manifesting Myself and My truth, now I want to introduce to you suffering."

(2) Secondly, the word *necessary*. It is the word *must* in the King James. How that *He must*, that is, *how it is necessary*. The word *must* is the Greek word that means *necessary*, and it is from the word *binding*. We just studied loosing and binding back in verse 19. This is the same word for *binding*. He is bound. Or to put it more literally, He is divinely bound to do something.

To do four things, as we pointed out last week:

- 1) **to go to Jerusalem**
- 2) **to suffer many things** (from the elders and chief priests and the scribes)
- 3) **and to be killed**
- 4) **and the third day to be raised**

So Jesus tells them this. From here on in, here is our goal: heading for Jerusalem, heading for suffering, to be killed and to be raised up the third day.

Verse 22, **And when Peter took Him...** As we mentioned last week the phrase *took Him* means he took Him aside privately. **And when Peter took Him, he began to rebuke Him** (he began to rebuke Jesus) **saying to Him**, (literally it is) **Mercy to You, Lord; this will never be to you**. If we were to put it in smoother English it would be, "God have mercy on You for saying this. This will never happen to You." A double negative: *this will never happen to You*. Can you imagine taking Jesus aside and telling Him He's wrong and this will never happen? It has to do with suffering. It has to do with hardship.

As we mentioned to you last week, this is the beginning of The Man Centered Gospel. Where man takes over God's Word, God's Spirit. In fact, the gospel of The Man Centered Gospel is The Gospel of the Preservation of the Flesh. And that is mostly what we have in churches today, man centered gospel preserving the flesh from experiencing any hardship, any difficulty, trying to tell the people that God wants you healthy and happy. He does not ever want you to experience difficulty. If so, claim it, claim your healing and claim your happiness. That is The Man Centered Gospel. That is what was happening with Peter here.

In verse 23, **But when Jesus turned, He said to Peter, "Go behind Me, Satan!"** Some of the English texts say, "Get behind me Satan," as if to say He got rid of him, said, "Get out of here!" But no, He put him in position, "Go behind Me." Very important word, the word *behind*, **ὀπίσω μου** (opisō mou) *behind Me*. The proper position in having a relationship with Jesus is behind Him. He is the leader. He is the Lord. He is in front. He is in charge. But Satan's influence over Peter put Peter in charge, and in essence put Satan in charge. He [Jesus] called him Satan. He was not talking to Peter the human being. He was talking to the spiritual influence that was over Peter. Because Paul says in Ephesians 6:12, we do not fight against flesh and blood, but we fight against evil spiritual forces that are in the spirit realm. He was speaking to the spiritual influence that was influencing Peter and energizing his flesh to come up against Christ. Satan is the great defender of the flesh because that is our most prized human possession, the flesh. If you lose that you have lost everything. "Go behind Me, Satan." So He's telling Satan to get in his proper position behind.

"You are an offense to Me." The word *offense* is the word **σκάνδαλον** (skandolon). It is where we get our English word *scandal* from. But in Greek in this particular context, it actually means *a rock that you put in the pathway to cause someone to trip over*. So He says, "Satan you are throwing a rock in my path to keep me from reaching my goal." Jesus is heading towards Jerusalem to die and Satan is trying to put a hindrance. I gave you the translation of hindrance last week. The word *offense* has to do with *hindrance*, putting a hindrance in someone's way to keep them from following Christ.

So He says, "You are an offense to me," and here is the reason why: **"because you do not think the things of God, but the things of men."** Powerful. Important. In the King James it says, "for you savourest not the things of God, but those of men." The word *savourest* literally means *to think*. There are several Greek words that have to do with describing the thought

process of man. This is the word φρονέω (phroneō), the verb form. And it is from the root word φρήν (phrēn) that means *the frame of mind*. So φρονέω (phroneō) the verb form has to do with *the condition of the thought patterns*. It is not individual thought, but the frame of mind and the patterns of thought that flow through that frame of mind.

I think a good example of that would be the game that psychiatrists like to play with people - but people like to play it with themselves - the word association game. Where you say a word, I am just going to say a word, say the first thing that pops into your mind. Of course, after you hear it, you might think, "Gee I shouldn't have said that," but that is your frame of mind. That is the condition of the frame of your mind.

And so when Peter heard about suffering, his reaction was according to his frame of mind. That is to defend and protect his flesh from any harm or difficulty might come to it. So basically, that is where his frame of mind was when it comes to suffering and hardship.

You mention to people about suffering. They will give a response. Some people will give a response and say, "A God of love would never allow me to suffer. Love doesn't do that." But that is the frame of mind, to protect the flesh and defend the flesh.

We saw from Philippians 2:5 last week, it says, **Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.** The word mind is again the word φρονέω (phroneō), frame of mind. *Let this frame of mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, Philippians 2:5.*

And then Paul lists the Lord's frame of mind: His attitude and His approach to life. He being equal to God, He left His reputation of being God and came down and became a man. That is pretty low for God to become one of us. And not just become a man, but He took on the form of the servant. He did not set Him up as a king. He did not set Himself up as something the world should worship. But He came as a servant. God came to serve people. So we think we are high and mighty about our spirituality or how we function in life, but God came as a man and His role was that of a servant. Not just a servant, but He submitted himself unto death. Not just death in general but the death of the cross. Which is the most shameful death you could die at that time because the criminals were hung out on a cross in public. And Jesus submitted to that and the shame of it in order to identify with us and take our place.

So, *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.* He did not come insisting of His rights, or that people treat Him a certain way. As a matter of fact He asked God on the cross, He asked God the Father to forgive those who crucified Him *for they know not what they do*. So we are called to forgive. We are called to function in the love of Christ, which means we take the bottom. We are servants in our fellowship together.

Then in verse 24 for today, The Commands of Discipleship. **Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone will (or desires) to come after Me...** A couple of things.

(1) The word *after* is the same word *behind* that we just studied, ὀπίσω μου (opisō mou). *If anybody desires to come after me, or behind me.*

(2) In this verse is the first of two times that the word *desire* is used. In the King James it says, "If any man will come after me," that is the word *desire*, to make a decision to come after Christ.

Verse 25 says, **For whoever should desire to save his life.** You have two places where the word *desire* - because people have the desire either to follow Christ or to preserve their own life so that they do not have to give it up. So Jesus said to His disciples, **If anyone desires to come behind Me.**

Now I thought it was interesting, how many times have you ever heard in some kind of church or evangelical meeting; when you heard the invitation of people to receive Christ, how many times have you ever heard people say, "We are inviting you to make the decision to follow behind Jesus?" Usually it is, "Do you want your sins forgiven?" You know, it is all the benefits. "Do you want your sins forgiven?" I mean that is a good thing. And you do, you get your sins forgiven. "Do you want to go to heaven when you die? Are you sure right now that if you were to die today you are going to go to heaven? We are asking you to make sure today. Come on down and pray the sinner's prayer and receive Christ." I have never heard anybody say, "We invite you to make a decision to come behind Jesus. Follow behind Him." So when a person surrenders to Jesus Christ, that is what the person is doing, coming behind Jesus. Not taking Jesus on board with them as they go, but actually surrendering themselves and coming behind Jesus and being a follower. That is the key for this morning.

The reason why it is a key for this morning is because we have a religious system of churches that have the forms of Christianity and they have the Bible and Bible studies and preaching messages; and a person can actually go and listen to the Bible being taught and they can say, "I believe that." And the same people can leave church, and come back maybe one or two times more during the week; and so because they believe the right things from the Bible and because they go to church they attend they say, "Okay I am a Christian. I am a believer." That is not the question. Even Satan believes. James in James chapter 2 it says, **Even the demons believe and tremble.** So if you believe in Jesus Christ it is a milestone. That is great but that is not all of it. The question is: Do you follow Jesus? Individually. Do you follow Jesus with your life? Because that is what He is asking people to do. *Come behind Me. Come after Me, with your life.*

So now there are three commands. For the person who says, "I desire to come behind Jesus," there are three commands:

(1) **Let him deny himself.**

The word *deny*, in Greek **ἀπαρνέομαι** (aparneomai), means *to reject yourself*. It is the word *rejection*. Let him reject himself. It does not mean that you are to deny yourself dessert. I had to slip that in there because I might get some in the mail. It does not mean that you are denying yourself certain foods because you are on a diet, a certain diet.

We are approaching the season of Lent. *Lent* means *spring*. So during Lent up to the crucifixion of Christ, people are asked religiously to give up things, deny themselves things, during that time period to show their devotion and commitment to God, which God never asked them to do. And I have always asked the question - I am always the troublemaker asking questions - "What happens after Lent and you go back to do it? Are you showing God that you are not committed and you are not dedicated? Should not you do it from now on?" No, it is just for Lent. Just for a couple weeks at the beginning of spring.

So the word *reject yourself* literally means *you reject your opinion*. Whatever your opinion is about things, you reject it. How you feel about things with the feelings; not with the mind, with the feelings, you must reject it. Even to be ready to reject your beliefs if you find out they are wrong. I am to deny myself. And this is the principle and crux of all the problems that you and I suffer. When people come in and talk about problems in relationships, the first thing out of their mouth is, "He (or she) does this and I want this." And all this "I want," and "I don't like it."

"I want it my way. He (or she) won't do it my way."

"The person drives me crazy!" Not realizing that you have already been there and back. So Jesus said, "If you are going to follow behind Me, you have to reject yourself." Because Jesus is in charge. It does not matter how I feel or what I think or what I want. It does not matter.

(2) **And let him take up his cross.**

Everybody thinks this means whatever hardships you face every day; this is your cross that you have to bear. And even though it is included in this, that is not what the phrase means. It means that when Jesus died on the cross for me and for you, He died my death and therefore I have died. Most people do not understand this. That when Jesus died on the cross - when you hear how He died for your sins you think, "Oh that's great! All I have to do is believe He did that for me and I can be saved." No. Yes, you must believe that He died for your sins, so you do not have to. But He died your death therefore you have died to yourself. Reject yourself because you have died and take up your cross every day.

I am convinced that most of the time Christians during the day have the most difficulty not because Satan is fighting against them but because they are fighting against God. We are trying to get that flesh off the cross. We are trying to get our life back. I want it back. I want to be in charge. I want to accomplish the things that I want to accomplish. Again, "I." Jesus said, **You must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow behind Me.**

So you see that when Jesus died on the cross, according to Romans chapter 6, He died my death. Paul said in Romans 6:6, **Knowing this, that our old man** (our old nature) **was crucified with Him, in order that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we should no longer be a servant to sin.** It was put to death on the cross.

In Romans 6:11 Paul says, **Likewise reckon or impute also yourselves to be dead indeed to sin but living unto God in Jesus Christ our Lord.** Your flesh has been put to death. I have been put to death in the flesh but made alive to God in the spirit.

Another good text is Galatians 2:20. Paul says, **I have been crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me.** I am still alive. I am really not dead but I have died to myself to where I do not exist anymore, Christ lives in me. I was crucified with Him on the cross. He died my death. **And the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.**

And then Colossians 3:1-3 Paul says, **If you therefore were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God.** *Set your affection on things above*, that is what King James says. The word *affection* is the word **φρονέω** (phroneō), where we got, in our text in Matthew a few verses earlier, *frame of mind*. **Set your frame of mind on things that are above, where Christ is, not things upon the earth. For you died** (just flat out, in the Greek text it says, "you died,") **and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.** So Christ has taken over. You have died to your flesh. You now live spiritually unto Christ. I love that phrase, *you died*. I hear it constantly. The Lord constantly reminds me of it, that I have died. Therefore, I have died and every day my flesh is nailed to the cross and I am to carry that cross every day. I died when Jesus died.

And my life? Romans 12:1 Paul says, **Present your bodies as a living sacrifice.** Yes, you have died. But you are alive. Serve the Lord with your life. Follow Him. Let Him fulfill His will for your life.

And then thirdly, notice... First, we have had, **Let him deny himself.** Secondly, **Let him take up his cross.** And thirdly:

(3) **And let him follow Me.**

Again, this is emphasizing what we emphasized before. Behind Jesus. It is following Jesus. Jesus invited people and made it a command, if you want to belong to Jesus you must follow Him. Not just believe in Him. That is important, but you have to follow Him. It is a living relationship where He has a will for my life and He calls me to follow Him in His will for my life. I do not know what

that is. But I have to deny myself to find it. I have to deny myself to follow Christ. A person cannot just be a believer, he must be a follower of Jesus Christ. It is a life and relationship that is to be lived.

As I said earlier we have a tendency in the church today, we have The Man Centered Gospel where people are learning how to take their human ego, their human desires, and claim the promises of God for their life. A God who is a God of love that will never allow hardship to come; that is not the God of the Bible. I mean these are the words of Jesus, these are not my words. I am telling you what Jesus told everybody. If you desire to be His disciple - this is Jesus speaking - you become His disciple, here is what you must do. And that is why people today read things like this and they say, "Well it is easier for me to go to my church." To believe what the Bible says and become a church member and to attend church services, than it is to be a follower of Jesus. That is the person who is saved. That is what a person is called to do. It is a relationship, not a religion. Very powerful statements by Jesus.

Next week, Lord willing, we will finish out this section, The Consequences of Discipleship. Did you know that there are consequences? There are things that we will lose to make that decision to follow behind Jesus. We are going to discuss that in detail. I am not going to have a list for you of all the things you are going to lose, so I do not want you to be afraid of that. But these are the words of Jesus and He tells us the consequences about this person that is standing right in the middle saying, "Well if I desire to follow behind Jesus here is what my life is going to be. If I desire to preserve my life and not follow behind Jesus here are the consequences." You only have two ways, one of two ways to go.

As Jesus said in another place in the Gospels, that a person is either going to fall on the rock and be broken, or the rock is going to fall on you and grind you to powder. Which one? You either fall on the rock or the rock falls on you, you only have two choices. You say, "That is not fair." I do not even get into that, it does not make any difference if it is fair or not, it is the way it is, right?

Let's close with prayer.