

Matthew 16:21-28

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[0 : 00] So, turn with me to Mark chapter 16, and we're finishing off in verse 21 to 28. Let me explain what I mean. How we understand Jesus, and what it means to follow Jesus, will affect what it means to follow Jesus.

There's lots of different views out there as to who Jesus is. There's the inclusive Christ. He's the one that affirms everyone and everything.

And if we follow an inclusive Christ, we'll never have to stop doing anything. Anything that other Christians might say is wrong. Because we're following an inclusive Christ. Then there's the therapeutic Christ. And the therapeutic Christ is about me and my needs.

And if we're following the therapeutic Christ, we'll basically hop from church to church until we find a church that massages my needs. Then there's the prosperity Christ. And the prosperity Christ wants all his followers to live like kings and queens.

And if we follow a prosperity Christ, well there won't be room for any suffering in the Christian life.

And we'll use that Christ as a means to the end of prosperity. That's health or wealth.

[1 : 47] A kind of genie in a bottle. So that he can produce what I want. Maybe that's a husband, what I want. Maybe it's a new job or happiness.

What kind of Christ will we have shapes what kind of Christian we will be. And there are many views of Christ out there.

But which is the real one? And that's why this passage is so very helpful. You'll remember last week that in chapter 16 and verse 16, Peter finally gets who Jesus is.

Look what it says. Look at verse 16. Who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, you are the Christ, the son of the living God. But then as now, there were lots of different ideas about what kind of Christ this Jesus is.

And that's why in verse 20, Jesus strictly charges the disciples. He says, don't tell anyone that he was a Christ. Is that a surprise? You would expect him, we would expect Jesus to do the exact opposite.

[2 : 52] Tell everyone about him. It's brilliant, Peter, you've worked it out. Now go and tell who I am. Not at all, says Jesus. Jesus says, you need to be clear. You need to be clear who I am and what it means for me to be the Christ.

Before you start telling anyone. And so four times in Matthew, Jesus spells out what it means for him to be the Christ. And what will happen to him as the Christ.

And this is the second time. 16, 21, 23. And he makes it clear that he will be a crucified Christ. So my first point is this.

You've got to notice that the Christ must die and then live. That's the first point. Christ must die and then live. That's 21 to 23.

Look down at verse 21. And notice how Jesus begins to fill that out for his disciples. What kind of Christ he will be. And just look how detailed it is. He's predicting what will happen to him.

[3 : 50] And maybe you're here this morning and you're not yet convinced of who Jesus is. Well it's an extraordinary thing isn't it? How precise he is in his predictions.

Verse 21, he will go to Jerusalem. And there in that city he will suffer many things. And he will suffer many things on the hands of the authorities. And he will suffer so much that he will be killed.

But after three days he will be raised to life. And not only will he be raised to life. But he will be glorified. Go on to verse 27. And you will see that Jesus one day will return in glory.

In the glory of his father. So Jesus couldn't be clearer, could he? He's saying that he must die and then live. And the order is crucially important.

Death leads to life and glory. But without death. There would be no life and no glory. Put it another way.

[4 : 52] No pain, no palm. No thorns, no throne. No gall, no glory. No cross, no crown. You see, Jesus is not primarily an inclusive Christ.

Or a therapeutic Christ. Or a prosperity Christ. Although when he's understood correctly. There are elements of truth in those three things. But he's primarily a crucified Christ.

But Peter, he won't accept that, will he? Look what he tells in verse 22. Peter took him aside. And began to rebuke him.

Saying, far be it from you, Lord. Never, Lord. See the contradiction in those terms? Never, Lord. You can't say that, can you? If you're calling him Lord. You can't say never to him. Because for Peter, the Christ was to be a success. Not a sufferer. For Peter, the Christ was to be a king in control.

[5 : 58] Not a criminal on a cross. So for Jesus to say that he would be killed in Jerusalem. That's totally off message. And that's not what people want to hear, Jesus. But before Peter can go any further, Jesus turns on Peter.

Look at verse 23. But he turned and said to Peter, get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance. You are a stumbling block to me, initially. For you're not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

I don't know if you've been rebuked recently. But as rebukes go, as telling-offs go, this is right up there, isn't it?

It's one of the harshest. I mean, isn't it a little bit over the top? For Jesus to call his friend, his best friend, Peter, Satan. Well, in this case, not at all, because Jesus has heard this voice before.

The voice that has come to him and said, Jesus, you can have the crown without the cross. You can have the palm without the pain. You can have the glory without the gall.

[7 : 05] Do you remember back in chapter 4 of Matthew? Where's this voice that Jesus is here before? It's the voice of the devil. And do you remember how Satan had tempted Jesus, and his whole plan was you can bypass the cross.

You don't need to go that route. You don't need to be the crucified Christ. You can get the glory without that. And it's the same temptation, and it comes this time out of the lips of Peter.

And so Peter has gone from being a rock, verse 18, to being verse 23. Well, the ESV calls it a hindrance, but it's a stumbling block. He goes from being a rock to a stumbling block.

There's a play on the words. And you see what causes Peter to resist the idea of a crucified Christ. It's there at the end of chapter 23. Why is Peter so adamant this can't be?

It's because he sets his mind, not on the things of God, but on the things of man, the things of human beings. You see, thinking about glory and honour and myself and success, that comes very naturally to me.

[8 : 15] Success I crave. Suffering I hate. And as long as we set our minds and hearts on the things of men, a crucified Christ will make no sense to us.

But when we see it from God's perspective, it makes complete sense. So let's pause for a moment.

Let's think about and try and consider it from God's perspective, that Christ must suffer and die.

It's not because God is some kind of cosmic masochist who derives pleasure from pain. It's not because God is into cosmic child abuse, as is sometimes blasphemously said.

No, it is because God takes sin, our rebellion, our iniquity, the bent that's within us towards wrong, our transgression, where we blatantly say to him, I don't want you running my life, I'm going to run my life my own way.

God takes that very seriously indeed. And God says that my sin is so serious that it deserves death, but in his great kindness, God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, make a plan in love.

[9 : 36] That God the Son would come to earth and take on humanity. And he would be called Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins, and he will be the Christ.

Jesus, the Christ. And as we sang and as we confessed, this morning, Jesus, the Son of God, in his humanity, did suffer, and was killed, not for his own sin, but for the sin of all who would trust him.

And he died, and yet three days later, the grave could not hold him. And he is raised by the Father to vindicate all that he has done on the cross.

The resurrection is the receipt that the price has been paid. And 40 days later, he ascends to glory where he remains today. And so what about us?

How do you look at Jesus, the Christ, from man's perspective, or from God's? You see, if we look at him from man's perspective, his death is, well, at best confusing, and at worst, totally irrelevant.

[10:43] And maybe you're here this morning, and Jesus seems very, well, little, and insignificant to you. And that's because you are looking at him from a human perspective, and your mind is set on the things of man.

And so let me plead with you to change your mindset, to set your mind on the things of God. And when we do that, what we discover is we love nothing more than Christ.

And we're not embarrassed by a crucified Saviour. No, we delight in it, we glory in the fact that God made man die in our place.

And we love the fact that even today, as we gather to worship, Jesus stands in glory, and he has on his hands and on his feet scars.

Scars of the crucifixion. And we'll see that this pattern of death and then life is one that his followers have to follow.

[11:49] And that brings us to the second point. Christians must die and then live. Christians must die and then live is verses 24-28.

And so Jesus has just made very clear what will happen to him and now he makes equally clear what will happen to all those that follow him. One of the many wonderful things that I love about Jesus is that he doesn't bury the small print.

You know how advertisers give the big sound to you and then on the bottom there's the clauses and sub-clauses and the get-up clauses particularly on radio, isn't it? You know when you listen to an advert on the radio?

And then it's, you know, mortgage your home could be repossessed. It's said very, very quickly. But Jesus doesn't do that. He's wonderfully clear to you. He's totally straight with you. He says to you this morning, this is what it means to follow me.

And what does it mean to be a Christian? Verse 24 is a great summary. Verse 24. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

[13:01] Here's the deal. You want to follow Christ? You follow a Christ who died and that means we too have to die. That's what Jesus means by taking up our cross.

We've tended to trivialise that, haven't we? We were saying in our culture where we've all got our crosses to bear. That may be a bad knee. It may be an ingrown toenail.

It may be an arch kind of coming to stay. But put it this way. If we were in the first century, Palestine, and I met you tomorrow and you were carrying a cross, I wouldn't see you again.

You wouldn't be carrying that cross on Tuesday. You'd be dead. Because a man carrying his cross was on a one-way journey to death. A one-way ticket.

And that's the journey, isn't it, that the Lord Jesus took for my sake and for yours. And that is the journey that you and I must take if we want to follow Jesus. Jesus. For some people, that has meant, and it will mean, a literal physical death.

[14:12] There are brothers and sisters of ours across the world who this week, this is what it's meant for them, it's meant that they faced physical death. We know, don't we, that more Christians were martyred in the 20th century than in the previous 19th centuries combined before.

But even if it's not physical death, and it probably won't be for us, it must be a daily spiritual death. That's what Jesus means.

He says that we must deny ourselves. Taking up our cross means that we will put ourselves to death. So the one thing that Jesus really hates, the one thing Jesus really hates is he hates people living for themselves.

That's what sin is. Sin is living to myself. And Jesus came to die for sin. And he longs for us not to live for self, but to live for him and for others.

He longs for us to die daily to self-interest, to selfishness and to safety.

[15:32] 510 years ago this year, one of the finest pastors that this world has ever seen was born in northern France in a little town called Maillard. His name was John, John Calvin.

He's a pastor who had a remarkable ministry. He wrote many books, didn't he? His most famous is The Institute of Christian Religions. It's about 2,000 pages long.

It's one of the finest Christian books ever written. One of the finest books ever written. And right in the middle of that book is one sentence that begins like this. The sum of the Christian life is one of the finest Christian pastors who's written some of the best books ever written telling us that the sum of the Christian life is something.

So I think it's a good idea for you to listen. Here's how the sentence goes. I wonder what you'd say. The sum of the Christian life is self-denial. Self-denial.

Self-denial. That's exactly what Jesus means here when he says we are to take up our cross and to follow him. Sin is love of myself and my opinions and my time and my pleasure and my rights and my career and my money and my feelings and myself.

[16:52] Do you think the spirit of our age is captured brilliantly isn't it by our obsession with taking selfies of ourselves on an iPhone.

Selfies on an iPhone. I don't take selfies but I do have an iPhone. But I'm still very very selfish.

Selfish. And following Jesus means denying myself. Denying my self-interest. So let me ask you this morning have you done that?

Have you denied yourself and taken up your cross and committed to following Jesus? And can I say if you've never done that Jesus would say to you this morning you are not yet a Christian.

You're not yet a Christian. Don't shoot me. I am not saying that you're not yet a Christian. Jesus is saying you are not a Christian.

[18:00] And if you haven't done that you're not a Christian. And today would be a wonderful day wouldn't it? A great day to start doing verse 24. But I guess many of us most of us the vast majority of us here have done that wonderfully and we need to ask this question we need to ask am I doing that?

Because this command of verse 24 is not just a one-off decision it's not just a decision I made at camp 20 odd years ago or a decision I made at university. No, this is the pattern of daily discipleship of daily following.

And for different people it's going to apply differently isn't it this morning? for some people it's going to mean making a stand where you've not made a stand.

For some people it's going to mean not getting drunk. For others it's going to mean not entering into a relationship or breaking off a relationship with someone who is not a Christian.

who's that boyfriend and girlfriend? So maybe for some it's going to mean radical action about what you look at on your computer.

[19:23] For others it's going to mean stopping being over-sensitive to what other people think of me. So I'm living in a state of wounded pride I think this probably is where it kicks in for me.

Always wanting to know what other people think what is other people's opinion of me but it doesn't matter. It really does not matter. For others it's going to mean forgiving someone who has hurt us very differently.

For some of us it's going to be very deliberately humbling ourselves before God and saying I haven't got it all together when I'm desperate to show everyone I have.

The sum of the Christian life is self-denial. Maybe you think it's really hardcore it's pretty gloomy it's pretty negative and it's certainly not what psychologists tell you to do and yet this is the way to life because just as death led to life to Christ so too death leads to life for Christians.

So let me show you the 7th verse of 25, 26 and 27 and they all begin with the same word or at least they should. They all begin with the word for and Jesus is giving us three reasons why it makes sense for you this morning to die yourself and follow him.

[20:45] So the first reason is in verse 25 where it says for whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

And so you know how to catch a monkey don't you? How do people catch a monkey? Hunters, they hollow out a coconut and they put peanuts inside the coconut. And the monkey comes along and he puts his hand into the coconut shell.

And as he does that he makes a fist to grab hold of the peanuts. And at that point the monkey is trapped. Because he loves the peanuts so much that he will not let go of them. And the hunter at the other end can pull the monkey in.

just like that with our lives. As long as you grab hold of life, you're trapped.

We're so excited, aren't we, by peanuts, by the things of this world, by repetition, by money, by all sorts of things. We're so trapped by them.

[21 : 54] We're so glad we've got them, we just will not let them go. But it's when we do let go, then we're free.

We find our lives by giving them away. Here's the paradox. If we try to save our lives, we'll lose it. But if we lose our lives for Jesus and for others, if we die to ourselves, then we find them.

Find them. you see, pouring out our lives for others is what we were made for. We weren't made to live for ourselves, we were made to live for God and for others.

Our lives are not for holding on to, they're for giving away. And when we do that, yes, it will be painful, I know that, and it may involve suffering and sacrifice, but it will come back to us a hundred fold.

And what if it's not just peanuts that are on offer? What if it is serious money? What if it is fantastic sex? What if it is worldwide fame? What if it is what you dream of?

[23 : 02] Well, look at the second reason Jesus gives in verse 26. For what will it profit a man or a woman or a boy or a girl if you gain the whole world and you forfeit, you lose your own soul?

Or what shall a man or a woman or a boy or a girl give in return? For their soul. So Jesus says to this morning, he says, get the wane scales out, you know, the old wane scales, and put on one side of the wane scales, put the whole world on the wane scales, clearly in exaggeration.

Not even the richest men, not even the Simon Cowell's or the Sultan of Brunei's, not even them have got the whole world, have they? They've got a lot, but they haven't got the whole world. Let's just say you've got the whole world, and you put it on one side of the wane scales, and then on the other side, you put your soul, your never dying soul, your life.

life. And Jesus says your soul is that valuable. Your soul, your life is so precious, so vulnerable, but whatever you gain, if the price is your soul, then it's too high.

I want you to realise this morning your value. Some of you don't think you're very valuable at all, do you? But realise your value. and realise that the way for you to live, really live, is by forfeiting the world, not by forfeiting your soul.

[24 : 37] Grasp with me just how valuable is one human soul, your soul, your children's soul, the souls of the people that you're at school with tomorrow, the souls of the people you are at work with tomorrow.

And so the way to live now is to die now. And that life which starts now goes on forever, and we see that in the third reason that Jesus gives the following him in verse 27.

Verse 27, the son of man is going to come with all his angels in the glory of his father, and then he will repay each person according to what he's done.

If that wasn't the case, if that wasn't true, it wouldn't really matter what we decide to do with Jesus. First school makes very little sense with exams, but it would make no sense without exams, would it?

If there's no assessment at the end of it. But there will be an exam at the end. And deep down we know that, don't we? You know that. One day the Christ who died and was raised will come back, and this time he will not come again in humility as a baby that no one knows about.

[25 : 49] The shepherds have to hunt for, and wise men have to hunt for. No, when he comes he will come as a king in glory. And when he does he will repay each person according to what they've done.

Now don't miss the encouragement. Don't miss the encouragement for those of you who are seeking to die to self, and I know some of you are, to follow Jesus now. You can look back in your life and you can see decisions that have been costly for you.

Maybe it's a relationship that you didn't go down because you knew to follow Christ you had to go another way. Well, Jesus knows that. He knows the decisions you've made. He knows the hard decisions you're making.

Jesus knows the money that you are giving away sacrificially. Jesus knows the way that you are serving sometimes when you really wish you didn't have to. And maybe this is why you're feeling weary or be encouraged.

Look what it says. Then at 27, one day he will repay you for those things. The greeting wrote, Sunday morning, I just need another half an hour in bed.

[27 : 00] You drag yourself into the shell and you get out of the house and you get here and you greet people with a broad smile. Well, Jesus knows that because he rewards that.

the missionary martyr, Jim Elliot, he put it so well that it turns out he actually stole it from Matthew Henry. But the famous line, he is no fool to give up what you cannot keep, to gain what you cannot lose.

He is no fool to give up what you cannot keep, to gain what you cannot lose. Do you get it? And the world will call you a fool, won't they?

They will call you a fool. Some of them think you are a fool. But on that day when Jesus comes back, it will be clear that you have not been foolish to follow him. And you have not been foolish to give your life away for others.

But for those who have not followed him, and that may be some of you, the regret, the reality will be very different. There will only be regret and anguish.

[28 : 14] As people realise in their thousands the foolish bargain that they made, trying to save their lives only on that day to lose them totally. Trying to gain the world or at least a tiny part of it, only to forfeit their own never dying soul.

What kind of Christ we have will shape what kind of Christian we will be. And only when we have a crucified Christ will we live crucified lives.

But please, please don't forget what that death led to for Jesus. And what that death will lead to for us.

Led to life. Life now, life forever. let's pray.