

Matthew 16 (Part 4) :21-28

Two Sides of Peter (continued)

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · April 18, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Matthew chapter 16, this is the second and final week that we'll be covering. This last section of the 16th chapter of Matthew, we're picking it up in verse 21, read with me as I read along, it says, from that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, never Lord, he said, this will never happen to you. And Jesus turned to Peter, get behind me, Satan, you are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.

And then Jesus said to his disciples, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for me will find it. 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 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. I tell you the truth. Some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the son of man coming in his kingdom. That last verse is actually better connected to the next chapter. It's kind of an unfortunate chapter division.

We'll talk about that next week, but let's start by praying. Father, open our hearts to the ministry of your word this morning and teach us. You are the teacher, oh Lord, our God. And we look to you to instruct us, to open our hearts and to speak to us, Lord God, and feed the spiritual man inside all of us. That part that you have made alive through your spirit and regenerated and breathed life into, Lord, fill us with who you are today.

We ask it in Jesus name, amen. You'll remember that after Peter was soundly chastised for the things that he said to Jesus when he rebuked him and said, you know, never Lord, never will you have to go to Jerusalem. Never will you die. Those things just won't happen to you. That Jesus then turned in verse 24 and he used the rebuke of Peter, the rebuke of the one to speak a word of warning to them all.

And whereas Peter had insisted to Jesus that he follow his plan, you know, that's what Peter was essentially doing. We talked about that last week. Whereas Peter was saying to Jesus, no, you follow my plan, right? Jesus responded by making it clear that essentially to be a disciple of his means to follow God's plan. And that was probably a hard thing for Peter to hear, but he communicated his idea using three basic terms that we're going to say, describe the characteristics of a, of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Let's just first read through that verse 24 one more time where Jesus said, if anyone, it starts off with, he said to them, if anyone would come after me, he must, and here's number one, deny himself a number to take up his cross. And then thirdly, follow me. We'll put these up on the screen for you. Since those of you who are taking notes, I think this might be somewhat helpful for you. If anyone would come after me, number one, he must deny himself.

Number two, he must take up his cross. Number three, he must follow me. Let's take a look at the first one. We'll highlight, uh, deny himself. What do you think of what goes through your mind when somebody talks about self denial?

Do you kind of get these instant pictures of like Mahatma Gandhi or some kind of a lifestyle of, um, Oh, I don't know, a separation from, I mean, we, we, we think of like a monk sitting somewhere in some isolated, uh, you know, place on a lonely island, you know, completely cut off from society and, and, and, uh, culture and, and that sort of thing, you know, living my life in a monastery and so forth. Those are probably fairly popular images when we, when we mentioned the subject of self denial, but the meaning of what Jesus is talking about, if we want to find out what Jesus is talking about, when he talks about denying yourself, all we got to do is look at Peter and then do the opposite of that. Because what Peter has just done in this passage is he has advanced his own agenda, his own thoughts, his own ideas, and he has essentially said, this is paramount. This is, you know, have you ever, you ever done that in your life, exalted kind of your own thoughts or, or, or whatever, and elevated what you desired above all else? I'm sure we all have many, many times what we're basically saying is what I want is what is most important.

What I want, that's the highest aim. That's what Peter was essentially communicating to Jesus. What I want, Jesus, it's not what you want, it's what I want. No, you will not go to Jerusalem. You will not die.

And frankly, I don't want to hear any more talk about this dying nonsense. Why? Because I don't want it. Because I don't want it. It's not, it's not what we're going to do.

It's elevating one's own desires. You know, I, I insist on my way because I want to be happy. You know, it kind of gets into this whole thing that we're dealing with in our culture today about the, the run for

personal happiness, the desire for personal happiness that the world is running after just as fast as they can go just for the fun of it. And I do this. I work on my laptop and I, I type up all my notes.

So I have access to the internet all the time, which can be a huge distraction too. But I decided I flipped over to my browser and I just got into Google and I thought I'm I'm just going to Google personal happiness and just see what comes up and just read some of the stuff that, you know, and of course I didn't have any trouble finding, do you think I had any trouble finding a website on that subject? You know, it was like, you know, a couple of billion hits immediately, you know, there's, there's no, you know, shortage of information on, on advice on how to become personally happy in life, you know, not none at all. Anyway, I found this website that was listed, the title was listed as five methods of finding personal happiness. And I went through and I read them all and it was just the usual kind of drivel, you know, that you hear from the world.

It's just, it's just secular humanism. It's, it's, it's, it's the life of the flesh. It's, it's putting my desires first, but so that we might kind of contrast a little bit of what Jesus is saying to us. I thought I'd take a little excerpt and put it up on the screen for you. Ready for a little wonderful worldliness here, right here at Calvary Chapel.

Here's what it said. Oh, there goes my water. It said, as human beings, a life without happiness is meaningless. For happiness to be truly felt, we have to set goals. You see, and once we have established the goals we want in life, well then we'll know what we want and then we'll have to figure ways to achieve those goals.

And we will need two ways to make the things we want happen for us so that we will have what we deserve. You guys, isn't it just kind of, you know, it's so all about me and, and, and what I can do to be happy. What do you see there? Happiness is the goal. Without happiness, life is meaningless, right?

Isn't that what it says? And by the way, this is by no means uncommon. I mean, this is the kind of stuff you pick up on pretty much any website. They don't use the same words necessarily, but the sentiment is exactly the same. And so what do we got to do?

We got to set goals so that we get what we deserve. And do you see that the, it's more than an implication. It's, it's, it's, they're telling you flat out, you deserve to be happy. I mean, without it, good grief, good grief. They said it right there.

Life is meaningless. Life is meaningless without you personally being happy and so forth. That's, that's, you can see that this is, this is the top of the heap, isn't it? On the, on the list of things that people

are, are seeking for, searching for, desiring in the world. Jesus said, however, that rather than, than this philosophy here, a characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus Christ is one who denies themselves those things, those goals, those desires, the things that the world would otherwise run after.

after, and we take those things and lay them down at the feet of Jesus Christ. It's called learning to have the mind of God about life. Remember when we just read it, when Jesus rebuked Peter, back in verse 23, do you remember what he said? He said, You don't have in mind the things of God. That's your problem, Pete.

The reason that came out of your mouth just now is because you weren't thinking about God's heart and God's mind and God's desire and God's will. Those weren't even on your radar. What you were thinking about was what you wanted, and what you want, Pete, is consistent with the mind of man. You were thinking like a mere man. You were thinking like a human being.

I want you to move beyond that now. I want you to transcend beyond that now. I want you to begin to think differently. I don't want you to think like an animal. You know how many times have I said this?

I like to make fun of our pets. Please don't send me nasty notes. I know you love your pets, but you know, pet, we like to think they're so smart. Oh, he's so smart. You know, pets, they think with their stomach, right?

You know, how do you get them to do things? You hold out a treat, you know? Hey, roll over. There you go. Good doggy.

He's like, Hey, keep feeding me, man. I'll do whatever you want to do. You want me to recite the pledge of allegiance? Just give me some treats, you know, sort of thing is it's all based on, on, on the stomach. It's all based on this, this urge, this basic urge to satisfy fleshly lusts.

And as human beings, we can abase ourselves to that level of living where all we're living for is just to please our fleshly lusts. And we even start thinking based on our fleshly lusts. That's what Jesus is rebuking G Peter for Peter. You're thinking like a man who is using his stomach for his brain. I want you to think with the heart of God and just hours, days, or whatever it was before that Peter had said the most beautiful thing when he declared that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God.

There it is, Peter. That's the way I want you to respond. I want you to respond moved by the spirit, not by the flesh. I love how the new living translation puts Matthew 16, 23. Let me put this on the screen.

Basically it's Jesus saying, listen, Pete, you're seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's. And that's kind of a clear, you know, uh, sort of a elongation of what Jesus is actually saying to Peter. So what we learned about ourselves from this passage is that our thoughts being human based are naturally centered upon self and desire the things that are in keeping with that. So what is our answer to this obvious gravitational pull that we all deal with towards self-centered thoughts, self-centered desires, self-centered ideas? What is, what is the answer?

Jesus said it. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself. He must deny himself. And in the case of what he's saying to his disciples at that time is he's saying, guys, listen, I understand that that this doesn't make sense to you right now. And I understand that what I'm saying to you about going to Jerusalem and being turned over to the Gentiles and dying there, I understand that that doesn't make you happy.

And I understand that it, it confuses you and frustrates you. When I, when I say these things, it's not what you want, but let me explain something to you boys. Being my follower isn't about getting what you want. It's about adjusting what you want to the will of my father in heaven. That's what we're doing here, guys.

That's what it means to be my disciple. Just so you knew, just so you kind of were able to count the cost. I think that denying self is probably best seen in the practice of fasting, which I hate to do. I'll just admit it right up front. Don't really care to fast.

I've done it a few times. Uh, not always very successfully, but fasting is, is a great picture of what it means to deny yourself because that's exactly what you're doing and you can do it for a while, but you know, and then what you begin to realize is that everybody else is, it's time for everybody else to sit down at the table and enjoy a meal, but you're not joining them because you're fasting. And so therefore you have to deny yourself the pleasure of sitting down and enjoying that meal and all the things that go along with that. You're denying yourself. You're saying, no, I'm not going to do that.

Although it's really, really difficult because it's extremely enjoyable. Way too enjoyable. But to withhold yourself from mealtime and to spend time instead in prayer or meditating on the word of God or something like that is a practice that involves denying our inner fleshly lusts, desire for food and so forth. And it's hard. Don't let anybody tell you otherwise, no matter how you slice it, denying yourself is hard.

But you know what? If we never learn the art of self denial, we will go through our lives like Peter, always locking horns with the will of God. Unless we learn some level of self denial, we will go through

the rest of our lives literally at loggerheads with God and his will. And in fact, that's the way some Christians live their lives. They're like always at odds with God.

You know, they love him and all that kind of good stuff. And they know that they need Jesus Christ to be saved. But darn it. Does he always have to ask that kind of stuff of me? I mean, good grief.

It's not what I want. And boy, they'll let you know right there right now. That's not what I want. But I guess that's what you know. And there's just there's this lack of, of willingness to deny oneself such things.

But you know what, a believer who is surrendered a believer who has, who has come to terms with the desires of self to the point where he recognizes she recognizes the need to surrender those things and the need to deny self is a joyful believer. It's he is a peaceful believer. And as a result is a more fruitful believer. You know, because you're no longer kind of doing the bucking thing, you know, every time God lays something over your back. All right, second characteristic we looked at, let me highlight this one on the screen here for you, is when Jesus said that a characteristic of a disciple is one who would take up his cross.

Some people think this is exactly the same thing as the first point. But I think that there's some interesting kind of dynamics about this. And I first of all, I find it interesting that Jesus should say, take up, he should actually even reference the cross at this juncture, because do you know, at least according to Matthew's chronology of events, at this point in time, Matthew chapter 16, Jesus had not even told his disciples yet that the cross would be the means of his dying. He told them he would die, but he hasn't revealed yet the whole cross thing to them as far as him being crucified. And yet he uses the cross in kind of a rather anachronistic way to say to them, this very statement that he's making, you must take up or literally carry your cross.

Now, you and I, we have to maybe think back to think about what that means to the Jews following Jesus, it would have been they would have had an instant picture, no doubt they'd witnessed crucifixion. Prior to someone actually being nailed on that cross, it was the tradition of the Romans who, by the way, reserved crucifixion only for non Romans, to take an individual who had been so condemned, and force them to carry the instrument of their death, the cross through the streets of the town, to convey a very important message to everyone who was looking on. And what is that message? It was Rome's way of basically saying this, this individual has violated the law of Rome, but now they are under the authority of Rome, and we are going to show it in graphic terms. That's what it means to carry one's cross.

It's the final surrender, it's the final humbling of oneself, literally carrying the instrument of your death, to show that you have been conquered. How's that one? Try that one on for size. That if that doesn't make you squirm, nothing will. To literally portray to anyone who's looking, I have been conquered.

I have been conquered. Wow! Jesus said the character of a disciple is one who is constantly conveying to other people the fact that they've been conquered by God and that they are now surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And a person who carried their cross didn't have the freedom to take a different route. He went where his captors told him he was going to go.

And everybody knew, by the way, that where he was going ultimately was the place of death. And there he would die. And by the way, the cross never let anybody off the hook, no pun intended. It always completely and utterly silenced its victims. Now lest you think that what I'm talking to you about here this morning is a brutality that God wants to visit upon you and you shudder a little bit at that thought, let me encourage you that what I'm talking about is truly a death, but not a brutal sort of a situation, but a death nonetheless.

And a death which has a byproduct that is one that you and I will never understand until we go there. It produces a freedom and a joy that no worldly goal of happiness can even begin to touch. It brings an exaltation in the things of God to the point where it's probably best expressed by the Apostle Paul when he said, you know what, I've done it, I've carried my cross, I went all the way and I got on that cross and now I've been crucified with Christ and I no longer live. But now Christ truly lives in me. And now this life that I do live in this body, I now live for the glory of God.

No longer do I live it for my own expectations, my own desires, my own purpose. I am now freed up to live it for him. And so it's a rather glorious thing actually. So Jesus uses this word picture to portray the character of a disciple in this way, someone who has died to self and carries that cross continuously. The third characteristic that we're looking at here this morning is the issue of follow me, where Jesus says, follow me.

And don't overlook these two words and oversimplify them in some way. Follow me. These are huge words. So all of us are in some capacity followers, even those of us who are leaders at some point have to follow. And do you know, do you know the person that we are most likely to follow and obey?

It's ourselves, ourselves, the person we are most likely to follow and obey is ourselves following self is the most common activity among mankind. And relying on self then becomes a practice that we all engage

in every day. And we think nothing of it essentially. And the world around us constantly affirms us in it. And it says things like find your own path, you know, and, and, and follow your dreams.

You know, we've, we've worked that into all our neat little songs and ditties and, you know, and I did it my way and, and all the other, you know, sorts of, you know, you guys remember that from the music? That's it. The sound of music. Yes. You know, here's this, you know, mother superior singing this to this young woman telling her, you know, just follow your dream, follow your dream.

That was the message. Follow your dream. Jesus steps into a place boldly to come between us in that message. And he looks us right in the face and he says, if you would be my disciple, you would follow me. And that's a pretty bold thing for him to say, you have to admit, but it's an important and even more so important that we hear what he's saying to us.

Follow me, which properly means follow in my footsteps. Now that makes it a little more challenging right there because it's one thing to say, I'm going to follow Jesus. It's another thing to say, I'm going to follow in his footsteps. That means you're going to go where he goes and experience what he experienced. And that creates a whole new dynamic.

That is no small thing because when we look at Jesus and where he walked in, when we look at where it got him in the end, which was not a place of popularity or a place of worldly success or anything like that, we look at it and we see that, you know what? Jesus walked to the place of rejection. He walked to the place of sorrow. He did not walk toward the door that said, you know, here's the fun life, this direction. It seemed to kind of almost walk the other way.

And you know, later the disciples understood that very thing when they shared in that rejection and they shared in the difficulty and the trials. Here's the crazy part. They didn't walk around, you know, with just sad faces when they found themselves walking in the footpaths of Jesus. You know what they did? They rejoiced.

Remember what happened after they got scourged? After literally they got whipped like horses, in fact, way worse than you do to a horse. It says in the book of Acts, they left the Sanhedrin that day rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ. They were like, we're getting to do just what he did. And they were pumped.

It wasn't a downer. It wasn't depressing. There was a joy that bubbled up and overflowed that was something that would make the human desire for happiness seem like nothing by comparison. That's the

crazy paradox of this life that you and I are called into. It sounds like such a drag, you know, unless you're willing to deny yourself and take up your cross.

I mean, you read that and you go, oh, yay. Anything else? But what we don't get until we actually begin to walk that out is the joy, the joy, the peace that just envelops us when we walk in obedience to God's will. And you know, Jesus, I think he, I wonder if he looked at his disciples after he said all this and there and saw maybe the confusion in their minds as they're kind of like, you know, mouth open thing sort of thing, which tells you a sort of thing. And so he goes on here in verse 25 and look at this, because here's, here's the paradox, right?

Here it is for whoever, this is the summary, all right, in paradox form for whoever wants to save his life. That means to preserve it. I want it. I want to possess it. I want to take my life and possess it for myself.

That's what he's saying here. Whoever wants to do that is going to find that his life actually is not preserved, is not saved, is in fact lost. That's what he's saying there. And that truly is a paradoxical kind of a statement. You want to keep your life?

Give it away. Lose it for my sake. That's how you find your life in Christ. That's not what the world says, does it? I know the world says, go for it, find yourself, run after the dreams of your heart.

Jesus says, give them all up and you will find happiness and joy that you couldn't even begin to imagine. You will find your life when you lose it in me. And then he asked the questions, a couple of rhetorical questions, you know, what good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world and yet forfeits his soul, you know? So you run after all the things that the world tells you to run after and what do you get? When it's all over And then he asked the question what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

That's that's a way of saying How do you put a dollar amount on your soul? What's it worth to you? That's what that is basically saying So Jesus informs us here that if we attempt to preserve our lives We'll actually end up losing them And if there was ever a better statement of how the self-life backfires Yeah, I don't know what it is Do you understand people? That the way those who are living who are outside of Christ do you understand it's gonna backfire bad We're seeing it happen in many people's lives Some people it backfires sooner than others, but it will backfire for all of them The the the desire to be pleased and to run after that pleasure at all costs it backfires every day and ultimately, it will backfire into destruction one day and That's the that's the sad thing about this Conversely, there's only one way to find your life and that is to lose it for the sake of Christ And then Jesus reminds us in verse 27 for the Son of

Man is going to come in his father's glory He's gonna come along with the angels And at that time he will reward each person According to what he has done people please understand This is not a statement saying that we are saved by what we do not at all He's saying this in the context of all the things he has said up to this point about denying yourself in this life He's saying listen you you go through this life denying yourself, let me tell you my father in heaven will not forget He keeps a running tally in ways that would have blow your mind That which you give up today, let me tell you you can't even begin to understand how tomorrow those things Will be recompensed You can't even begin to understand how God is gonna make good on on on all the things that you have Willingly surrendered at his feet today And that's that's really an incredible statement and And and he's basically laying this out here because you see rather than desiring the things of this world You and I are to desire the things of heaven and so he tells us you know what that you got that to look forward To this life may in fact be a time of sacrifice and sorrow in some respect But listen what's coming later? It's gonna blow your socks off So this isn't asceticism or self-denial for the sake of asceticism You know It's it's it's a life of surrender to Jesus Christ That he tells us openly here will be rewarded one day and I have all kinds of people say I hear this said a lot They'll say well, but you know what?

We shouldn't we shouldn't even talk about the rewards that are coming our way because if we do we're gonna have the wrong attitude Where's that come from Jesus talked about it Talked about it a lot told stories about it There was once a man who went away and gave things to his designer told him to do this and then he came back and he said okay, we're gonna settle accounts and Then once he did he found out what they did and he rewarded them What's bad about that? I think he wanted us to hold on to that by faith and know that this life is not all there is Because otherwise if you think that you're gonna live for this life But he wants you and I to look with the eyes of faith. This is not all there is there's a whole lot more And that's why in the book of Revelation. It says the Spirit and the bride Say come Even so come Lord Jesus because that's what we're looking for. That's what we're waiting for You You You You You You You You You You You You You you you you you you you