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Following Jesus; Matt 16:24-28
GPBC
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Introduction – If you recall from last week’s sermon on the previous verses, 21-23, Peter was having major difficulty grasping the realities of the gospel. Although he had a firm grip on who Jesus was, as he stated in v16, he couldn’t grasp Jesus’ mission. When Peter rebuked Jesus and said to Him, “This shall never happen to you,” he was referring to Jesus’ prophecy of His coming suffering and murder. Peter could not imagine Jesus suffering and being executed. So he attempted to change Jesus’s mind and therefore remove the cross – do away with this talk of being killed. You are the Son of God. Take over. Wipe out Roman rule. Straighten out the religious leaders. Suffering and dying is not going to save us. Peter didn’t have the categories to connect suffering with God’s plan. ill. Phil 1

The problem with Peter’s rationale is that he was thinking totally in terms of political rule, earthly kingdoms, and temporary salvation. His mind was on the things of man rather than the things of God. He didn’t realize that underneath that thinking to do away with suffering and death was satanic influence. The mind set on the things of man is the backdoor where Satan enters to do his work. If Jesus doesn’t die for you, there is no hope for you. Peter was only thinking of the here and now and not the hereafter, the things of man and not the things of God.

So Jesus tells His disciples they not only need a Godward perspective of His suffering and death, but they need a Godward perspective on their own life and suffering and death. Faith in God requires that we cease thinking in temporary, earthly terms of safety and comfort and deliverance and begin thinking in eternal, everlasting terms of life and salvation. We walk by faith and not by sight. We live by the things of God and not the things of man. God sent Jesus to save us forever, to deliver us, not from temporary bondage or oppression, but from eternal bondage and oppression. And if we can come to grips with the nature of Jesus’ mission, we will begin to clearly see the path that He has blazed for us to follow.

- I. The Way of the Savior is the Way of the Believer (v24)
 - a. This is Jesus’ gospel presentation. This is Jesus’ gospel appeal. It doesn’t look at all like the neat little booklets we produce with the

colorful designs and the 3 easy ABC steps. His gospel tract does have 3 points but they are deny, die, and follow.

- i. I'm going to be raised. I am life and resurrection. Eternal life and glory are found in Me, but I don't receive the crown without the cross, and you won't either.
- b. "If anyone would come after Me" – Do you want to go to heaven? Do you want to see God? If you are going to follow Jesus, just know there will be a price to pay, you will need to stop and count the cost. If Jesus' life included suffering and death on His way to glory, and we are following Him, then it stands to reason that our lives as believers will also include suffering and death on our way to be with Him in glory as well.
 - i. The path to heaven is a bloody trail that first our Savior trod.
- c. First step. "let him deny himself" – what does it mean to deny yourself? The Bible speaks of our old self and our new self. The old self is our life apart from Christ. The old self is our sinful, fallen nature. The old self is when we only lived for self. When our world revolved around us. When everything we did was for our own gain and advantage and pleasure in this life. Our old self loved our sin. Our old self is our selfish, self-centered life.
 - i. Jesus says, "To follow Me, you've got to deny the old self, the old man. You must turn from pursuing this world, and your sin, and your self, and pursue God and His glory."
 - ii. This is the gospel message of repentance. A turning from me to God.
- d. Second step. "and take up his cross" – to this group of Jewish disciples, that word cross carried a special sting. That's the way Romans executed criminals, and it was the most excruciating, humiliating way to die.
 - i. Jesus' gospel presentation is no bait and switch tactic. He comes right out with straightforward clarity and vivid description of what following Him entails. He suffered, and so will we. Some of us will not suffer to the degree that Jesus suffered physically. Some of us will suffer to some degree physically as Jesus suffered, but as Paul spoke in Acts 14:22 "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

- ii. III. Rehema
 - iii. III. As a pastor, I've been misunderstood, accused, opposed, criticized, hated. The deepest sting and hurt though has been when the fallback on me has fallen upon my family. I'm not whining or complaining or asking for pity. I'm just stating the facts. If you follow Jesus, you will have a cross to bear.
 - e. Third step. "and follow Me" – the word follow there means to start following and keep following. This is the gospel command to believe. The call to endure, to persevere. It won't be easy at times. It won't make sense at times. It will hurt at times. But keep following. Keep believing.
 - f. Now, anyone who hears this call to follow that entails denying and dying has to wonder and question, "Why would I do that?" Right? Our human, things of man thinking, wants to say, just like Peter, "This shall never happen." Why would we follow Jesus if it is going to cost so much?
- II. Three Reasons to Count the Cost and Follow Jesus (vv25-27)
 - a. Which life and which suffering is worth it? (v25)
 - i. There are only two paths. You have the things of man and the things of God. The way of the world and the way of God.
 - ii. On both paths there is something to gain and something to lose. There is a kind of life and a kind of suffering on both paths. Which one is worth it.
 - iii. On the path of the things of man you strive to find life and happiness and satisfaction and living now, but in the end you lose everything – you suffer loss of everything forever.
 - iv. On the path of the things of God you give up this world and its trappings, this life and the desires and pleasures of sin for the gospel, but in the end you find all that your soul desires and all that satisfies and pleases forever.
 - v. The life here is short-term and comes with eternal consequences. The life in Christ has short-term costs but comes with eternal bliss.
 - b. The end of life proves which path is worth the suffering (v26)

- i. You have to have an eternal perspective or the things of man thinking will overshadow the things of God thinking, and when you arrive at your eternal destination, it will be too late.
 - ii. 1st question. What have you really gained if you get everything you want in this life to find that it cost you your soul?
 - iii. 2nd question. The only ransom for the soul that sins is the death of Christ on your behalf. We have nothing to offer to God for our salvation except our sin which makes it so necessary!
 - c. The Judgment is Sure and Certain (v27)
 - i. A promise for the believer. Your suffering will not go unnoticed.
 - ii. A warning for the unbeliever. Your sin will not go unpunished.
- III. Proof for the Promise (v28)
 - a. To make sure the disciples know that Jesus keeps His Word, keeps His promises. To ensure the disciples realize, yes, He is indeed the Son of Man. So what He says will be, will be. Jesus issues this proof to reinforce the promise of eternal life for those who follow Him.
 - b. Some, not all, of the disciples will be eyewitness to Christ inaugurating His kingdom before they die, and then they will know with unqualified certainty that to follow Jesus is worth it all.
 - c. That started with the Transfiguration in the very next text, for which only Peter, James, and John were witness. Peter says of this very episode in 2 Pet 1 that he and James and John were “eyewitnesses of His majesty.”
 - d. This continued in the post-resurrection appearances of Christ, of which Judas was absent. Thomas was absent the first appearance and didn’t believe until He saw the Lord for himself and then declared “My Lord and my God!”
 - e. Jesus left absolutely no doubt that if you let go of this life and follow Him, you will find life everlasting and fullness of joy when He returns.

Conclusion – Paul put it this way in Gal 2:20 before he was beheaded by roman emperor Nero – I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. Jim Elliot put it this way before he was speared to death by

the Acua tribe while taking the gospel to them – He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.