

Theme: Jesus calls each of us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him, for the only way to find true freedom, life and joy is by giving our life away for God and His kingdom.

I. Intro - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

- A. German theologian, pastor and martyr under Hitler
- B. Saw that many German's claimed to follow Christ, but really did not understand His call
- C. He called the church to a life of costly discipleship, away from cheap grace
- D. In the end he was martyred for plotting against Hitler
- E. What is the cost of discipleship?
- F. What is the call of Christ to us today? What does a life of total commitment look like?

II. The Call To Total Commitment

A. A universal call

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If **anyone** would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For **whoever** wants to save his life will lose it, but **whoever** loses his life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for **a man** if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can **a man** give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward **each person** according to what he has done. Matthew 16:24–27

- 1. Notice all of the universal terms in the passage
- 2. This is not an optional call for select few
- 3. This is the call for everyone

B. A command - not an option

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he **must deny** himself and **take up** his cross and **follow** me." Matthew 16:24

- 1. All three verbs here are imperatives - must
- 2. KJV - let him - not a permission; a command
- 3. Jesus is giving the absolute requirement for all

C. Three parts - one call to a life of total commitment

- 1. The call - a life of discipleship/following Jesus
Then Jesus said to his disciples, "**If anyone would come after me**, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Matthew 16:24

- a. To come after Jesus - live as His servant
- b. What it means to be a disciple - a learner/follower

2. Three parts to being a disciple

a. A call to deny myself

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, **he must deny himself** and take up his cross and follow me." Matthew 16:24

- 1. Deny, refuse, disown or reject
- 2. What we deny is not things - it is our very self
- 3. This is not patiently suffering what others do to me, for I can do that and still be the center. This is a call to remove me from the center.
- 4. I might deny certain things, or others opinions, and still keep myself at the center - so Jesus says I must deny myself.

5. To deny myself means I am not to be the focus of my own actions. What determines my actions is not me and my desires, but God and His will.

b. A call to take up my cross

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, **he must** deny himself and **take up his cross** and follow me." Matthew 16:24

1. All disciples must bear the cross - death
2. Not a religious symbol, or sign we make - it is death to life on our own terms
3. When connected with denying myself, the cross refers to a life of dedication which will involve suffering, and perhaps even end in martyrdom itself.
4. When Jesus calls a man He bids him come and die - Bonhoeffer

c. A call to follow Jesus

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, **he must** deny himself and take up his cross and **follow me**." Matthew 16:24

1. All disciples must follow wherever Jesus leads
2. The basic call to a disciple is "follow me" - with no hint as to where that might lead.
3. Deny & take up cross are aorist - initial act
4. Follow is present - daily outworking of first two

3. To be a Christian is take up our cross and die to ourselves, so that we might follow Jesus - for dead men have no desires & plans of their own.

III. The Result of Total Commitment

A. The result of total commitment to Jesus is losing our self/life

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. Matthew 16:25

1. Again note the universal language - this is a universal truth - it applies to everyone at all times
2. The call to lose our life/soul
 - a. The word ψυχή means soul, life, essential self
 - b. Jesus says we must lose our life/very self to find life
 - c. The modern quest is to "find myself" and we try to use Jesus as another path to self-realization. But Jesus says if we do this we lose ourself.
 - d. If we do not love God above our own self, our life will implode and we will lose all joy. The self-centered life is no life at all.
3. The path to finding true life is losing our life for Jesus and His kingdom. Those who do this find life and joy - now and for eternity. But those who cling to their own life and purposes lose everything.

B. The paradox of total commitment

1. The paradox is that if we cling to our own life and identity, we lose them. But if we will forsake our own life, our own identity and embrace Christ, we will find out true life and identity.
2. This is definitely a paradox - but we have Jesus' word that it is in fact true!

IV. The Basis for A Life of Total Commitment

A. The basis - the value of our soul

What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? Matthew 16:26

1. In the end, what matters is our soul, our total self
2. Jesus actually appeals for us to calculate it out
3. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose - Jim Eliot

B. The basis - judgement day and eternal rewards

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. Matthew 16:27

1. Jesus tells us that life is not certain - but eternity is!
2. When Christ returns this life's rewards will fade
3. He tells us to live in light of eternity - we will stand before Him
 - a. This means we must commit ourselves to Him now - or else we will be found in our own sin
 - b. But even Christians will have our works judged for reward - what we do now echoes in eternity!
4. Jesus is telling us to live now in light of what will happen on judgment day and after

2. It is about a life that is totally oriented to Christ
3. This is what faith is in Scripture - not just intellectual assent, but a reorientation of our whole being to God
4. Have I personally embraced the call of Christ?
5. Do not be deceived - Jesus is Lord of all, or we are still in our sin - there is no in-between state of Christian but not disciple
6. Embrace Christ today!

B. Am I living for kingdom truth or the American dream?

1. They are very different - and often mutually contradictory
2. Which one characterizes my life as a Christian?

American "Dream"	Kingdom Truth
Live to find yourself	Live by denying yourself for Christ
Follow your own dream	Follow Christ, even if it costs your "dream"
This life is all there is, eternity is but a dream	This life is a fading mist, but eternity is sure and forever
You Only Live Once - so go for it NOW	Jesus is returning and we will live forever - so live for eternity

3. The American Dream calls to us each day - do we must renew our covenant commitment each day

V. All In To Apply the Word

A. Have I responded to the call of Christ?

1. Notice this is not about intellectual knowledge

C. The Lord's Table - Our Meal of Covenant Renewal

A Life of Total Commitment

Matthew 16:24-27

September 27, 2015

Communion

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Teaching keywords: discipleship; lordship; obedience; freedom, kingdom of God; cross

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. Matthew 16:24–27