

The Cost of Discipleship

by Chuck Smith

The cost of discipleship is denying the self-centered life, taking up your cross, and following Jesus.

Duration: 33:49

Scripture: Matthew 16:24-27, Mark 10:21, Luke 9:23, Philippians 2:5-8

Topics: "Discipleship", "Self Denial"

Description

This sermon focuses on the call to discipleship as outlined in the Gospel of Mark and Matthew, emphasizing the need to deny oneself, take up the cross, and follow Jesus. It delves into the cost of discipleship, surrendering fully to God's will, and the importance of living a life centered on Christ rather than self. The message highlights the tragic consequences of holding onto worldly pleasures or self-centered desires at the expense of one's soul.

Transcript

On Wednesday night, we will be having communion, but then we will be speaking Wednesday night on the subject of the Bible's prophecies concerning the coming war with Russia. And so we encourage you to come on out this Wednesday night for the special Wednesday night conference. Shall we turn now in our Bibles to, hold on here.

The gospel according to Mark, chapter 10. And we will begin reading with verse 17 and we will read to verse 31. I'll read the 17th and the odd numbered verses.

We ask you to join in the reading of the even numbered verses and let's stand as we read the word of God. And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running and kneeled to him and asked him, good master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? Thou knowest the commandments, do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, defraud not, honor thy father and mother. Amen.

And then Jesus beholding him loved him and said unto him, one thing thou lackest, go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor and thou shall have treasure in heaven and come, take up the cross and follow me. Amen. And Jesus looked round about and said unto the disciples, how hard shall they that have riches to enter the kingdom of God? It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

And Jesus looking upon them saith, with men it is impossible, but not with God, for with God all things are possible. And Jesus answered and said, verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my sake and for the gospels, but many that are first shall be last and the last first. Let's pray.

Lord, we pray that you'll help us this day to understand the cost of discipleship. Even as you said to those, if you wanna come after me, you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. Lord, help us as we seek to follow you that we must Lord, first of all, deny self, then take up the cross to follow you.

Help us Lord, that we'll not stop short of complete commitment of our lives in following you. In Jesus name we pray, amen. You may be seated.

Well, we're moving through the gospel of Matthew as we've entered into the New Testament. And tonight we'll be studying Matthew chapters, actually we'll begin with chapter 14 and going through chapter 17. So we encourage you to read them over this afternoon, Matthew 14 through 17, and then come and join with us tonight as we continue our journey through the New Testament, the gospel according to Matthew 14 through 17.

This morning, we'd like to draw your attention to the 16th chapter of Matthew, beginning with verse 24, where Jesus declared, then said Jesus unto his disciples, if any man come after me, let him deny himself, 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. And what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? And 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 shall he reward every man according to his works.

Verily I say unto you, there are some standing here which will not taste of death till they shall see the son of man coming in his kingdom. Jesus was at the area of Caesarea Philippi with his disciples. And as they were there with Jesus, he asked them the question, who do people say that I am? And they shared with them the various ideas that were going around concerning who he was.

They said, well, some of you think, some of the people think that you are Elijah. Some of them think that you are the prophet Jeremiah. And they gave the various opinions that people had of Jesus and who he was.

And he said, well, who do you say that I am? And Peter answered and said, well, you're the Messiah. You're the son of the living God. And Jesus said, blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah.

I say unto you that you are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. But then he went on to say that whoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Just what did Jesus mean, deny himself? Deny himself what? There are many who will give you their opinions of things that you cannot do if you're a Christian.

Things that you must deny yourself of to become a Christian. And I grew up in a church that had many rules and the things that you couldn't do and still be a Christian. My being a Christian was based upon the fact that I didn't smoke and I didn't chew and I didn't go with girls who do.

And, you know, it was all a negative kind of a thing that it's because I didn't do these things that I looked upon myself as being a Christian and being righteous. But Jesus didn't give a list of things. He just said deny himself.

That is deny the self life. As a Christian, I have a continual battle between the life of the flesh and the life of the spirit. Daily things take place in which I need to respond and I do respond either after the spirit or after the flesh.

I can give into my flesh and I can respond after the flesh or I can just pray and say, Lord, help me. It doesn't matter, let it go. I just, and respond after the spirit and just let it go.

Just smile and don't worry about it. Just pray about it and forget it. Paul wrote, they that are after the flesh have the mind of the flesh.

But they that are after the spirit, the mind of the spirit. He said the mind of the spirit is life and peace and joy. Paul wrote to the Galatians, if you will walk after the spirit, you will not fulfill the desires of your flesh.

There are areas of my flesh that I would like to hang on to. But it's necessary that I let them go. I deny myself.

Over in the Philippines, they have a very ingenious way of catching monkeys. Monkey is a delicacy there. They love eating monkeys and the kids love to take the skulls and suck out the brains.

It's a big honor, the one who gets that. But it's a thing that it is a delicacy to them. But the way they catch them is interesting.

They take a coconut and they make a hole in the coconut and it's just big enough for the monkey to reach his paw inside. They'll pour rice inside of the coconut and the monkey comes along, sees the coconut with the rice and he squeezes his hand in, grabs a fistful of rice and with a fistful of rice, it's too big to pull it out through the hole. So he tries to climb the tree and he just is knocking on the tree with the coconut and the native sitting there in his little hut hears this knocking on the tree and he knows he's caught the monkey.

Because the monkey won't let go of the rice and he'll go into captivity, he'll go into the stew pot to hold on to that handful of rice that he has because he won't let go and he goes into captivity because he refuses to let go of the rice. That ain't stupid, little monkey. You know, all you have to do is let go of the rice and you can scamper up the tree and get away.

But he'll hang on and sacrifice his life, go into, well, he's worse than captivity, he goes into the stew pot in order to hang on to the rice. And I think of people who are holding on to paltry things of the world, things that are gonna pass away but they are so attached to these things of the world that they will go into spiritual captivity rather than let them go and enjoy a rich full life in Christ. Years ago when we were back in Toledo, Ohio doing a series of meetings in the eastern part of the United States, we were there in Toledo and we met a bunch of the young guys from that area and they have a lot of ponds there in Toledo and in these ponds are these muskrats and these boys actually had these traps that they would set in these ponds to catch the muskrats because they would sell their pelts for a good price.

And so they would tell me that when they would catch a muskrat by the paw or by the tail that the muskrat would turn around and chew off his paw and leave it in the trap or chew off the tail and leave it in the trap. So often when they get to their trap, all they find is the paw of the monkey or the tail of the muskrat or the tail of the muskrat because it has chewed it off and left it in the trap to escape to freedom. And you think, ew, chewing off your paw, that's sort of drastic.

Well, yes it is, but it's sure better than being nailed to a board and being tried as a fur, you know. So it shows a bit of wisdom to me that it's willing to sacrifice a paw if necessary in order to remain free. And I think of the things that cause people to go into bondage, into the things that they're hanging onto, won't let go, and it costs them their life in Christ.

And so Jesus said, if you want to come after me, deny yourself, what? Whatever it is that is keeping you from a full, rich relationship with Jesus. And he just puts his finger on it and says, look, if you want to come after me, just let that go. Secondly, he said, take up your cross.

Just what did Jesus mean by that? I hear people talk about unpleasant things that they have to do, and they will say, well, I guess that's just the cross that I have to bear for Jesus. You know, some onerous thing that is just so unpleasant. I have this aged aunt who's cranky and mean, and I have to take her shopping once a week.

I guess that's just the cross that I have to bear, and that you have to go along with these things that you just don't like, because you look upon it as a cross that you bear. But when Jesus said, take up your cross, I don't think that he meant you have to do things that you detest. What did the cross mean to Jesus? Well, we find that Jesus, the night that he was betrayed, was in the garden and he was praying.

And his prayer was, Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, as he was referring to the cross that he was to be hanging on before that day was over. Let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but thy will be done.

Taking up the cross is submitting your will completely to his will. Whatever it is that he wants you to do, taking up that task, whatever it is, surrendering yourself fully to do his will is the cross that, for Jesus, and I believe it is the same thing for us. It is surrendering myself fully to do his will.

The path that I have trod has brought me near to God, though oft it led through sorrow's gate. It's not the way I'd choose, for in my way I might lose the joys that yet for me await. It's not what I wish to be, nor where I wish to go, for who am I that I should choose my way? The Lord shall choose for me to his better far I know, so let him bid me go or stay, surrendering myself completely to the will of God.

And this is to acknowledge that God's purpose and God's will for my life is better than anything I could devise for myself, that he knows what's best for me, and thus yielding to him and yielding to his will is yielding to what's very best for me. The third thing Jesus said was, follow me. Now, in doing this, we are doing exactly what Jesus said he did.

He said, I did not come to do my own will, but the will of my Father which sent me. So in following Jesus, I'm following his example of not doing what I want to do, but doing what he would have me to do. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet he made himself of no reputation, and he came in the form of a servant, and he was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Peter wrote concerning Jesus, if a man, because he is aware that God wants him to, takes things well when he endures grief and suffers wrongfully, this is praiseworthy. But what glory is it if when you are punished, when you are guilty, and you take it patiently? It is when you have done what is right, and you suffer for it, and you take it patiently. This is acceptable with God, for you were called to do what is right.

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps, who did no sin, and neither was guile found in his mouth, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. When he suffered, he threatened not, but he commended himself to him whose judgment is righteous. What they're saying is when things that you have done are stupid, and wrong, and dumb, and someone says, why would you do that? That is so stupid, and all, and you take it well, well, that's good, because you were stupid, and you know it, and you can accept that.

But if you've been doing the right thing, and someone comes along and says, hey, that was so dumb, why did you do that, and you knew that it was the right thing to do, and you take it well, you say, well, I just thought it was the right thing, and you smile, and you take it well, then that's commendable. We're reminded that when Jesus was being nailed to the cross, he prayed, Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.

And when we are reviled by someone, and I've been doing the right thing, and yet I'm accused of wrong motivations, or whatever, I smile, and I just say, Father, forgive them. They don't understand, they don't know what they're saying. That's good.

The self-life can never bring satisfaction. You'll always desire more. It's interesting, you'll never be able to satisfy the lust of the flesh.

The more you feed your flesh, the more your flesh will demand, and the hungrier you become. If you live for yourself, put it down, you will be the loser. But if we, by the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the flesh, the Bible said, then we will live.

If you will deny yourself, and live in full submission to Jesus, you'll find what life is really all about, the true life, and the true purpose for the meaning in life. Many years ago, back in the 40s, there were a group of fellows, missionaries, who were down in South America, and they had a desire to go in, and to reach an Indian tribe known as the Ooccas, and the Ooccas were a very savage tribe. They actually had killed so many people who came into their territory, and these missionaries felt a call of God to go in and to reach them with the gospel, and one of the missionaries was named Jim Elliott, and when one of his friends back here in the States found that Jim was actually planning to go in, and to try and reach these savage Occca Indians, he wrote to Jim, and he said, Jim, you're a fool to go in, and to take the possible threat on your life, just to reach them with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and Jim wrote him back, and he said to him, no man is a fool who gives up that which he cannot keep, in order to gain that which he cannot lose.

Jim did go in with these other fellows, and all of them were killed by the Occca Indians, there in the banks of the Oranka River, but yet, Jim's words, no man's a fool to give up that which he cannot keep, in order to gain that which he cannot lose. You cannot live the self-life forever. One day, you're going to die, and that is the end of the self-life, and that is, if that is your only life that you have lived is just for self, when you die, you at that point have lost everything, because your life has never counted for anything.

There is this poem that I read, and it impacted me very much. I'd like to read it to you. It speaks about four different relationships that you can have with the Lord, and as I read it, I want you to just, which of these relationships really fits me? Which really expresses how I am relating to the Lord? Oh, the bitter shame and sorrow that a time could ever be, when I let the Savior's voice plead in vain, and proudly answered, all of self and none of thee, first.

Second, yet he found me, and I beheld him, bleeding on the accursed tree. I heard him pray, Father, forgive them, and my wistful heart said faintly, well, some of self and some of thee. But day by day, his tender mercy, healing, helping, full and free, sweet and strong and also patient, brought me lower, while I whispered, less of self and more of thee.

Higher than the highest heavens, deeper than the deepest sea, Lord, thy love has conquered, grant me now my soul's desire, none of self and all of thee. What is it with you? All of self and none of thee? Or maybe you've progressed to, well, Lord, some of self and some of thee. Maybe some of you have actually come so far in your walk with him that it is, Lord, less of self and more of thee.

But I pray that the Lord will bring us all to that place of, coming to that place of, Lord, none of self and all of thee. If you want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, you've got to deny yourself that self-centered life, submit yourself to the will of God and to follow Jesus Christ. That means that you're to love even as he loves, you are to forgive even as he has forgiven you, you are to be gracious even as he is gracious, be kind even as he is kind.

It is a call to life on the highest plane, the only life that is truly worthwhile. As Jesus went on to say, what should it profit a man if he would gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? It's tragic how cheap people will sell out to the world. Tragic that a little monkey will hold on to a handful of rice it will never be able to eat and will give its life just to hang on to that handful of rice.

How tragic when people will hang on to just some pleasure of the world or some aspect of the world and will sacrifice their eternal life, spend eternity separated from God because they won't let go and just hang on to that thing, whatever it is, that they're holding on to that is costing them their relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Think about it. If any man will come after me, Jesus said, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

Think about it. Father, we come to you today and we think of the words of Jesus as he is calling us to discipleship and the cost, denying the self-life, taking up the cross, submitting ourselves to your will and following Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray, Father, that as we weigh these things and as we consider these things, we'll see the wisdom of surrendering ourselves fully unto you and to your will and to your plan for our lives.

Lord, that we will not be walking after the flesh but after the spirit. In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Let's stand.

The pastors are down here at the front to pray with you, to pray for you and today, if you would like to just follow Jesus Christ, like to surrender your life to him, they're here to just help you, to minister to you so we would encourage you as we're dismissed, just come on forward and just tell them, pray for me. I want less of self, more of him or I want none of self and all of him and God knows where you stand but I know that for each of us, it could be a step closer and we'll be happy and satisfied when we do. God bless you, may his hand be upon you, may this be a wonderful week of just experiencing the consciousness of his presence with you and the joy of the Lord, may it be your strength and may you be led by his spirit into that life that is rich, full and fulfilling, the life that he has for you.

The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace, God bless

you.

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