

Matt 16.13-28

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Main Point – Jesus is the King who denied himself, and we must follow him.

Today self-denial is no longer a virtue, but a sin. A sin against yourself.-----

Self-denial is seen as dangerously repressive, threatening your self-realisation,(**SLIDE**) self-expression, self-fulfillment.-----

- What should the man who's tempted to have an affair do?-----

Society used to say he should deny himself for the sake of his marriage n' family.

Now our culture says his first duty is to find himself by expressing his desires, being true to himself.-----

Even if that means leaving your wife, and putting himself first.-----

- What should the woman who feels worthless do?

Society used to say she would find worth in serving others.

Now our culture encourages her to believe there's a goddess inside;

or buy new clothes, new things to feel good about herself – even if that means racking up a credit card debt.-----

Today the terms we hear are: love yourself; self-expression, self-confidence.

Yet what we see in the pages of Scripture is instead, self-surrender, self-sacrifice; self-control and self-denial.-----(**SLIDE**)

Self-denial is counter-cultural.-----

But it is what Jesus exemplifies. And what Jesus calls us to.-----

And it's worth it.-----

We're in this series through the middle chapters of Matthew's Gospel.

Jesus has continued to perform miracles, and there's been controversies with the Jewish leaders especially about Who Jesus is.-----

And we've seen people responding to Jesus in various ways.

The Pharisees n' Jewish leaders have rejected him and wanted to test, trap, and even kill him.

They've responded to Jesus with stubborn unbelief.-----

The Canaanite woman in ch15 put great faith in him.

While in 16v8 Jesus rebuked the disciples for their little faith.-----

But who is this Jesus?-----

That's our first of 4 points today, Jesus?-----(SLIDE**)**It's about 6 months before Jesus' crucifixion, and we're told in **v13** he is with his disciples in Caesarea Philippi, which is north of the Sea of Galilee.(**SLIDE**)

So Jesus has moved from the blue circle to the red on the map.-----

Maybe Jesus wanted a break from the crowds to instruct his disciples in peace.----

And Jesus asks his followers, 'Who do people say the SoM is?'

I mentioned the Son of Man reference in **Daniel 7v14** last week, who would be God's appointed King, who'd rule forever and over everyone.-----

And 'SoM' was Jesus' way of talking about himself.-----

So really he's asking, 'Who do people say I am?'

The disciples reply with some prophets' names.

Jews didn't believe in reincarnation.

But like the last chapter of the OT promised –a second Elijah would come.

Back in **Matt 11** Jesus told us that John the Baptist was that second Elijah.

The point is, the Jewish people think Jesus is a prophet, who speaks & acts with God's authority.-----

But Jesus is no mere prophet.

He's much more than that; as Peter says.

When asked, "But who do you say I am?" How does Peter reply in **v16**?-----

Familiar words to many of us... "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

In the original Greek, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.-----

And Christ in Greek, Messiah in Hebrew, mean the same thing – 'the anointed one'.

When we read **Psalm 2,(SLIDE)** we read of people standing against ‘the LORD and his Anointed One’, v2, that is his appointed King, v6.-----
 So when you hear Christ, or Messiah, think: God’s promised King and Rescuer.
 The promised King and Saviour.-----
 The one who will rule over us, and can save us.-----
 And in Psalm 2, God also says of him, ‘you are my son’.-----
 So Psalm 2 prophecies of Jesus and points us to Jesus, who is both the Messiah, and Son of God.
 Jesus is both God and man; the divine King.-----
 And Peter sees and recognizes this.
 Not because someone told him, but because God revealed the truth to him, v17.----
 And v28 promises that they will get a glimpse his real glory, as King of God’s Kingdom, in the transfiguration to follow in ch17, and in his resurrection.-----
 So Jesus is God come to rule and save.
 Jesus is the King and ruler of the world.
 And the Saviour of all who will turn to him and trust him, in repentance and faith.-----
 The question is, Is he your King?-----
 Peter confessed Jesus is the Christ, the King and Son of God, who saves.-----
 Is he your King, who has saved you?-----
 You can’t have him save you and not be your king, who calls the shots in your life.
 And scarily, Psalm 2 says (**SLIDE**) if he isn’t your king who you trust n’ submit to, then he will be the King who judges you.-----
 But blessed are all who take refuge in him.-----

And those who are saved by him, join **his church; Point 2.----- (SLIDE)**

So in v16 we have Peter’s confession of faith.
 And he speaks on behalf of the 12 disciples.-----
 Then Jesus proceeds to say v18, ‘you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church’.
 Peter’s new name means ‘rock’, in Greek petros,
 from which we get petrified – turned to stone.-----
 Yet Jesus is not primarily talking about Peter, but Peter’s faith-filled confession about Jesus.-
v18 has caused endless controversy in the church down the centuries.
 It isn’t teaching that Peter and his successors are to be the Popes ruling over the Catholic and universal church from Rome.-----
 Peter is a leader and representative of the apostles, but not the all-powerful supreme leader.-----
 The church doesn’t depend on imperfect Peter, it depends upon Christ.
 The NT makes clear that Jesus is the rock on which God’s church is built.
 The precious living stone we believe in.-----[1Pet2.4]
Eph 2.20 (SLIDE) says Christ is the cornerstone of the church.-----
 Jesus says in Matt 16.18, ‘I will build my church’.-----
 And the gates of Hades will not overcome it.-----
 Hades is the realm of the dead, and Jesus is saying, death, will not swallow up the church.
 The church will never die!
 Hell, the devil n’ death will not win against God or his church.-----

And the faith of Peter’s confession n’ declaration, is what Christ will build his church on.-----
 Proclaiming that Christ is King and Saviour will continue to save people from death, the world over.-----
 For the kingdom of heaven is opened to people as the message about Christ is proclaimed, and people believe it, and confess it for themselves.-----
 Neither the apostles nor we determine who enters heaven, but the door is opened by the spoken word.-----
 The apostles open the door to the heavenly kingdom by preaching the Gospel.
 As Peter will do after Pentecost in Acts 2, & 3,000 were saved that day.----- (Act2.41)

And the door will be closed to unrepentant sinners.-----
 So if you have repented, turned your back on ruling your own life n' been saved, you've joined Christ's church, and entered his Kingdom.-----

But you can actually help others join it too.-----

We have in the New Testament, the words of Jesus' apostles, the Gospel of Jesus.
 And whenever you share the gospel with another person you are opening the door of heaven to them.-----

What happens if people go through that door?----- They are forgiven. They are born again. They become children of God. They become members of Christ's kingdom.----
 Who will you pray for, for an opportunity to share your faith in Christ with?-----

Peter and the disciples have begun to understand who Jesus is, as the Messiah n' SoG.

Now, **v21**, they must get why he came.----

He explains what being the Christ means; what it will involve.-----

And HOW he will save us.-----

Our next point is, Jesus self-denial.-----

V21, 'From that time on Jesus began to point out to his disciples that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and scribes, be killed, and be raised on the third day.'

This is Jesus' first clear statement that he will die.

Instead of, like other kings, grabbing political or military power.

Instead of grabbing temporary glory or wealth, Jesus will deny himself, for the good of others.-----

To do the will of God and to save our souls Jesus must deny himself.-----

Jesus says it's necessary to go to Jerusalem, suffer and be killed, then be resurrected.

He must do this in order to fulfill Scripture, and God's eternal plan n' promises ----

He must do this to pay the penalty for people's sin. Our sin.-----

In **my Biology degree** at uni, we dissected and studied various animals, from snails to baby crocodiles.

And it was pretty yuck – the guts and the blood.-----

I don't really like looking at blood, not even my own.-----

In the OT period and first century, whenever you as one of God's people sinned, even unintentionally, you were to bring a ram to the tabernacle as a **Guilt Offering**.

Leviticus said you were to go to the priest, watch him slit it's throat n' slaughter the creature. **(SLIDE)** [ch5,7]

Its blood would be collected and splashed or sprinkled against the altar.

The animal's innards would be burnt on the altar.-----

This communicated to the Israelites that sin was costly.

Sin meant blood must be shed.

Sin brought death.-----

Forgiveness is costly.-----

And even me, squirmish about blood n' guts, it shouts loud and clear that my sin is costly.---

Do we get that?----- Really understand how much it costs to forgive sin?-----

For Our sin required the blood and death of our Lord Jesus.-----

For an animal can't take your place or mine.-----

Remember when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming, what he said?----**(SLIDE)**

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"-----

If the punishment for sin is death, and we've sinned and rebelled against God, then we deserve death.-----

But what does God do?----

God comes in Christ, to take our punishment for us.

He takes our place. And dies our death.-----

If we rely on him in our hearts.-----

The moment we truly believe and turn from sin, self-rule n' self-reliance, at that moment, we are saved, and reconciled to God.----- Amazing grace!!-----

But what does **Peter think** about his Christ and King suffering and dying?-----

'No Lord, Never!', **v22**-----

Do you think Jesus' response is a little harsh - "Get behind me Satan" Get out of my sight; "You've got human concerns in mind, not God's priorities."-----

Understandably, Peter doesn't want to lose his master, and he wants glory for Christ.-----

But you see Jesus' suffering & death on the cross, is so central to God's plan that to try and avoid it is to take the position of Satan.---

Remember at Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, in ch4, Satan tried to offer Jesus all the kingdoms of the world.

Satan tried to tempt Jesus to take the crown without the cross.-----

And that's what's happening here.-----

But Jesus must go to the cross for our sakes, in order to save us.

It's the will of God, and why Jesus came.

He came to die, so that we can live.-----

Jesus chooses the path of suffering, he chooses the way of the cross, the path of self-denial, for us.-----

And we must deny ourselves to follow him.-----

Final point, Denying ourselves.(SLIDE)

v24, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."-----

When you hear **self-denial, what do you think of?----**

Things we need to say NO to, right?-----

Like I should stop lazing on the couch and do the vacuuming.

Or denying yourself chocolate or ice-cream for a week, or forever if you're dairy-free.----

However, denying ourselves such things is not what Jesus is talking about.

It means to give yourself completely to Christ.

Following Jesus, isn't a call to follow a diet, but to follow him, and take up a cross.----

And taking up a cross does not mean carrying burdens or having problems; like someone saying their asthma is 'the cross they have to bear'.-----

Sometimes we can **speak about the cross as if there were no one on it.**

The way of the cross it no abstract standard or code.

Our standard is a person, and not just a good person, but the perfect person, and SoG.-----

The way of the cross and self-denial, is the way of Jesus.-----

He suffered rejection, mocking, beating, spitting, flogging; stripping, nailing, hanging, dying.

That's the cross – it's no quaint symbol of love.-----

And following Jesus means following that way.

So following Jesus not only means trusting him, but also following his pattern.-----

In v24 Jesus calls us **to die.**

Not just endure some minor discomforts;---- but die.-----

For some this may mean a call to a literal death – to persecution and martyrdom.

For us in Australia, that seems distant.-----

Yet even in our church, converts from Muslim backgrounds know what it is to have their lives threatened.

Others know that conversion means rejection by their family, and that is huge.----

But even for the rest of us, persecution is increasing.

Anti-Christian laws are pushed in Parliament.

Christians in the media, at schools, uni's & workplaces are often labeled homophobic intolerant bigots.-----

One writer says, 'For the first time... Christians are being perceived as evil... Christianity now stands for what is perceived, not only as outdated and self-righteous, but as evil.'-----

And in the face of this Jesus calls us to **die, to self**.-----

That decision begins when we first repent, for in repentance we deny self, turning-from self-reliance n' self-rule, to come under Christ's rule.-----

So often we thank God that Jesus died for us, but we instantly recoil from doing the same. I know I have.-----

But the way of the cross isn't the calling of a few. It's the stamp of every Christian's life.

To follow the way of the cross means to show the same sacrificial love Jesus showed.

The same submission to God; same willingness to suffer.

Same service of others. The same self-denial.-----

Look at **v25**, 'For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.'-----

We're to lose our life for Jesus, give up our life, our sinful wants & desires, for Jesus, and to have him instead.-----

But when we find Jesus we get a new and secure identity.

An identity that's not rooted in our work, or family, or in sex, or our gender; not rooted in our health or pleasure – whether shopping, holidaying, gaming, streaming or gardening.-----

A new life and identity in Christ where we have life to the full.-----

You want to get the most out of this fleeting life now and live-it for yourself, then you'll lose it.

If you live your life on your own terms by your own rules, you'll lose it.-----

But if you decide to rely on and live for Jesus, you will find life; real life;

fulfilling and everlasting life.-----

He drives this point home in **v26** asking: What good will it benefit you if you gain the whole world, yet forfeit your life (or soul)?-----

Don't be like the rich young ruler, who wanted his money and his riches, more than Jesus.

For he lost it all.-----

Choose Christ above everything else.-----

As **Warren Wiserbe** says, Jesus presents two approaches to life:

Deny yourself or live for yourself;

Take up your cross or ignore the cross

Follow Christ or follow the world

Lose your life for Jesus' sake, or, save your life for your own sake.

Forsake the world, or gain the world

Keep your soul or lose your soul.-----

What path are you on?-----

I commend to you Tim Chester's book on this, **(SLIDE)** 'The Ordinary Hero: Living the cross and resurrection'.

It's practical and helpful in living cross-shaped lives of self-denial.-----

But is this teaching harmful for people?-----

These days we hear a lot that many people struggle with **low self-esteem**.

Maybe you struggle with a low self-esteem, a low view of self.-----

I've heard people say low-self-esteem is the reason why there's so much depression, eating disorders, drug addiction and so forth.

And apparently the solution to low self-esteem is to remedy it with high self-esteem. People are told: "YOU need to see that you're a great person, you need to see how wonderful you are. Look at all the great things you've accomplished".

"Stop worrying about what others think and set your own standards, accomplish your goals".-

In other words, Focus on yourself.-----

Is that what people need I ask?-----

Tim Keller in this great little book, 'The Freedom of self-forgetfulness' says, No. Instead of thinking of myself more, or thinking less of myself, I must think of myself less.-----

This is true Gospel-humility, and true self-denial.-----

Self-denial isn't about thinking you're an unworthy or hopeless person, No.

You need not think less of yourself, but we need to think of ourselves less.-----

We'll be self-denying when we are self-forgetful.

We need to forget ourselves, not focus on ourselves, but focus on Christ.-----

Then we can say, 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' [Gal2.20]

We deny ourselves when we are Christ-focused, and thinking n' acting in a self-less manner.-----

Denying ourselves will mean many things:

Choosing not to stay angry at or get even with the person who hurt me and has apologized.

Patently helping someone, or getting up AGAIN to my crying baby, even when I'm tired.-----

I'll I go out of my comfort zone to love others, at church or maybe coming to church, even when I'm busy or anxious.-----

I'll give to the poor, because Christ became poor to make me rich.----

Instead of asking, How will this affect me?---- I'll seek to give and serve.-----

When the washing-up needs to be done at home, I'll remember, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.'-----

What does cross-shaped self-denial mean when my friends or work colleagues sneer at my faith, or may despise me?----

I love them, and thoughtfully share Christ with them still.-----

Christian, Jesus is the King, who denied himself for you; so deny yourself as you follow him, knowing that in that, you find life.-----

I **close** with this story about **Polycarp,(SLIDE)** a man martyred in the 2nd C.-----

When the officer called him to renounce Christ Polycarp declared:

'86 years have I served him and he has done me no wrong.

Can I revile my King that saved me?'

The officer threatened to have him burned, to which Polycarp replied:

'You try to frighten me with fire that burns for an hour, and you forget the fire of hell that never goes out.'-----

Some school children were told this story and they thought Polycarp was an idiot.

"You've only got one life" they said, "You've got to hold onto it – it's precious".-----

Was Polycarp an idiot?-----

Let's pray.