

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. 28 Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. Mt. 16:24-28

An unknown author wrote that on a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks were frequent, there once existed a little lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted volunteers kept a constant watch over the sea. With no thought for their safety they went out day and night, tirelessly rescuing the lost. Many lives were saved, and the station became famous. Some of those who were saved, along with others in the surrounding area, wanted to become associated with the station. They gave time, money, and effort to support its work. They bought new boats and trained new crews, and the lifesaving station grew.

Some of those who volunteered at the station soon became upset that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. So they replaced the emergency cots and beds and put better furniture in a new, larger building.

As a result, the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its volunteers. They decorated it exquisitely and began to use it as a club and even charged membership dues. Because fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, they hired lifeboat crews to do the work.

The lifesaving motif still prevailed on the club emblems and stationary, however, and there was a symbolic lifeboat in the room where club initiations were held.

At about this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in loads of cold, wet, half-drowned people. Because these survivors were dirty and sick, they soon messed up the beautiful new club. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where the shipwreck victims could be

At the next meeting there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the lifesaving activities altogether because they thought it was a hindrance and unpleasant to the normal social life of the club. Other members insisted on lifesaving as their primary purpose and pointed out that, after all, the club was still a lifesaving station. But those members were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of various people shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast, which they did.

As the years went by, the new station gradually faced the same problems the other one had experienced. It, too, evolved into a club, and its lifesaving work became less and less of a priority. The few members who remained dedicated to saving lives founded yet another lifesaving station. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that coast today you'll find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent, but most of the people drown.

What happened to those people who operated those lifesaving stations? What was their problem? They lost their sense of purpose!

What is the danger for us in forgetting our purpose? It is That we would waste our lives on worthless pursuits.

So what is our purpose anyway? What should be our driving passion and purpose as followers of Christ and as His church? Let's consider that by first looking at some lessons Jesus taught His disciples.

Before discuss the Great Commission, we need to be clear on some basic truths of discipleship. This is really prerequisite for involvement in the Great Commission. Before we can be making disciples we have to ask ourselves, "Am I a disciple?"

What are a few of the things that Jesus' disciples learned from Him about discipleship?

1) They learned to make the kingdom of God their priority.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matt 6:33, NKJV).

In the context, Jesus is teaching on not worrying about our physical needs. While these are important, they are not the most important things we should give attention to. As Americans, we have to fight this hard because we are constantly bombarded by advertising to want more and better stuff. Our culture teaches us to seek the “American dream” of getting a good education and a good job, owning a home, having 2.3 children, having nice things and great vacations, and retiring early and comfortably. While there is nothing wrong with any of those things in themselves, they can become a snare to keep us from the best thing which is, to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. So, to be a disciple of Jesus you must make the kingdom of God your priority above everything else in your life.

Jesus is challenging us as His disciples to put off the primary concern and pursuit of the unbeliever and to put on the primary pursuit of a follower of Christ. God’s people should know which pursuit is of greater value and has a greater reward.

The unbeliever seeks after these things because they have no assurance of anything but that which is temporal whether it be in large or small measure. Many believe that the soul perishes with the body so the need for material satisfaction is a temporary thing and should be sought after because there is nothing else.

However, we are to desire and pursue, above all, else the entering into the kingdom of God as it now is with its standards of normal Christian living and pursue kingdom living as we have been taught to pray in the model prayer. We are to be a part of the answer to our praying thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We are to store up our treasure in heaven for the day when the kingdom will be consummated, completed for all of eternity and this is done to the praise of Christ’s glorious grace.

In the end there are only two kinds of piety. That which engages itself in the theater of piety and all of the self centered exhibition that goes along with it or there is a true and genuine piety that is God centered and is proven by the way we are being seen as salt and light in the world. John Stott writes, “there are only two kinds of ambition: one

We learned in our study of the Gospel of Mark that ambition can be a dangerous thing. God insists on telling us what our ambitions are to be. We ourselves are to know the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that is eternal life. We are to love him with all our hearts. We are to glorify God in everything we do. We are to be filled with all the fulness of God. We are to help bring in the kingdom of God so that the earth is filled with the knowledge of his glory. We are to live forever in a new heaven and earth. Give up your small ambitions! Live for him! Live with God! Live now! Jesus Christ came that you Jesus Christ came that you might bring forth the glory of his name through preaching the gospel.

2) They learned that Jesus is the King of God's kingdom.

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ [God's anointed, the King], the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matt 16:15-17, NKJV). Notice that Peter didn't say, "Some people say you are the King." No, he said

with full confidence, "You are the Christ [the Messiah, the anointed of God, the Davidic King]." And this truth was given to him by the revelation of God. In

fact, "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3b, NKJV). Have you confessed that Jesus is the King? Do you truly believe and submit to the truth that He is Lord? You can only do so by the power of the Holy Spirit. The natural man will not submit his mind to this truth. But the renewed man does heartily. He willingly confesses that Jesus is the Lord, the King. He is not just a king. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the One that we owe full and unswerving allegiance to. Anything less is treasonous, cowardly, and deceitful.

3) They learned that Jesus was establishing His church.

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matt 16:18, NKJV). Jesus, the King, is building His church on the confession of faith that He is the

Savior-King. The church of King Jesus is manifestation of the kingdom of God in the present age. Local churches are really outposts of the kingdom. They are not just religious organizations that exist as one among many communities in the

“global village.” No, a church is made up of kingdom citizens who will one day live in the fully-realized and established kingdom of God. God the Father has promised to Jesus, the Davidic King, the right to rule the world: “Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall [rule] them with a rod of iron” (Ps 2:8-9b, NKJV; Cf. Rev 2:26-27).

Do you realize that you are citizen of the kingdom of Jesus? Does your life show that you are preparing for life in that eternal kingdom as you live now in the temporal spiritual kingdom rather than living for this age that will perish? This is what a disciple does.

4) They learned that to follow Jesus would entail great commitment and sacrifice on their part.

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. 28 Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom (Matt 16:24-28, NJKV).”

From this teaching of Jesus, the disciples learned four truths about discipleship:

- 1.They were to submit to the requirements of discipleship, v. 24.
2. They were to understand the reason for discipleship, vv. 25-26.
- 3.They were to realize the reward for discipleship, v. 27.
- 4.They were to remember the royal source of discipleship, v. 28.

First, they were to submit to the requirements of discipleship.

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny

Here are the terms for being a disciple of Jesus, not salvation. And that desire will be there, if one is truly saved because you have a new heart. Denying self is not self-deprivation, self-inflicted pain, or asceticism.

Denying self means to forget or to disown yourself, to disregard yourself. It means to get your attention off of yourself and your own ambitions, desires, and ideas. It has to do with denying your independence from God or your autonomy, your self-government.

One way to understand the idea of denying self is to contrast it with its opposite.

The heart of Satanism is to exalt self—doing whatever you want apart from God.

One of the goals of Satanism, according to The Satanic Bible written by Anton LaVey, is to reach your highest potential as a human being (independently of God). On the other hand, the disciple of Jesus must conform himself to the will of God and that means denying self not exalting it.

Denying self also has to do with denying the sinful aspect of self – the remnant of the old nature:

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!—²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Eph. 4:17-24 ESV

Denying self is a continuing characteristic, not a prerequisite, of the way of life within the kingdom. You don't deny yourself to become a disciple, it is part of who you are.

“Take up your cross” – This does not mean bearing some common trial or hardship. It's not just putting up with an angry boss or having a physical handicap. It's not having a difficult family member and just resigning to accept it as “my cross to bear.” What did

the disciples think of when Jesus said this? They knew it as a cruel instrument of execution used as a strong deterrent against insurrection and other serious crimes. Not many years before this, 100 men had been crucified in the area. A century earlier, Alexander Janneus had crucified 800 Jewish rebels at Jerusalem, and after the revolt that followed the death of Herod the Great, 2,000 Jews were crucified by the Roman proconsul Varus.

Many others were crucified during Jesus' lifetime. It was a common sight.

When Jesus said, "take up your cross," the disciples pictured people carrying the cross beam of their execution stake. They were walking to their death. To follow Jesus means to follow Him even if it brings hardship or death knowing that we are partakers of the suffering that Christ endured for us (1 Pet 4:12-14).

"Follow Me" – This means we imitate Jesus.

Don't run from suffering, embrace it. Follow Me and I'll show you how.

Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way.

This call to discipleship is not an obscure teaching. It is a recurring theme in Jesus' teachings. There are parallel passages of this text in Mark 8:34-38 and Luke 9:23-26. Similar teachings are found in Matthew 10:38-39; Luke 14:25-35; Luke 17:33; and John 12:25. So the first truth the disciples learned is that they were to submit to the requirements of discipleship.

Second, they were to understand the reason for discipleship, vv. 25-26.

"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

This paradox about losing one's life in order to find it illustrates the previous demand for self-denial. Life and soul are the same word in the Greek. It means

self or the real you. Isn't it your experience that living the Christian life is so much better than living as an unbeliever? However, we must be careful here because the Lord has not promised a higher quality of life in this world. On the contrary He promised tribulation and persecution which has been much more common in church history than our experience as Americans. But even if tribulation should come to us, there is still a definite inward peace and joy, regardless of our circumstances, that far exceeds anything we ever experienced apart from knowing Christ.

The text declares, a future application, that is You will find life in glory. You may experience great loss in this life as a result of following Jesus. But you will gain so much more in the life to come by inheriting eternal life. This eternal life is not merely quantity of life, though it certainly includes that. Eternal life is a far superior quality of life than we can ever imagine (Eph 3:20).

It is an eschatological focus. The loss is the eternal loss of ones soul=life=self.

In v 27 it is not just following Jesus' example, but the judgment He will exercise is an incentive to examine our lives and to see if we are truly His disciples by taking up the cross. The rewards are the results of living as disciples in this way so that Christ is honored and glorified and He is revealed through the preaching of the gospel.

As a result we will live as His disciples, perfectly in the consummated heavenly kingdom. We live it now, imperfectly, but then perfectly. It has nothing to do with earning anything or gaining merit because of how we lived.

And hear the words of the martyr Jim Elliot:

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Finally - I quote from John Piper - "If someone should ask whether having our heart in heaven will make us useless on earth, the answer is given by Jesus in the very next paragraph of the Sermon on the Mount. People who have their hearts so much in heaven that they fear no man but rejoice in persecution—such radically free and joyful people are the "salt of the earth" and "the light of the world"!!!!