**Follow the King to the Cross**

**Following the King’s Example**

Matthew 16:24-28

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 We have seen that Jesus, the King, had a message, repent and believe the gospel because the kingdom is at hand. We have seen that Jesus, the King, had a method, calling men and women to follow him in discipleship. And we have seen that Jesus, the King, demands a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. Today in Matthew 16:24-28, we will see that Jesus, the King, gives us three simple phrases that character the life of disciples, those who follow him. Jesus has just told them of his coming death and resurrection and Peter responds, no way, that will never happen. Peter had embraced Jesus as Messiah but not a suffering Messiah. So Jesus rebukes Peter (16:21-23) and then immediately describes what is required to follow him.

**The Challenge to Follow Jesus (26)**

Jess is talking to his disciples here and says, if anyone would come after me. Would is a verb of choice, if anyone chooses to come after me. Come after me means to get behind Jesus, is the language of discipleship. One must get behind Jesus to follow Jesus. In that day, it meant following his teaching, coming to him by faith for salvation and submitting to his form of discipleship. It is the same word used in 16:23 because Peter is not following Jesus but correcting Jesus about his mission as the Messiah. Coming after Jesus means he is in charge, he is the king, and he defines his mission and what it means to follow him, not us. Then Jesus defines or describes what it means to come after him as a disciple or a Christian. He must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. Let’s look at each of those. First, a disciple must deny himself. The verbs in all three of these phrases are in the present active tense, meaning that they are what characterizes the life of discipleship, the habits of our lives. They are also commands, not suggestions. They are not optional in the Christian life, they are not a second phase when you get serious about Jesus. They describe what it means to believe in Jesus. Denying yourself only has value when it flows from faith in a saving relationship to Jesus. Denying yourself does not mean self-abuse or lack of self-esteem but denying the selfish impulse to put yourself at the center of your life. So, a disciple must deny himself. But a disciple must also take up his cross. Taking up your cross does not mean put up with the inconveniences or discomforts in your life. When Rome sentenced someone to death, they were made to carry their cross to their execution. The Romans had perfected crucifixion as a way to deter rebellion of those they had conquered. They paraded you through town to the place of crucifixion, you hung there suffering, mocked by the crowds and picked at by animals as you died. The life of discipleship is the life of dying to yourself, to your sinful desires, to you being the center of your universe, and the king of your own kingdom. Take up our cross means you battle and fight against our own sin and rebellion against God. That fight is a daily fight. It is only in denying ourselves and taking up our cross that we can follow Jesus, the third characteristic of being a disciple. Following Jesus means we come to him in faith for salvation and give him our allegiance in this life. That we have submit ourselves to him personally, to his teaching, to his way of life, to his mission, and to his kingdom. Then Jesus gives three incentives or reasons to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.

**Three Incentives to Follow Jesus (25-27)**

To motivate his disciples to the life of discipleship, Jesus gives three reasons or incentives. These incentives are identified with a conjunction, ‘for’, in verses 25, 26, and 27. The first is the promise of reward and the warning of punishment at the judgement (25). If you save your life; you will lose it but if you lose your life you will find it. If you reject the demands of discipleship in these three phrases, then you forfeit eternal life. Or you could say it this way, if you are living just for this life, you are short sighted and will lose in the long term. If you so love your life apart from Jesus that Jesus and following him is insignificant to you, then in the end, you not only lose Jesus but you lose eternal life. Eternal life is true life and if you don’t want that or believe that then you forfeit eternal joy. The first incentive is that if you follow Jesus, the you find true life and joy and happiness in this life and in eternity. That is, if you abandon the life you so love to follow Jesus, if you come to him for salvation, then you will find true life and joy and happiness in this life and even more in eternity. The second incentive essentially makes the same point in two rhetorical questions (26). First, what will it profit a man/woman if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? The answer is, in the scope of eternity, you gain nothing but only lose because your soul experiences eternity without God. His second question is, what shall a man/woman give in return for his soul? Again, nothing. If you value your own soul, then live to gain your maximum pleasure in eternity, not just this life. But that requires you to fight for it, to fight to trust Jesus, to purposely cultivate your appetite for Him and for eternity. Cut out what undermines and dulls your appetite for Jesus and for eternity. The momentary pleasures of sin are a cheap substitute, an allusion of pleasure and the good life compared to the pleasures of eternity with God. Everything in this world tries to convince you to live for yourself, live for today and not for eternity. The third incentive Jesus gives is that he will judge you by the life you choose to live (27). He will come with his angels and in the glory of his Father. They are his angels at his beckon call as God the Son. The angels will come with him when he judges humanity to help him execute his judgment. And he shares the Fathers glory because he is God the Son. Now this does not mean that we are saved by our works, rather it tells us that God rewards works of faith in eternity - denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus while he punishes those who reject Jesus’ demands of discipleship and live for their own sinful desires, do not take up the cross, and do not follow him. If you value your soul, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.

Questions for Life Groups:

1. What does it mean to follow Jesus in discipleship?
2. How are denying yourself, taking our your cross, and following Jesus all connected to one another?
3. Why is this so difficult for us?
4. How are you struggling with this now?
5. How does cultivating our relationship with Jesus help us obey the demand of discipleship?
6. What are the three incentives Jesus gives us to follow him in discipleship?
7. Why does Jesus give three incentives to submit to the demands of discipleship?
8. How are the rewards of eternity not a form of works we earn by following Jesus?