

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Winning by Losing: The Paradox of Discipleship

Scripture: Matthew 16:24-28

Code: 2321

Our text for this morning as we look together at the Word of God is Matthew 16, verses 24 through 28...Matthew 16, verses 24 through 28.

Then said Jesus to His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. For what does it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul, for the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels and then He shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, there are some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom.

Now this passage strikes right at the heart of the matter of discipleship. We could entitle it, "Winning by losing: the paradox of discipleship."

It really strikes a death blow as well to the current trend that I see in Christianity. Much of contemporary Christianity and church life is bent on self-centered, self-circumferenced consumption. There are many people who wish to identify themselves with Jesus Christ. They wish to call themselves Christians and they're whole perspective toward it is that they are in it for what they can get out of it. Christianity has somehow been redefined as "get." And Jesus has been turned into a utilitarian genie, who must jump at our ever whim when we rub the magic lamp.

There are some among the charismatics, for example, who say that Jesus is here to make you healthy, wealthy and happy. And they tell us Jesus wants you well. Or, Jesus wants you rich. And if you aren't all those things, then you're not demanding your rights or you don't have enough faith to appropriate what's yours because Christianity is designed for you to get everything you need and want.

And even the fundamentalists and evangelicals through the years have been guilty of propagating a Jesus who is offered to men as a panacea for everything. Wouldn't you like to be happy? Wouldn't you like to have abundant life? Wouldn't you like to know peace? Wouldn't you like all your problems solved? It will make you a better salesman and a better athlete, etc., etc. And we advertise the "get" without the "give," the "gain" without the "pain."

And then there are the self-esteem cultists and the self-image cultists who tell us that Jesus came to boost our self-esteem and our self-image. They have fallen victim to the Narcissism, the self-love of our contemporary society.

But I submit to you that to view coming to Jesus Christ as simply to get is to prostitute the divine intention. To come to Jesus Christ, yes, is to receive and keep on receiving forever and ever. But there's pain before the gain and there is a cross before the crown and there is suffering before the glory. And there is sacrifice before the reward. And I believe that's what our Lord is teaching us in this critical passage.

We are called to win by losing. That's the heart of discipleship. We are called to give up before we gain. It isn't as if Jesus had just said this for the first time. Back in chapter 10 He had told the same disciples the same thing in a little different terms, but the same lesson. For example, in 10:37, He said, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." In other words, you...you need to be willing to give that up. "He that love a son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life shall lose it and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it."

But it isn't only Matthew that records this principle. Mark does as well. In chapter 10 and verse 21, Jesus beholding the rich young ruler loved him and said to him, "One thing thou lackest, go thy way, sell whatever thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven and come take up the cross and follow Me."

We find the same thing repeated at least three times, or four times, in the gospel of Luke. Luke gives us the very same teaching from our Lord. In chapter 14, verse 25, "There went great multitudes to Him and He turned and said to them, If any man come to Me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

And John wouldn't be left out either in this crucial lesson. And so we hear our Lord say in John 12, "Verily, verily I say unto you, except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

So, what you have here in Matthew 16 is an oft-repeated principle. And I've only suggested maybe half of the places in the gospels where it appears, to say nothing of the myriad times it is rearticulated by the writers of the epistles. And even the Apostle Paul in the fourteenth chapter of Acts and verse 22 says, "It is with much tribulation that we enter the Kingdom."

You see, this was one of Jesus' recurring themes. There are some things that our Lord especially taught, some specially loved truths which He went back to again and again and again. We see them over and over in the Scripture. And we will never understand salvation and we will never understand discipleship unless we understand this principle...so oft repeated. The principle is winning by losing.

Now let's look at the text. And I want us to see as it unfolds for us, the principle, then the paradox, then the parousia and finally the preview. First of all, look at the principle as it's articulated in verse 24. "Then Jesus said unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."

Now this isn't new to them. I just read you chapter 10 where He articulated that. And if you go earlier into Matthew, you will remember there's a passage where some wouldbe disciples came along and Jesus said to them, in effect, "You're not coming on the right terms, the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." And we note from that passage that they didn't follow Him anymore.

He has talked about the sacrifice of discipleship. He has talked about the cost of discipleship. He has talked about the pain involved, the severed relationships, the hostility, the reproach, the rejection, the willingness to suffer. And here He reiterates it, this time to His disciples.

Why, if He's taught them before? Because it is clear to Him at this juncture that they have somehow missed the lesson. It's one thing to teach a lesson, it's something else to have it learned. And at this point, it is apparent that they haven't really learned it. And I'll show you why.

They were raised in the glory concept of Messiah. They expected the Messiah to arrive, overthrow the Roman yoke, dethrone the Herods, establish the Kingdom with all of its glory. And they were waiting all the while for that to happen. And it was very difficult for them to handle the fact that Jesus didn't seem to do that. And that even when He was given the opportunity to be made a king, He rejected it and fled from such attempt. And instead of the people falling at His feet, they misunderstood Him. And instead of the leaders who were the Messianic experts saying, "This is the one," they hated Him and sought to kill Him. And it didn't seem to be going the way they had been told it would.

But as they spent this twoandahalf years with Jesus up to this point, His miracles couldn't be explained humanly, His words couldn't be explained humanly, and they had come, finally, by the work of God in their hearts to the affirmation that in spite of what they saw not happening, He was in fact the Messiah. And so they were willing to wait until it happened. But if you look at verse 16, you see the affirmation of where they were. Peter speaking in reference to all of them, giving the consensus says, "Thou art the Christ the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And that's a great thing that they've

finally come to. We know You're the Messiah, the Son of the living God, one in essence with God, the only God who lives, not a dumb idol. You are the Messiah.

In response to that, Jesus said in verse 18, "I will build My church and the gates of Hades which is death, that's simply a term used by the Hebrews for death and death will not hold it in, the gates of death. If they take My life, I will rise. If they take your lives, you will rise. If they martyr those in the church, they will rise for death itself, to say nothing of anything in life, cannot contain the power of the church." So, this is a glorious moment for them on the dusty road in Caesarea, Philippi and the northeastern most corner of Palestine, way away from all of the trouble. This is a great moment for them because they say You're the Messiah and He says "I'll build My church." And all they can see in those terms is it's coming, He's going to continue to collect His redeemed people and the gates of Hades aren't going to prevail.

And then He goes a step further in verse 19 and says to them, "And not only that, I'm going to give you the keys to the Kingdom. I'm going to give you the authority on earth for the Kingdom which is in heaven." And it literally says in the Greek, "Whatever you permit on earth shall have already been permitted in heaven. And whatever you forbid on earth shall have already been forbidden in heaven." In other words, you will act in behalf of heaven. When you say something is permitted, you're in agreement with heaven. When you say something is forbidden, you're in agreement with heaven. How so? Because heaven is in the process of revealing itself to you.

Back to verse 17. "You didn't learn it by flesh and blood but from the Father." And so here they're finding out that heaven is going to be revealing the truth and they will act in behalf of heaven as the authority on earth. And all they can see is the Messiah in His glory and the gates of hell not prevailing, and the assembled people being gathered and they with the authority and the keys and they see themselves as the heroes of the Kingdom. It's a great moment. They've waited a long time for this.

And then Jesus says in verse 21, "By the way, I have to go to Jerusalem to be killed." And they never heard the rest of the statement. All they heard was "be killed." "And Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him, saying, Hey, you're not in sync with the Messianic program. Be it far from me, Lord, this shall not be unto Thee." This can't be. "And He turned to him and He said, Get thee behind Me, Satan." You see, He recognized the attacker. Peter was just a tool. The attacker was Satan who had been trying to divert Him from the cross since the first temptation in the wilderness when he tried to get Him to take over the kingdoms of the world and miss the cross. He knew where it was coming from, it was the same old thing.

And then He makes this very important statement at the end of verse 23, it's a categorical statement, it puts this kind of attitude in a category. "You're an offense to Me, for you are thinking not the things that are of God but those that are of men." He says, "Peter, that offends Me because you're thinking

the way men think." And how do men think? Men think about the gain without the pain, the crown without the cross, the glory without the suffering, the reward without the sacrifice. That's the way men think. And you're thinking like men think, not like God. God says the gain comes through the pain and the glory comes through the suffering. It has to. There's no other way because you cannot put God, whether incarnate in the Son or alive in the hearts of His people, in the midst of an antiGod society without there being some suffering, without a reproach, without hostility. That's why 2 Timothy 3:12 says, "All that will live godly in this present age shall suffer persecution." And He says to Peter, you don't understand God's thinking, you put holiness in the midst of an unholy society and there has to be a reaction.

And so, because of the category at the end of verse 23 comes the teaching in verse 24. And it starts with the word "then." And "then" means right then. He says, I've got to get this straight with you, and right then He says to His disciples...and the other gospels tell us there was also a crowd collected as well. And He says, "Look, let's go back to that first lesson when I called you and told you to leave everything, your nets, your family, your livelihood, your life style, your home and come and follow Me and I would make you fishers of men. Let's go back to that original abandonment of everything to follow Me and let Me remind you that if any man will come after Me, he will deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." There's no gain without pain.

Now, what does He mean "if any man will come after Me?" Basically just this, if you want to be a Christian, if you want to follow Jesus, if you want to be a disciple, if you want to come to Christ...it's an evangelistic word here. You say, "Well, then why is He giving it to the disciples?" Well, the evangelistic thrust goes to the multitude. But it also has a tremendous message to the disciples because it's easy for us having understood that total commitment to the Lordship of Christ and submission to Him when we got in, to eventually begin to try to take back some of our own rights. Have you noticed that? And follow our own will and do what we want and avoid the reproach and avoid the hostility and avoid the persecution and avoid the intimidation by just clamming up and not really representing Christ in the world, or by not understanding that this kind of thing is supposed to happen. And so, He says first of all this is not only a word for those who need to know how to come to Christ to start with, but this is a word for those who having come may have forgotten what they said they came for in the beginning. So if you come to follow Jesus Christ, you come on His terms.

And the disciples, like us, needed a reaffirmation of those terms. You know, even Christians...boy, one thing goes wrong in your life, you get a little flack over here, or over there, and some people start to disintegrate, like: What? Is God abandoning me? Not so.

Now, how do you come to Christ? How is a person...what is a person's attitude to be? In the saving transaction as a person comes to Christ, with what attitude must they come? Here it is, three things: selfdenial, cross bearing and loyal obedience. Verse 24, look at the first, selfdenial, "Let him deny himself...let him deny himself."

Now that's where it all starts. Now the word "deny" means to disown, let him disown himself. It could be translated, "Let him refuse any association or companionship with himself." Now you say, "That's hard, it's hard to refuse companionship with me because I'm always around when I'm around." And I understand that. Now He's not just talking about your selfconscious self. What He's talking about is self as equal to the flesh.

In other words, you have to come to the point where you deny that you have the capacity to save yourself, or you as on your own have the capacity to be what God wants you to be. Or, frankly, you have in yourself the ability to be anything good at all. You've got to deny that. In order to come to Jesus Christ, you must affirm that there is in your flesh, Romans 7:18, dwelling no good thing. You can't please God in the flesh. You can't redeem yourself in the flesh. You can't be anything to speak of before God in the flesh. It is a selfless perspective that says I am nothing, I can contribute nothing to my worth. I can continue nothing to my redemption. And the selfesteem cult that goes around saying we've got to build up people's self esteem is taking them the opposite way that the message of the Bible does because the more you love yourself, the less likely you are to need a Savior.

As Peter, who denied Jesus Christ, said, "I know not the man," so must you say regarding yourself. I disown myself completely. That's the first essential in the Christian life. That's the way you come to Christ and that's the way we live. We go on denying our humanness, denying the expression of the flesh. You see, the heart must see itself in sin. The heart must see itself in damnation. The heart must see itself judged and condemned to hell and knowing that in itself it can do nothing to change that. In desperation, it reaches out and seeks a rescuer outside itself. And that rescuer is Jesus Christ. Self is cast away and Christ enters. "And so I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but...what?...Christ lives in me." It is subjecting oneself to the resources, subjecting oneself to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in an utter rejection of self sufficiency.

And I'm drawn again to that word of the Apostle Paul which we studied in our series on worship in which he says, "We are those who worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh." That's the hardhitting message. You come to Christ, you come on His terms. What are His terms? Selfdenial. He said that.

As a refresher, go back to the fifth chapter of Matthew and let me give you this word from Jesus, the first sermon He ever preached, the greatest sermon on salvation ever preached, the Sermon on the Mount. And He lays out the right attitude for those who will enter the Kingdom in verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom." The foundation of all virtue is to be poor in spirit. That is to be inwardly in poverty. How poor? Ptochos in the Greek. How poor is that? So poor you have to beg. So poor you have nothing, you can't earn a living, you can't gain it anyway, you have to beg for it. You are destitute. You have no way. You are humbled by your wretchedness. And you sit, as it were, as a beggar crying out for someone to give you something. You are that poor. You have

nothing.

And so, the Lord says those who come into My Kingdom aren't those who think they're somebody, but those who know they're nobody and have no resource. Until you see we know how damned we are, we'll never appreciate how precious His forgiveness is. Until we know how utterly poor we are, we can't ever know how great His riches are. And it's out of the carcass that the honey comes. It's out of our deadness that life is born. And the term has to do with total poverty. And that's why, as we read this morning, the Psalmist said, "The Lord is near to those that are broken hearted and to those who are contrite, or crushed in their spirit." Out of resources.

Only desperate people come to God. The publican and the Pharisee in Luke 18 went into the temple. And the Pharisee says, "I thank Thee that I am not as other men, even as this publican. I tithe and I fast and I do all this." He had good selfimage. And then in the corner is this guy with his head down on the ground, he won't even look up and he's pounding on his chest and he's saying, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner." He won't even look up. "And Jesus says, That man went home justified rather than the other."

You see, you come on these terms...when you have run out of resources, when you know you can't do anything about your sin, when you are bankrupt in your spirit. And that was the intention of the whole Old Testament, by the way. The whole law of God in the Old Testament is...is to show men how unsavable they are on their own terms, how irreconcilable they are to God, how unredeemable. So that when God comes in Christ, it is all of grace to the desperate sinner who in himself can do nothing. And that is the same word reiterated by Jesus throughout the Sermon on the Mount.

By the way, the "poor in spirit" also mourn in verse 4. Why? Because they're sorrowful over their condition. And they are meek in verse 5, humbled, nothing good in them. And they hunger and thirst for something they can't get because it isn't within their grasp but they know they must have it. And so they are utterly dependent on the one who gives life.

First, then, you come to Christ denying yourself. And that means you take Christ on His terms, not yours. The proud sinner wants Christ and his pleasure, Christ and his covetousness, Christ and his immorality, but you don't get Him on those terms. And then once you've come to Christ, Jesus is saying here it becomes a way of life to deny yourself. A happy way of life, admittedly, is it not? For I'm not happy when my self acts, I'm happy when the Spirit of God acts in me. Joy comes to me in obedience, in holiness.

Arthur Pink said, "Growth in grace is growth downward. It is the forming of a lower estimate of ourselves, it is a deepening realization of our nothingness. It is a heartfelt recognition that we are not worthy of the least of God's mercies."

That's why in Colossians 3:5 it says we have to commit suicide. We have to mortify our members that are on the earth. We have to put off, Ephesians 4:22 says, the old man, corrupted by lust.

So, selfdenial then is the way in and it becomes the life pattern. We say no to self and we say yes to the Spirit of God.

What does it mean to live a life of selfdenial, dying to self? What does that really mean? Have you ever thought about that? Think of it this way. When you are neglected, unforgiven, or when you are purposely set at naught and you sting and you hurt with the insult of that oversight, but your heart is happy, being counted worthy to suffer for Christ, that is dying to self. When your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed and your advice is disregarded and your opinions are ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself, you take it all patiently in loving silence, you're dying to self.

And when you lovingly and patiently bear any disgrace, any regularity, any annoyance, when you can stand face to face with folly and extravagance and spiritual insensitivity, and endure it as Jesus did, that is dying to self. When you are content with any food, any money, any clothing, any climate, any society, any solitude, any interruption by the will of God, that is dying to self. And when you never care to refer to yourself in conversation or record your own good works, or itch after commendation from others, and when you truly love to be unknown, that is dying to self. When you see your brother prosper and have his needs wondrously met, and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy and never question God, though your needs are greater and still unmet, that is dying to self. And when you can receive correction, and reproof from one of less stature than yourself and humbly admit inwardly as well as outwardly that he's right and find no resentment and no rebellion in your heart, that is dying to self.

Are you dead yet?

There's a second element here. "Take up his cross," He says. Dying to self is one thing, taking up the cross is another. What does that mean? Oh, I've heard such mystical things about that. And then I've heard the cross being all kinds of things...everybody from your motherinlaw to your wife to a cantankerous neighbor. What is the cross? What does it mean, "taking up your cross?" Very simple. I mean, it isn't even a scholarly problem here. It's very simple. It is the willingness to endure persecution, rejection, reproach, shame, suffering, even martyrdom for His sake. That's all.

You don't get mystical about the cross of Jesus Christ. The disciples aren't thinking of that. He hasn't died yet. They don't even know, are you ready for this?, that He's going to die on a cross. He hasn't said that yet. All He said in verse 21 is He's going to be killed, that's all. So they're not looking at

some mystical apprehension of the cross of Jesus Christ. What are they thinking on that dusty road in Caesarea, Philippi, up on the plateau where the cool breezes blew and they could overlook the Galilee area, what are they thinking in that day 2,000 years ago when He says "take up His cross?"

I'll tell you what they're thinking. A hundred men had been crucified in that area, not much earlier than this very event. Something about 120 years before. Antiochus Epiphanes had crucified many Jews during the reign of the Greeks in the intertestamental period. And from a revolt following the death of Herod the Great, the Roman proconsul Varus crucified 2,000 Jews. Crucifixion was somewhat common in the Roman Empire, somewhat common in middle Asia, somewhat common in Egypt, somewhat common in Italy. They had seen crucifixions a lot. One historian estimates 30,000 crucifixions occurred around the time of Jesus Christ.

Now when He said, "Take up your cross," you know what they saw? They saw these poor sad condemned souls marching along the road with at least the cross beam of their own instrument of death strapped to their backs. That's what they thought of. To them the cross meant you're walking to death, you're moving toward your martyrdom. That's what it meant. And that's what the Lord is saying. You must perceive following Me as putting on the instrument of your own execution. Because the world is going to cut you off. Not all of you will die, not all of the twelve died, but many of them did, as martyrs. But you will bear reproach and you will be ridiculed if you live for Christ. That's what 2 Timothy 3 means, you'll suffer persecution. So that's what He's saying.

It means that when you come to Jesus Christ, you're willing to suffer the indignities of a condemned criminal in the service of Christ, if you're called on to do so. Now in our society in our day, it isn't as obviously pronounced to us. I mean, we're not being martyred for Christ, but there is still a reproach to bear. And if we walk after Jesus Christ in total devotion to Him, we'll set up reaction all around us. Selfdenial means that I will walk after Jesus Christ, I will identify myself with Him, I will name His name up to and including the point of death. Most of us say, "Oh boy, if I ever got to that point, I don't think I could handle it." But if you ever did, the Bible says in 1 Peter 4 that the Spirit of grace and glory would rest on you and you would have such an overwhelming sense of the dispensation of the grace of God by His blessed Spirit that you would find in the midst of your death great joy...great joy.

You see, those who come to Jesus Christ, come on His terms. You don't just sign on the dotted line, folks. You don't just stick your hand in the air. You come to the end of your self and you are so enamored and so desirous of the precious gift of salvation that He offers that you will sacrifice even your life. And then after you've received the gift...isn't it interesting how we back off from that original commitment? that's why He's reminding the disciples as well as instructing the crowd.

See, back in chapter 10 verse 24, He told the disciples, "Have you forgotten that a disciple is like his teacher and a servant is like his lord? And you're going to be like Me and you're going to be treated like Me." And He told them you're going to get persecuted. He said, in fact, to them in chapter 10, "I

did not come to bring peace but a...what?...a sword, to set a man against his own household, his own family," and He goes down through all of that. There is hostility. There has to be when godliness invades ungodliness.

And yet there's a marvelous ambivalence because while on the one hand we are a rebuke and a reproach is borne by us in the world. At the same time, there is an incredible attractiveness to us, isn't there? But that's reserved for another passage.

The emphasis here is on the reproach. And the cross is the suffering that is ours because of a faithful connection to Jesus Christ. The thought here is magnificent. It is magnificent. It's as if you could see Jesus Christ going along the road to the cross, the Via Della Rosa(?), moving to His own execution, bearing on His back the cross upon which He will bear the sins of all the world. And in His train, millions of people, all with their cross, willing to take His reproach. Glorious scene.

No, you're not called to Christ to get the goodies. You're called to Christ to abandon yourself in service to Him. That's the essence of the epistles. It is this cross that marks the true disciple. You know, if you want a good test to separate the wheat from the tares, the tares are the one who are not willing to suffer the reproach for Christ. They won't pay the price.

By the way, Luke adds a wonderful word here. Luke doesn't just say, "take up his cross," Luke says, "take up his cross daily," every day...every day...every day. It's a way of life, folks, for us. The hymn writer said, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone? And all the world go free? No, there's a cross for everyone, there's a cross for me. The consecrated cross I'll bear, till death shall set me free. And then go home, my crown to wear, for there's a crown for me." That's what our Lord is teaching here.

The third ingredient in the principle of discipleship is loyal obedience. "And follow Me...and follow Me." The text literally says, "Let him be following Me." It's a way of life. It's a submissiveness to the Lordship of Christ that becomes a pattern of living. It can even relate to the word "to imitate." If we say we belong to Jesus, 1 John 2:6, we ought to walk as He walked, putting our feet in His footprints, loyal to the divine will. And that's what our Lord meant in Matthew 7 when He said, "It's not everyone who says Lord, Lord that enters My Kingdom but he that doeth the will of My Father." And so, the true disciple is marked then by selfdenial, cross bearing and loyal obedience. "If you," John 8:31 says, "continue in My Word, then are you My real disciple." It's a life pattern.

If you're going to take a trip, the first thing you do is say goodbye; pick up your bags, second thing; proceed on your trip. Same thing here. You say goodbye to self, pick up your burdenyour cross, follow in loyal obedience. That's getting on the way to God through Christ.

Now that brings us to the paradox in the next two verses. And this is just illustrative and expands off the principle. "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake

shall find it." Now that's a simple message in that verse, very simple. Well, you say, "What's it saying?" Just this, whoever lives only to save his earthly physical life, whoever lives to preserve his ease and his comfort and his self-indulgence, will lose his spiritual eternal soul. But whoever is willing to give up his earthly physical life, deny himself, bear the cross, follow in obedience to the Lordship of Christ will save his spiritual eternal soul.

In other words, you have a choice. You can go for it now and lose it forever. Or you can give it up now and gain it forever. That's the point. By the way, the word "life" there is the same as "soul" and the same as "self", it's the same idea. The terms may be different, the idea is the same. It's talking about yourself, your life, your soul, that inward part of you, that real you. You spend your life going for the gold right here and you're going to lose everything forever...forever.

There's a willingness to pay the price that may mean martyrdom, may mean humble self-sacrificing death as in the case of Paul. It may mean sickness as the case of Epaphroditus, it can mean a lot of things. In our day it's not likely to be a martyrdom kind of thing, but if a person truly follows Jesus Christ, he abandons his own safety, his own security, his own ease, his own comfort, his own selfish indulgence, his own consumptive materialism, and he comes after Jesus Christ. And he may have to give up some things in this life. On the other hand, the Lord may pour other things on him. It isn't that you have to give it up, it's that you have to be willing to do that.

I remember the story of the man in the south on a plantation that had some black slaves. There was this one black slave who was always happy and excited and positive and singing. And no matter what you did to him, he never changed.

So, his master came down to him and said one day, "What have you got?" He said, "Well, I love the Lord Jesus Christ and He puts a song in my heart. He's forgiven my sin." And the man said, "I want what you have." He said, "All right. You go put on your white Sunday suit and you come down here and work in the mud with us and you can have it."

He said, "I wouldn't do that." And he rode away. He came back a little while later and he was haunted again by this man's life and he said, "Look, what do I have to do to have it?" He said, "You put on your white Sunday suit and you come down here and work in the mud with us and you can have it." And he rode off in a huff again.

Some weeks later he came back a third time and said, "Now listen, I want you to give it to me straight. Now what do I have to do to have what you have?" He said, "I told you what you have to do." And the man in desperation said, "I'll do it." And the slave said, "Then you don't have to do it."

I'm not saying God's going to make you be a martyr. I'm just saying that if you come to Jesus Christ on His terms, you'd be willing. That's what it says. Be willing to lose your life in His cause apart from

the world to gain eternity, rather than spend your life trying to get it here and lose it forever.

Verse 26 strengthens the paradox that confirms the principle. "For what does a man profit," or literally, what use is it for a man, or of what aid is it, "if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And here is the ultimate hyperbole. Let's say the guy gains the whole world. I mean, he gains every...he owns the globe and everything on it and he loses his soul. What's he got? He's got nothing. I mean, what's a dead man who owns everything? He's a dead man. And even worse, an eternally dead man.

Or, another way to look at it, verse 26, "What will a man give as an exchange, or with what will he buy his soul?" Let's say he owned the whole world, could he buy back his soul with it? No...no. You see, if you're going to throw your life away in this world, you will be bankrupt forever. But if you abandon your life and give it to Jesus Christ, you'll be rich forever. And He may just choose to pour out riches in this life as well.

And that leads us to the parousia, that's the word for "coming." We use it speak of the Second Coming and that's what verse 27 talks about. "For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels and then He shall render to every man according to his works." And what He's saying is, Look, you better decide what decision you're going to make because there's a day of accounting coming. There's a day when the judge is going to come. And you remember John 5 says that the Father has committed all judgment to the Son and He is coming to judge and He will be coming in the full radiant glory of God the Father manifesting and revealing that ultimate glory, along with angels who are the instruments of judgment. And then He will render to every man according to his works.

And it isn't a works salvation, but we will be rewarded and we will be judged on the basis of what we do because what we do will reveal what we are. This is the parousia, the coming, the appearing. The Son of Man shall come. And by the way, that "shall come" is not a simple future tense, it's stronger than that. It means He's about to come. You better get ready cause it's near. And this is the first indication of the Second Coming in the New Testament. So, boy, they are learning a lot this day...a lot. But He's coming in the glory of His Father. He's coming with His holy angels, the instruments of service and judgment. And He is going to render to every man, nobody will escape, the final accounting will be brought to bear on every individual life according to that life. As Psalm 62:17, "O Lord, Thou renderest to every man according to his work." And Romans 14:12 says, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." That's the reckoning day, the balancing day. And God will look at works and He'll say, "There's a believer, I can tell by his works. It's the product of the Spirit. There's an unbeliever, I can tell by his works, they're the product of the flesh." Just like Romans 2, He judges by works. That's the objective criteria by which He can evaluate the subjective reality of the life.

And it's a twofold judgment. And here I think it's in general, it's not specific, it's general. Luke emphasizes the shame that will be there. And Luke seems to emphasize at that particular point the judgment on the ungodly. But you can see in this the general judgment of all of us. For example, the ungodly are going to come and they're going to be judged according to their works and sent to hell. And you and I when Jesus returns are going to have a judgment, too. And we'll be rewarded according to our works. And we'll receive crowns if we've been faithful. And so we're all caught up in this. So He's saying to the crowd, "You better come to Christ," in essence. "You better give your life away, take up your cross and follow Me because there's coming a day when if you don't you're going to be cast into judgment." And He's saying to the disciples, "You better be faithful to follow the path of selfdenial, cross bearing and loyal obedience, cause there's coming a time when you'll be rewarded." There is a martyr's crown, too, isn't there? And so, we look for judgment.

Now somebody might say, "You know, how do we know that's going to happen? I mean, how can we believe You're going to come in glory? We haven't seen any glory." You can imagine the disciples saying, "Boy, this is getting more depressing every day. I mean, no Kingdom. No nothing. Now He's going to die and not only is He going to die, we're going to die." See. I mean, they got into this deal just on cloud nine. I mean, we're...the Kingdom, man, we're going into the Kingdom. And James and John send their ma, "Hey, we want to be on the right and the left when this deal takes off." And now it's just getting very depressing. And now they're saying...the Lord's saying, "Well, there's coming a glory day...yeah, there's coming a day when the Son of Man will come with glory and His Kingdom with Him. It's a glorious day. And He'll render to every man and all the tables will be turned and all the equalizing will be done and all the equity will be laid down. There's coming that great glory day."

And you can just see them saying, "O man, how do we know that's going to happen? We haven't seen a glimpse of that." That takes us to verse 28, the preview. He says I'm going to give you a glimpse of it. I'm going to give you a sneak preview of the Second Coming. "Verily I say unto you, there are some standing here," some of you people standing right here, "who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom."

Somebody says, "Man, there must be some old people around." Is that what it's saying? What is this? What do you mean they won't be dead until they see the Son of Man? This is the preview. If you want to know what it means, come back next week. This is a preview of the preview. But they got the message. They saw it and they knew they saw it and Peter writes in his epistle, "I was an eyewitness of His majesty." He saw it. And you can see it, too, if you come back.

Now listen. The man who selfishly hugs life to himself, whose great overwhelming concern is ease and comfort and security and riches and prosperity and selfindulgence, that man no matter how prosperous he may appear is an eternal pauper. The man who gives his life for Christ, the man who abandons self, may become a beggar, he may become a martyr, but he will be a prince with God

forever. That's what it's saying. And only a fool struggles with that kind of choice.

But like those in Jeremiah's time, there are some who will forsake the fountain of living water and hew out broken cisterns that can't hold water at all. Let's bow in prayer.

Lord high and holy, meek and lowly, help us to learn the paradox that the way down is the way up, that to be low is to be high, that the broken heart is the healed heart, that the crushed spirit is the rejoicing spirit, that the repenting soul is the victorious soul, that to have nothing is to really possess everything, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive. Lord, we know that we can't see the stars in the daytime but they're there. But when the night comes, they shine so brightly. Help us find Your light in our darkness, Your joy in our sorrow, Your grace in our sin, Your riches in our poverty and Your life in our death. We would be crucified so that we live, yet not us but Christ.

We pray for those who don't know You today, that they would open their hearts, they would say no to the passing world and yes to eternal life, that they would never think to purchase their soul with earthly gain or to profit if they were to gain the whole world and lose their soul. And, Father, for those Christians, help us to know that this is the way we came to You, destitute, desperate, without resource, begging, mourning, meek, hungering. And we affirmed Your Lordship in those days and we said we'd commit loyal obedience at any price, so hungry were we for salvation. May we be true to that commitment. And may we gladly, as Moses, be willing to bear the reproach of Christ rather than the pleasures of sin and the treasures of Egypt. Father, help us to be faithful disciples, selfdenying, cross bearing, loyally obedient, until we see Jesus face to face, to receive the crown given to those who bore the cross, a crown to be cast at His blessed feet. We thank You that He...He's coming and we know it because He gave us a glimpse of His Second Coming glory. And we have hope.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).