

All right, we are attempting to finish out Matthew 16:21-28. We are in that section of Scripture that many scholars believe to be the heart of the gospel.

The Principles of Discipleship in Matthew 16:21-27, some of the most powerful and pointed texts in the Scriptures themselves. And every time we come across these teachings - we've had them back in Matthew 10 and now in Matthew 16, we will have them again in Matthew 18 - it's a wake-up call, an awakening for God's people to realize that it's different to become a disciple of Jesus than it is just to be satisfied with being a church member. Following Jesus Christ is an individual relationship. Some people, as we mentioned last week, some people are satisfied with just believing what the Bible says about Jesus and then going to church on Sunday and not having any personal relationship with Christ whatsoever, any interaction with Him. It is interesting that Jesus called people to become His disciple; not a Christian, not a church member, but a disciple, of Him, individually.

So, as we go along, about three quarters of the way through Jesus' ministry, we have The Principles of Discipleship. First of all, we have The Conflict of Discipleship, verse 21, **From then Jesus began to show to His disciples** - that is, from here on, for the rest of His ministry, until he dies on the cross - **that it is necessary** (divinely bound) **for Him to go away into Jerusalem, and to suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and the scribes, and to be killed, and the third day to be raised.** We spent a lot of time on the word *necessary*, *divinely bound to do these things*.

Verse 22, **And when Peter took Him** - in the Greek Text it is literally *when he took him aside privately* - **Peter began to rebuke Jesus, saying**, (this is the literal translation) **"Mercy to You, Lord;** which in smoothed out English would be, "God have mercy on You," and then calling him, "Lord." **This will never happen to you.** This is Peter telling Jesus, "This suffering," Jesus is now introducing suffering into the mix, and Peter is saying, "No, that won't happen to you. God have mercy on you for saying this."

As we told you before, this is the beginning of The Man-Centered Gospel, where man begins to defend his own flesh, his own ego, his own self, life. The Man-Centered Gospel, even in our day, preaches The Gospel of the Preservation of the Flesh. Whatever we can do in our total human effort and whatever protects us from any harm or hurt or struggle, is The Gospel of the Preservation of the Flesh.

Verse 23, **When Jesus turned, He said to Peter**, (not, "Get behind Me," but) **"Go behind Me, Satan!"** Very key phrase, **ὀπίσω μου** (opisō mou), *behind Me*. It is the only proper position to have in a relationship with Jesus Christ - whether you are human, or whether you are spirit, whatever the situation might be - to go behind Jesus. Jesus is always in front. It's trouble when we get along side of Him or out in front of Him; like Peter out in front telling Jesus what to do. He says, "Go behind me, Satan." He wasn't calling Peter, "Satan." We know Paul said in Ephesians 6:12 that we don't fight against flesh and blood, but against evil spiritual forces that are in the spirit realm. Jesus is speaking to the influence over Peter's life to make him approach Jesus this way. **"You are an offense to Me,"** the word *offense* is a stumbling stone in the way. Jesus has a mission to accomplish and Peter is standing in front of him stopping Him

from accomplishing his mission. So, He says, "**You are an offense to Me because you do not think,** (King James says *savourest*) **you do not savourest the things of God, but the things of men.**" *Savourest* means *to think*. In fact, it comes from the Greek word **φρήν** (*phrēn*), which means *frame of mind*. There are several Greek words that describe the thinking processes and function of the brain. He says, "Your frame of mind, Peter, is not on the things of God, but on the things of man. You're responding out of the human. You are trying to protect the flesh." Satan is the great defender of the flesh, he doesn't want any harm to come to the human element. And yet Jesus said, "From now on I'm going to be telling you the human element is going to suffer." And Peter jumps in and says, "This is not going to happen." So, Jesus says, "Your problem is that your frame of mind is humanistic. You're out to protect yourself and your flesh and your human, and that is Satan's influence."

Verse 24 that we took last week, **Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires"** - the word *will* in King James is the word *desire*. "**If anyone desires to come behind Me**" - again, there's that **ὀπίσω μου** (*opisō mou*) phrase: "If anyone desires to come behind Me." As I told you last week, and I'll repeat it this week because it's important, I have never heard - in over fifty years of ministry, I've never heard an invitation where people were invited to come forward and make a decision to come after Jesus, followed behind Him. So, you're surrendering yourself and you are going to come after Jesus, because that's what you're doing, you're surrendering your life to His Lordship as Savior.

But Jesus said, "**If anyone desires to come behind Me.**" It is the first of two words for *desire*, we will share the second one with you in a moment. "**If anyone desires to come behind Me,**" here are three commands:

(1) "**let him deny himself**"

ἀπαρνέομαι (*aparneomai*) in the Greek means *to reject yourself*. You must reject yourself. Your self keeps living. Your human keeps living. Your human desires continue to function, but you must reject them. That's a decision made on your part.

(2) "**let him take up his cross**"

As we shared with you last week and shared with you a little bit this morning as we took communion together, when Jesus died on the cross, not only did He die for my sins, but He died my death. I died up on that cross. You can see the progression that goes through here - let a person reject himself by taking up his cross, because you're accepting the fact that you died and then follow behind Jesus, that's the third command.

(3) "**and let him follow Me**"

Again, following behind Jesus is the only proper position. He leads. We follow.

As we get into our text for today, in verses 25 to 27, we have The Consequences of Discipleship. There are consequences for surrendering your life to Christ, human consequences, eternal consequences in both directions. Beginning with verse 25, it gives us some of these consequences and it starts out with the second word for *desire*. "**For whoever should desire**" -

again, King James says *will*. **"Whoever should desire (or *whoever should will*) to save (or *preserve*) his life, he will lose it. And whoever should lose his life on account of Me, he shall find it."** There are only two choices in life. There are only two directions. There are only two roads in life. It's just the opposite of what the world teaches, and a lot of the churches of today are teaching this man-centered gospel: "Take your talents and take your best efforts and work them for God." That's human. It's not spiritual, nothing spiritual about it at all. The world says, "Go for worldly success, worldly wealth. You've got to think about your standing and status in life," so says the world.

But this text tells us that there are two choices and two roads. *Whoever should desire to preserve his life...* So, there are only two desires that a person wrestles with in this life:

- (1) to desire to surrender and come behind Jesus
- (2) or desire to preserve my life from doing that, and live life for myself.

For whoever should desire to preserve his life he will lose it, and whoever should lose his life on account of Jesus he will find it. Two choices.

Jesus said back in Matthew 7:13-14, **"Enter in at the strait gate"** - it is literally the word for *narrow*. **"Enter in at the narrow gate because wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many are going through that gate: because narrow is the gate, and pressured is the way, which is leading to life, and there are very few that are finding it."** Two roads. One gate is wide, the road is broad, plenty of room for everybody. Plenty of shops along the way on the side of the road. But Jesus said, "There's another road that is narrow," and it is interesting he said, "It's narrow because it is squeezed," it's pressured into this thin line of road and he says, "There's very few that find it," because most people when they choose these roads, they choose the road that's the easiest and the most beneficial. See, it depends on what you're looking for in life. People want things that are going to benefit them and be good for them. Well, it's not good to lose your life and lose your soul throughout eternity. It is not good. But we are talking about people making decisions based on the temporary here and now, not even thinking about the future.

I was speaking with someone yesterday, we were talking about our kids, and she was talking about her son and how at the age of 23 he has no concept of the consequences of the decisions that he's making. And he's making this decision based on the temporary, he is not making decisions based on his eternity. People say, "I can't give up what I have now, I only go through once in life." Like that old commercial on TV: "You only go through once in life. Go for all the gusto!" Jesus said, "You do that, you will lose your life, you will lose your soul."

Now, there is a reason for this, and it comes with understanding what sin is. We all know the definition.: *sin is missing the mark, falling short*. But it is interesting, there is one verse in the Bible in the Old Testament that tells us what sin is. All all the works of sin that we do, all the effects of sin, and the sin that we live out in our lives, these are all symptoms of the main root and main cause. Isaiah 53:6 says, **All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned**

everyone to his own way; and Yahweh has laid upon him the transgressions of us all. A *sinner* is *someone who goes their own way*. Period. They can be a nice person. They can become a nice person. They can become a good human being, nice to their neighbors, very helpful, always having a good reputation. In fact, in the human that person can find a religious system that teaches them how to be a nice human being and a good human being. Some of these people that come around on Saturday and knock on your doors, and dressed very nicely, and some of them lead very, very good human lives. They're kind. They're giving. Most of them try to keep their lives pure and so, in outward appearance it looks good. It looks like all the requirements of Christianity in the Scriptures. The problem is they have never been born again; they have never been born of the Spirit of God. They don't belong to Christ. So, it's a problem. But I can go my own way and not surrender to Christ and I can find a religious system that's going to help me be a good and better person by me going my own way.

That's why we said to you last week, and I think I mentioned it again this morning, is that right now thousands of people, millions of people around the globe, are meeting in churches. We hear from people all the time. We hear from people over in Germany - they're talking about the church system there is the same as here. People go to church and they believe what the Bible is teaching, but all week long they go their own way. They don't seek the Lord. They don't come behind Him. They don't seek to go behind Him. They don't seek to look for His lead. They are not surrendered to Him. There isn't that personal relationship, that interaction with Christ himself.

Here in a couple weeks, in fact, two weeks from today, we are celebrating the resurrection of Christ. He didn't just rise from the tomb two-thousand years ago, He's alive today, and He has a living present interaction with all of His people. It is personal. It's living and it's real and it's spiritual.

So, going my own way, a person going their own way is the chief principle of sin. Not so much doing bad things, because you can discipline yourself not to do that many bad things, but to go our own way. And Jesus is saying, "If you desire to come after Me, you've got to deny yourself, and take up your cross and follow Me." But if you desire to preserve your life and not give it up, not surrender it to Christ, then you are going to lose your life, you are going to lose your soul. A sinner is somebody who goes his own way. They don't want to do with the Lord wants them to do. They want to follow their own beliefs and what they think is right.

Then in verse 26, "**For what will a man be profited if he should gain the whole world, and should lose his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?**" Two of the most important questions in all of life. You don't know how many times these questions, these two questions have come back when I've been talking with somebody and relating to them about how beneficial will your life be if you exchange your soul for what you're doing now? What is the goal? What is a career ambition? What is it you are looking for, for yourself? Is it worth exchanging your soul for? And many, many people, most people right now, are exchanging their soul for temporary pleasure.

It reminds me of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25:29-34. You remember that Esau was the firstborn, Jacob was born second. Esau was a man of the field, he liked to be outdoors, liked to do the hunting. Jacob liked to be home, he liked to cook, one of the first chefs on Flintstone TV, Jacob. So, one day Esau comes in out of the field, he didn't catch anything, and he said, "I am so hungry!" and he sees his brother Jacob making these beans, these red beans. And so, he was faint, Esau was, he was weak and weary from hunting, and he says to Jacob, "Feed me please with those same red beans because I am faint!" therefore was his name called Edom. *Edom* means *red*, red beans. Edomites came from Esau. And Jacob, being the businessman that he is, he says, "Sell me this day your birthright. You want some of my beans? You want me to feed you? I see you're in a weakened, faint condition. You want some of my beans? Sell me your birthright." The firstborn gets all the blessings of the firstborn: gets two-thirds of the father's inheritance and all the things that come with it. So, Jacob says, "Sell me your birthright and I'll give you some beans." Of course, Esau being very faint and weak he says, "I'm at a point to die," Esau says, "and so what benefit is my birthright to me?" And Jacob said, "Swear to me this day;" and he took an oath and he sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and a whole bowl of lentils or beans; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way and Esau despised his birthright. "It doesn't mean anything to me, who cares? I just want my stomach full." And so goes the saying that Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of beans. For the temporary satisfaction of satisfying this hunger, he got rid of the blessings of the firstborn.

In contrast to Moses, in Hebrews 11:24-26, **By faith Moses, when he was come to years - that is, he came to the legal age in Egypt, remember he was raised by Pharaoh's daughter - he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to know and enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.** It is not worth it. You see, he could've stayed in the palace in Egypt and lived in royalty and not suffered like his Hebrew brethren did; but he saw the affliction they were going through and he says to himself, "Since they are suffering, I should suffer. Why should I escape the suffering?" So, he refused to be called Pharaoh's daughter son and went over and identified with the suffering of God's people at the hands of the Egyptians, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. **Having esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he was looking for the recompense of the reward.** He says, "I'm looking for the reward after this life," and he saw the reproaches of Christ more valuable in treasure and in wealth and in riches than the treasures of Egypt.

See, we get back to this frame of mind that we talked about with Peter, this φρήν (phrēn), this φρονέω (phronēō), this *frame of mind*. The frame of mind of Moses was that the afflictions of Christ are more valuable than the treasures of Egypt. Most people in our culture would not agree with that. They'd say, "Take the treasures of Egypt and believe in God and you'll do fine." That is not how the Scripture presents it.

So, Jesus asks in verse 26, **"For what will a man be profited if he should gain the whole world, and should lose his soul?"** My question to people, especially to younger people, "If you reach your goals, if you become a success according to the standard of the world, what have you gained if you lose your soul throughout eternity?"

"Or what will a person give in exchange for his soul?" What are you giving in exchange for your soul? You've got two decisions to make, in the two roads. Those two decisions: (1) do you desire to come behind Jesus? and you say, "No, because it is going to cost me, cost me everything to be a follower of Christ." Or (2) do you desire to preserve yourself? If you do you will lose everything, even your own soul.

Verse 27, the reason why Jesus emphasizes the importance of this, **"For the Son of Man is about to come in the glory of His Father with His angels and then He will reward each one according to his** – notice, not just *works*, the Greek word is **πράξις** (praxis), which means *practice*. Not just what a person does. Which desire did you choose? What lifestyle did you choose? To come behind Jesus? Or go your own way? Go your own road? Everyone is going to be judged based on the choices.

As I mentioned to you last week, in another part of the Gospels where Jesus said about these two choices, "Either you will fall on the rock and be broken, or the rock will fall on you and grind you to powder." Two choices.

Verse 28, as we finish out this chapter, The Coming of the Kingdom. Jesus says, **"Truly I say to you, there are some who have been standing here who should never taste of death, until they should have seen the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."** This verse has caused a lot of problems for a lot of people. Mainly because we made the divisions - back in the 14th century or so, we made the verse divisions and chapter divisions. Verse 28 should have gone with the next chapter, chapter 17. When Jesus said, "There are some who are standing here who will never taste of death until they see the Son of Man coming in His glory." So, then the debate rages on, "How can people be standing there with Jesus and having never died until they see the Lord *come back*?" That is how they interpret *the Lord coming in His glory*. Well, chapter 17 opens up with this, **And after six days** (after Jesus said this) **Jesus takes Peter, James, and John his brother, and brings them up into a high mountain privately. And was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun and His clothing was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with Him.** They saw Him changed and transformed into His glory speaking with Moses and Elijah on top of this mountain. This is what Jesus was talking about in verse 28, "Some are standing here who will see the Son of Man come in His glory." Six days later Jesus appears in His glory for these three, for them to see. He's been talking about suffering, but He is also letting them know there will be time of glory. So, all you have to do sometimes when you get into a quandary as to what scripture is saying is keep reading. It's in context. The context will straighten it out for you. So, verse 28 is making reference to the transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew chapter 17, which we will get into next week. Interesting, the week before Easter and we will talk about the transfiguration of Jesus.

These are very, very powerful words. This is Jesus being right up front with people, saying to people, "This is what it is going to take to be a disciple." There are going to be consequences. You have to give up your life. You have to surrender. You can't just believe and go on your way. You must surrender to Christ. You must come behind Him. In order to do that, you must reject yourself because your ego and your fleshly desires, your human desires are going

to want to go your own way. You have to reject those in order to stay in line behind Jesus. If you go your way, you are going to break off from behind Him and go off in the side, or go up front, or be somewhere else, you can't follow behind Him. "Let him deny himself, let him take up his cross." Accept your death, take that cross with you every day. And Jesus said, "And follow Me." Now, that is Jesus telling people what they must do to be His disciple.

I've said it before over the years, and I've said it here many times, it is easier for a person to become a church member than it is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, because some people find the system to be a good, secure, environment. As long as I believe the right things, as long as I show up to all the meetings, I'm in. When in reality this is a personal relationship as we will see in chapter 18 of Matthew. Jesus is going to say, "Where two or three are gathered in my name I am there in the midst."

A couple weeks ago we studied about the word *church* in the New Testament. The Greek word for *church* is not found in the New Testament at all, it's the word *assembly*. It is not talking about the organization like what we have here, it's not talking about the building. The Greek word for *assembly* means *wherever two or three or more believers are gathered together in the name of Christ seeking Him, learning of Him, praying to Him, Jesus is there in the midst*. Anywhere. Everywhere. Whether it be in a church, whether it be in a restaurant, whether it be in a home; wherever it might be, Jesus is there. But we find security in the walls and we find security in the system. And don't realize that every day of our life, we don't bother to do a check to see if we are following behind Christ and following Christ and seeking Him as to what He would have us to do versus going our own way. Two choices. Two roads.

Let's close with prayer.