

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/31/93 PM
Matthew 16:24 "The Call to Follow Jesus"

Intro: This is a joyous occasion! Tonight we are going to observe the two ordinances our Lord commanded us to keep in the church: Baptism, and Communion. This is a highly significant service. It will be our privilege to watch as 8 individuals publicly identify with Jesus Christ.

Q: What's involved in being a disciple of Christ? What does it take to be a follower of Jesus, the Son of God?

Illust:

Jesus answered that important question for us in Matthew 16:24.

Proposition: According to Jesus' words in Matthew 16:24, if I want to be associated with Jesus Christ, I have to come to grips with 3 responsibilities.

- I. I must deny myself.
- II. I must die to myself.
- III. I must follow Christ.

READ: Mt 16:24 "Then Jesus said to His disciples..."

Before we identify the responsibilities, take a look at the context. The verse says Jesus spoke to His disciples (Mark's account says the crowds were there too, listening in). A disciple is one who follows someone else. The Rabbis had disciples. John the Baptist had disciples. Jesus had disciples. We know about the 12. But there were a lot more than 12.

Jesus was a very popular figure in Israel at this time. He fed the multitudes of 5000 in Mt 14, and then the 4000 in Mt 15. The crowds loved that. If you want to get a crowd, start passing out free lunches! There were other miracles too. He had walked on the water (ch 14), and healed a Syrophenician girl of demon-possession (ch 15). The people thronged to Jesus.

See: Mt 15:29-31 "...and great multitudes came..."

Lots of people were trying to follow Jesus. He was the celebrity of celebrities in 1st century Palestine.

Then He said something that caused the crowds to leave. In fact, we must say that Jesus was interested in attracting crowds in the first place. His aim was not to be popular. What was His aim? He had come, as Mt 1:21 says, "to save His people from their sins."

Q: What did Jesus say that shocked the multitudes?

Up until this time, Jesus had demonstrated the privileges of His Kingdom. And there are many. But in Mt 16, He focused on the responsibilities.

Look at what He said...

V 24 "If any man will come after Me"

The crowds had been coming. The interest was high. Now not everyone had the wrong motive. The world then, as now, was full of hurting, oppressed, desperate people, people looking for help. And so they came to Jesus.

Then Jesus said to them, "Do you really want to be associated with Me? If you do, you need to get a handle on three things..."

I. I must deny myself.

V 24 "let him deny himself"

Q: What does it mean to deny yourself?

Let me say up front it is a painful, difficult admission to deny yourself. Our flesh cries out against such an admission, that in me there is no good thing.

To deny oneself means first of all that I admit that I am spiritually bankrupt. Remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount? Who is the blessed person?

5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit"--those who admit spiritual poverty

5:4 "Blessed are they that mourn"--who grieve over their condition

A person cannot receive Jesus as Savior who does not first admit that he has a NEED for a Savior, a need caused by sin.

Caution. To deny yourself does not mean to deny things. There are lots of religious, well-meaning people who think they can impress God by giving up things. That's not what Jesus had in mind.

A person who denies himself experiences a transformation in his value system. Look at Jesus' confrontation of Peter in the preceding verse, "Get behind me Satan...thou savorest not the things that are of God, but those that are of men (NIV "you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men")."

When we make the decision to deny ourselves, we start looking at life differently. We see it from God's perspective. Our aim is no longer to promote self. It's to exalt God.

Appl: A lot of Christians struggle because of a refusal to deny themselves.

See: Rom 14:7-9

Illust:

II. I must die to myself.

V 24 "and take up his cross"

Let's talk first about what this does NOT mean. To take up a cross does not mean to carry a burden or problem (sometimes you'll hear people say, "Well my cranky boss is the cross God has called me to bear." Or, "My fear of heights is my cross."). No, it's not a nagging spouse or a lemon of a car that Jesus had in mind.

Any Jew in Palestine would know exactly what Jesus meant when He talked about taking up a cross. They would know that when a criminal was condemned to be executed by crucifixion, he would often be forced to carry part of his own cross to the site of the execution.

Listen. When Jesus calls us to take up our cross, He's calling us to die, to die for Him. He's calling us to make the ultimate sacrifice. He's calling us to surrender to Him as Lord in every area of our lives.

V 25 "For whoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it."

Now let's be honest. That kind of teaching doesn't settle too well in our day and age. In fact, think of the gospel presentations you often see on TV or hear in churches. Like the bumper sticker says, "Try Jesus."

Listen. The Bible never says that a person becomes a Christian by "adding" Jesus to an already crowded life. Jesus doesn't want a corner of your life. He doesn't call you to give Him one day out of your week, or 10% of your income. He doesn't invite you to trust Him merely so you can have fire insurance from hell.

No. A genuine Christian is one who has called out with no strings attached, "I need You Jesus. I repent of my sins, and acknowledge You as my Savior and Lord. I lay my life at Your feet. I am Yours."

Q: Have you ever come to Christ on those terms?

Illust: Cortez burned his ships when he landed. No going back.

III. I must follow Christ.

V 24 "And follow Me"

Listen carefully. Following Jesus means more than trying to live like Him. There are lots of religious people who view Jesus as their example, yet they are still dead in their sins.

Because before Jesus can be our Example He must be our Savior. When we follow Christ, we identify with Christ. We identify with His death, burial, and resurrection (see v 21). I must admit that what Jesus did on the cross, He did for me! And what Jesus did when He conquered death, He did for me!

When we say that Christianity is a "personal" matter, we don't mean it's subjective thing where we can come to God on our own way. We mean that in order to be a Christian, we must enter into a personal relationship with a Person, Jesus Christ.

That relationship begins the moment we are born again. Listen. True faith is not an experiment. It's a lifelong commitment (MacArthur, The Gospel..., 202)

Illust: Testimony of Ken & Dara Henry--started coming to our church because invited by friends. Nearly a year ago, asked about joining the church so they could get involved in ministries. I went to the house, and asked if they had a personal relationship with God. They both explained that they had been religious individuals for many years. They'd been involved in various churches. When I shared the gospel with them, they began to realize that something was missing.

Religion doesn't save. Only Christ saves. Over the course of several months of Bible study, they began to see what the Bible says about trusting Christ alone for salvation. God opened the eyes of both to their need of Christ.

Tonight, they along with several others will be baptized as a public testimony of what Christ has done in their lives.

Challenge:

Christ calls each of us to deny ourselves, die to ourselves, and follow Him.

Q: Have you ever done this? Are you right now? Would you like to? I find that even though I am a Christian, I need to reaffirm these decisions daily.