

The Most Importance Question Ever Asked

by Shane Idleman

The most important question a person can ever ask is 'Who is Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God?'

Duration: 50:17

Scripture: Matthew 16:24, Matthew 16:26, Romans 8:5-8, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, 2 Corinthians 6:17, Galatians 5:16, Ephesians 5:8, Philippians 2:12, James 4:4, 1 John 2:15-17

Topics: "Following Jesus", "Spiritual Surrender"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of denying oneself, taking up the cross, and following Jesus. It highlights the need to live a life distinct from the world, to deny the flesh, and to be filled with the Spirit of God. The message challenges carnality in Christians, urging them to live in obedience and surrender to God, rather than conforming to the ways of the world.

Transcript

The topic of the message tonight is the most important question ever asked. Did you know that the most important question ever asked was asked a couple thousand years ago? And I watched online a few years ago, they were doing a man-in-the-street interviews and they're asking people, you know, what is the most important question of your life? And very rarely did you hear this, you would hear, where am I going to work? Where am I going to live? Who am I going to marry? How much money am I going to make? Everything was centered on now, the external, the world, the things of the world, and not on the most important question a person can ever ask. And let me just be transparent and honest, not that I'm not, you know, you shouldn't say that because people think, well, aren't you, you know, aren't you honest on everything? But let me not use the word honest.

Let me just say up front that this is a very important topic because how many people think they've answered this question correctly and they haven't is actually alarming in the church, in the nation. And when the Bible talks about, most of you would agree that we are living in the end times, right? I mean, turn on the news and there you go. But it's interesting, the Bible says that there will be a great falling away.

Why is that? The reason is the faith is not solid. The faith is just, well, yeah, it sounds good. You know, it sounds, yeah, I'm a Christian, you know, that sounds great.

But when it becomes a point of, you could lose your life, you could lose tax-exempt status, you could lose your job, you could lose employment, you can lose a lot of things. When the Bible talks about the mark of

the beast, what we'll get into in Matthew 18, that you can't buy, you can't trade, you can't sell, you can't do anything unless you bow to this God. That's when faith will be tested.

If you're not willing to live for Him today, you will not die for Him tomorrow. This is the most important question I believe our culture and the church can ask. And that's what I'm going to get into with Matthew 16.

There's also a lot to absorb. I'm trying to get through all of Matthew tonight. So I don't want to rush through it, but at the same time, I have to, I feel compelled to get through the whole chapter because there's a lot of things that are relevant to us.

Matthew 16, verse 13. When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples saying, who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? So He's asking His disciples, who do men, what does the world say? What does the culture say in Jerusalem there? Who do people say that I am? So they said, well, some say John the Baptist, some say Elisha, and others, Jeremiah, are one of the prophets. The reason is because they saw His mighty works.

Clearly, this man is somebody special. No man ever spoke like this man. So Herod was saying, this is John the Baptist who I killed.

Others were saying, no, this is a prophet. Jeremiah, this is Elijah, this is Elijah who was to return. And they had all this different forecasting of who He was.

But then He said to them, but who do you say that I am? Who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And that is the most important question you can ever answer. Who is Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God? Now, the first thing I want to draw from this is, number one, the cultural distinction.

Jesus says, who does the culture say I am, or who do men say that I am, and who do you say that I am? And let me tell you up front, the culture is not going to say who the right Jesus is. And many times we look to the culture for confirmation. You ask Cain West who Jesus is, you don't know who that is, young adults, you know.

He has Jesus come out on a stage, mockery. You ask Hollywood, you ask, who's Jesus? Who do you say that He is? Well, He's a good teacher. He's a concept.

He's an ideology. He lived a long time ago. He's a historical figure.

But Jesus says, but who do you say that He is? Who do you say? I like what A.W. Tozer said many, many years ago. Open your hearts and search the scriptures. Bear your cross, follow your Lord, and pay no heed to the passing religious vogue.

The masses are always wrong. In every generation, the number of the righteous is small. Be sure that you are among them.

He hit the proverbial nail on the head with this quote. The masses are always wrong. People say, well Shane, what are you talking about? Think about it.

The masses, what we eat, what we drink, where we go, what we bought, watch, what we listen to, what we rent. The masses are always wrong. One thing I like to pick on a lot of times is healthy, right, healthy food.

It's kind of a background of health and fitness. And when you see a Krispy Kreme next to a burger joint, next to now Chick-fil-A coming in, and everybody's so excited, but the masses are always wrong. That's not healthy, that's not good.

That better not be a lifestyle. You look at what the masses are always watching. Now the cage fighting, all this martial arts now is becoming so popular, it's not good.

Folks, this is not good stuff. The masses are always wrong. What they're watching, the darkness, the vampires, the occult, the witchcraft, everything they're watching, the masses are wrong.

Tozer said the masses are wrong on all these points because they're away from God. If you always find this dilemma, what the culture says is right and what God's word says is right, and you are like a fish swimming upstream for the rest of your life. And that's difficult, isn't it? But it's with God's help, it's very possible, and that's what God calls us to do.

Some said he was a good teacher, some said a prophet, but we have to answer this question. Who do you say that he is? Now next, he said, who do men say that I, the son of man am? Now this could be a whole sermon in itself, the son of man. Throughout the Old Testament, the son of man was referred to often.

Even Jesus used it in the New Testament quite often. And theologians would say it had to do with his humanity. He was fully God yet fully man.

Son of man gives his humanity there, which is true. But if you look at what a lot of the Jewish people were familiar with, they were familiar with Daniel. In the Old Testament, of course, this was the children of God, the word of God passed down to them.

So when Jesus said the son of man, I have a feeling they knew a lot more than what we knew. And here's why, here's what Daniel 7 says. And behold, one like the son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven, he came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

Then to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom, the one which shall not be destroyed. So Jesus is basically saying, here I am the son of man, which Daniel spoke of is now being fulfilled.

I am the ancient of days. I will rule and I will reign. I am the son of man.

Who do you say the son of man is? And then that's why towards the end of Jesus's life in Matthew 26, many of you remember the scene in the passion for Christ, when they pulled him into the religious leaders and they had the Aramaic translated in English for us, and that Jewish man just ripped his shirt and said, blasphemy, get this man out of here. What further proof do we need? Well, why did he say that? Here's what Jesus said. Hereafter, you will see the son of man sitting on the right hand of the power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Then the high priest ripped his clothes and said, blasphemy, because Jesus is saying, they basically said, do you not answer anything against you? Do you not answer? Who are you? Who are you? Are you the son of God? And he said, I am. I am the son of man, and you will see me next to the right hand of God. Basically, the right hand of God is a position of power and authority.

Does God have a right hand? The Bible says that he is spirit. Those who worship him in spirit and truth. God is not a person like us, but the right hand of God means the power of God, the sovereignty of God.

And Jesus said, I will be sitting on the right hand of God, coming on the clouds of heaven to judge you, the son of man. So they knew exactly what he was talking about. And that's why he says, who do you say the son of man is? Now consider this.

Jesus made himself out to be the son of God. That's why they wanted to kill him. So anytime, we talked a few weeks ago about cults and different religions.

Anytime somebody says, no, no, Jesus didn't say, Jesus wasn't the son of God. Well, that's why he died. That's why they went to Pontius Pilate.

They were standing before Pontius Pilate with Jesus. And Pontius Pilate said, I find no fault in him. And they said, kill him.

We have a law because he claims to be the son of God. And Jesus himself said, I am the son of God. I am the son of man.

Also, interesting note, created beings throughout the Bible were never worshiped. So if Jesus, as Jehovah's Witness say, is a created being, that God would never allow a created being to be worshiped. Have you ever thought about that? Jesus Christ, when people came to worship him, and a man fell down, worshiped him.

The lady came with her alabaster box and worshiped him. Another, the demonic with legions of demons, possessed, came and just worshiped him. He didn't say, oh, no, no, don't worship me.

Why? Because all he is deserved, he's worthy of all of our worship. But angels and other things would say, don't worship me, or other men. I'm just a man like, don't worship me, don't worship me.

So Jesus, so next time, just give me ammunition. Next time somebody comes to your door and says, Jesus was a created being, say, then why was he worshiped as God? Well, I don't know. Well, that's why, because he was God.

He was the son of God. So we have the same dilemma today. People say, who do you say Jesus is? And even on the cross, we saw this.

One thief said that you are, if you are the son of God, get us out of this, get us off of these crosses. They're mocking Jesus. The other thief said, Lord, can I be with you when you go into your kingdom? We see the two different answers there.

And I just wanna encourage you tonight. I wanna compel you tonight. Have you truly really answered this question? Who is Jesus Christ? He's not just a good teacher.

He was a great teacher, but that's not all he was. He's not a concept. He's not a historical figure.

This is the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why in counseling people, when I talk to people often who lack the fruit of conversion, now let me back up, do you know what that means? Once a person is born again, according to the Bible, they have fruit. If you plant an apple seed and you water it and you take care of it, it's not gonna produce a watermelon.

What's this big green thing coming out of the ground? I thought it's impossible. Same thing Jesus said, by their fruit, you will know them. So when I talk to people, if there's no fruit, and that happens in the church, there's just no fruit at all.

They might be able to act a certain way or say certain things, but overall, there's just no fruit. I don't go back to, oh, but remember the prayer you prayed when you were 13? You're okay. I go back to general conversion.

Did it take place? Have you truly answered this question? You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Have you answered that? I believe in you and I trust in you. I said, Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Have you done that? Well, if they stutter, if they stammer, you start to hear things like, well, I've been a Christian all my life. Remember I said a few weeks ago, I've been a Baptist. My family's been Baptist for 40 years, Shane.

I've been a Catholic for all my life. I've been in church all my life. That's not what I asked you.

That's not what I asked you. I asked you, can you say this? That he is the Christ, the Son of the living God, that you repented and you believed in him and he saved you. Can you say that? Because in many churches, they will not ask that question because it's a little offensive.

I actually remember about four years ago, a pastor locally, I won't say names and things, in churches who told their worship leader to remove all the songs out of their thing about the blood of Christ. Speechless. But what was the whole reason? People don't wanna hear that.

That's offensive, Shane. Remove the very thing that Christ died for. Remove the very reason why we're here.

The blood, if it wasn't for the blood, the blood of Christ that washes me, that cleansed me. The old hymns used to sing it well. What can take, you don't want me to sing.

Wash away my sin, nothing but the blood. You know, you're young, you remember all those hymns about the blood, the blood of people. You know what, the church, we have to remember this.

We're not supposed to cater to the world. The world isn't supposed to come in the church and say, that's offensive, can you remove it? I say, no, that's exactly why it's offensive. You need to hear it.

The message of the gospel is offensive. The cross is offensive. It was a bloody mess.

A man died, the son of man, the son of God, died on a cross for your sin and mine, beaten beyond recognition. His own mother couldn't recognize him. As blood came down, his hammers were driven in.

That's messy, that's offensive, but that's the cost of sin. That's the cost. You know, it's interesting.

I told the first service and I said, I probably won't tell the second, but I will because it just, it keeps coming to me. If something very interesting happens, my wife will tell you that she doesn't like it, but I don't mind it anymore. And I know this will be hard to believe, but probably once a week, somehow I run into people.

Well, your messages are just too hard. You're upset, Pastor. You're just brangin' it.

We don't wanna go there. And what's ironic is what we've come to realize, and we joke about it now, is the people that are on fire for God, that wanna be edified, built up, love it, the people that don't wanna be challenged and they wanna live in their lukewarm, comfortable Christianity, hate the messages. So I look at who I upset to gauge the sermon often.

I'm just telling you a little, who do I upset? I mean, if you have spirit-filled believers on fire for God and they're upset at the sermon, something's wrong. You know, that's constructive criticism. Hey, you know, you need to get back in the Word, get back in prayer, get back in the Bible.

But when the world's mad, they're supposed to be mad. They're, and not even the word carnal Christians will be mad. And I might upset people just saying this, but I think pastors need to stop being popular and start being confrontational.

In love, of course, in gentleness, in humility, but you should upset a little bit. You should ruffle little feathers. If you're preaching the Word, that's what it does.

God says, is not my Word like a fire, like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces? It devours, it consumes. And that's what Jesus is challenging people here. Who do you say that I am? And really, this message is about hope and it's about life, it's about peace, and it's about joy.

Who is he? It's very joyful, it's very peaceful. If you look at who he is, the Bible says that he is my advocate, he is almighty God, he is the Alpha and the Omega, he is the bread of life, he is the captive of my salvation, he is my comforter, he is my cornerstone, he is my counselor, he is my deliverer. Should we keep going? The Bible does.

Look at that, an advocate, I don't care what you pay a defense attorney, you will never get a better advocate for free. He stands before God and before, he stands there as an advocate. So the next time, oh gosh, this is really, you know, tough.

No, it's not, you have an advocate who's the chief cornerstone, who's the son of God, who's a mighty counselor. Actually, they call them the consolation of Israel, the word consolation comes from the word to console, the comforter, he comforts me, he leads me, he's an advocate, he died for me, he redeemed me, and we know this is, Christianity's too tough. It should be a life of joy and peace because of who he is.

The door of the sheep, the end of the law, he is a prince of peace, a faithful and true, good shepherd, healer, he is the image of God. So when you see Christ, you see the image of God. That's what we see when we see him.

So it brings a lot of peace and a lot of joy and a lot of comfort answering that question. So I would just ask you again tonight, how do you answer that question? Who is Christ? Is he a concept? Who is Christ? Is he a butler that's gonna give you everything you want? No, is he a doting grandfather just winks at sin? No, this is the Lord Jesus Christ, where the Bible says, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Christ is Lord. It's amazing how many people wanna call him Savior, but very few wanna call him Lord.

And the Bible says it's the Lord Jesus Christ. He saved me, now he's my Lord. They go together.

Verse 17, Jesus answered and said to him, blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. Remember Peter said, you are the Christ, the son of the living God. And Jesus said, Simon, my Father has revealed this to you.

I say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Then he commanded his disciples that they should tell no one that he was the Christ.

So let's back up to the beginning. The Father revealed to Peter that Jesus was the son of the living God. And I wrote one of the points down, the first point, the Father reveals when the heart is receptive.

The Father reveals when the heart is receptive. If you want God to reveal something to you, if you want to know God's will for something, the Father reveals it when the heart is open, when the heart is receptive and open. Is your heart open, is it receptive? And God will reveal certain things.

First Corinthians, but the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit for they are foolishness to him, nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. This is why you can't argue somebody into the kingdom of God, you have to pray them in. Me arguing with people into the kingdom of God is not going to get them in.

I can sit and argue with somebody all day long, but if you ask God, Lord, would you reveal it, would you remove the scales from their eyes, would you open their heart? And as God's opening their heart and the word of God comes in and it penetrates and it divides, the Bible says that the word of God is sharper than any double-edged sword, it pierces to the joint marrow is the discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart. It comes in, it pierces, and they cry, oh Lord, what must I do to be saved? It pierces, that's what the natural man, the natural mind cannot perceive the things of God. Why, because the natural mind is at war with God.

The Bible says that enmity, enmity is pretty serious. Enmity is not, you can't sign a truce, you can't make a treaty, you can't negotiate, enmity is at war with God. So my natural mind is at war with God.

I don't like that. My flesh is at war with God. That's exactly why I say if you do nothing with your life, if you do nothing with your relationship with God, by default, you will gravitate away from God.

You will, don't do anything for a week, and you will, whew, gravitate away, because the natural mind is at enmity, is at war with God, the flesh is at war, but thank God for the Holy Spirit of God residing in the believers, who keep saying, Abba, Father, Lord, I love you, come back, and you have that battle. Paul said, oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of sin and death? For with the mind I serve the law of God, but with the flesh, the law of sin. We see this contrast, we see this battle inside.

Paul says that our choices are never free from this conflict because of that. And then he goes on to say, I will give you the keys of the kingdom. Now, there's been a lot of sermons preached on this.

I've heard good ones, I've heard bad ones. Keys could mean you claim it, you have it, name it, claim it, I want that Mercedes, I want that house on the mountain, I want this, and you just claim it, you got the keys of the kingdom, God's giving you all authority, and you come in like you're a power broker. And that's not what this is about.

Context is king. Anytime, Jesus is, he just said, who do men say that I am? Who do you say that I am? You are the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, Peter, but you are Peter, and on this rock I'll build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom. You have spiritual authority. So here's, in my opinion, what it means.

As children of God, we have the privilege to enter the kingdom of heaven. Our authority is in possessing kingdom keys. The message of the gospel, if it's received, opens the kingdom of heaven, but if it's declined, it shuts the kingdom of heaven.

We don't have to make it real complicated. There's spiritual authority, there's keys there that are allowing people to enter into the kingdom of heaven and that door is shut if they decline the offer. That's what I believe he's alluding to.

Now, let's get controversial again. My Father who is in heaven, verse 18, and I say to you, Peter, that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. There's something in Roman Catholicism called apostolic succession.

I don't know if you know what that is, but this is the biggie. This verse is the major, this is it for Catholicism, because they say that Peter was the rock of the church. Basically saying that Jesus said, on Peter I will build my church, and the bishops in the papacy of Rome, the pope, can trace their lineage back to Peter, so it's apostolic succession.

Peter to this person, to this person, to this person, to this person. Now we're in the second century, third century, fourth century, now the pope, and the papacy, and the bishops, they're all linked to Peter. Peter, apostolic succession, and the church is not built on Peter.

The church is built on Jesus Christ. No, the church is not built on any man. The gates of hell will not prevail.

That's on Christ, in Christ alone. So that's, but then they take the spiritual authority. Now the papacy, because it's apostolic succession, coming from Peter, now the papacy, the pope has more say than the Bible.

Whatever they say is true is true, and it goes, it supersedes the Bible. So that's the main verse that comes from here, is that they're building the church on Peter, the Roman Catholic church is built on Peter, and the apostolic succession, everybody who follows him. Now if you wanna get technical, Jesus speaking, you can look it up in the Greek, any linear translation of the Bible, it shows Greek and different things.

When he says, you are Peter, he's saying, you are Petro, and on this rock, Petra, I will build my church. So he actually uses two different words there. When he says, you are Peter, Petro, it's a little stone.

It's like a little rock, you could kick it, or throw it in a river. But then he says, but on this Petra, I will build my church, and that's a rock, it's a solid, like a granite cliff, a huge, you think of Yosemite, the dome there. But he's saying, but on this rock, I will build my church.

And most would think that he's saying, on your profession of faith, on that statement you just made, that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God, Peter, you are this little rock, but on that profession of faith that you just made, that I am the Son of God, that's what the church is gonna be built on, and that's, the gates of hell will not prevail against it, because it's built on me as the Son of God. Can you imagine the church being built on Peter? Whatever happened to Jesus? It's, in any church, they should tell you that Jesus Christ is the senior pastor. He's the leader, he's the shepherd, we're all just following him.

He's the good shepherd. It's built on him and him alone. And then he goes on to verse 21.

From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised on the third day. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, far be it from you, Lord, this shall not happen to you. But he turned and said to Peter, get behind me, Satan, you are an offense to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.

Now, this is an interesting statement, too. Jesus is saying, get behind me, Satan. He just said that he was the son of God.

Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you. My father has revealed this to me. But I'm gonna die, Peter, I'm going to the cross, I'm gonna die.

Peter says, no, you're not. And he turns into, now he's not speaking words of wisdom here, now he's speaking words infiltrated and probably produced by Satan, planting thoughts in the mind. That's a whole other sermon that would take another hour or two, how Satan can plant thoughts into the mind and deceive us and go about as a roaring lion doing these things.

But the bottom line here to remember is the father reveals things when the heart is receptive, what I said earlier, but the enemy plants seeds because the heart is deceptive. It's a little play on words, but you'll get it. The father reveals things when the heart is receptive, but the enemy plants seeds when the heart is deceptive, oh, because the heart is deceptive.

In other words, our heart is deceptive. I know some people might believe that, but it's true. Jeremiah says the heart is evil, desperately evil, who can know it? But God searches the mind, he searches the heart to give every man according to his works, according to his doing.

So our heart is deceptive. So the enemy comes in, he'll plant things in. And what Peter did is what I've talked about a lot, he reacted, he reacted, he let his emotions get control and he reacted.

And don't we do that a lot today? I don't think I can remember a time in recent history where I told my wife I moved too slowly on something. What do we usually say? I moved too quickly. I ran ahead, I went too fast, I reacted.

And the enemy loves reaction. The enemy loves to just get us off our high point, we're doing good, and then you get an email, you get a text, you get a phone call, you get somebody smarts off, and you just react, and you just react, and that's how he loves to work. That's why, is Satan actually, you know, going into Peter's body and saying this to Peter when Jesus says, get behind me, Satan? No, what he's saying is the words are demonically inspired because he's not thinking of the things of God, he's thinking of the things of flesh, of man.

He's going off his feelings. That's why I always say your feelings need to be the caboose of the train, not the engine. Your feelings follow.

But we say, I need to marry them because it just feels right. I need to move here, it just feels right. And we live off feelings.

I don't want to belabor that point because I have many times before. But be careful here, that's what Jesus is saying. Peter just initiates it really quick, he reacts to this, oh no, Lord, that can't be.

And Jesus said, get behind me, Satan. And then he goes on to verse 24, then Jesus said to his disciples, if anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

And I wish, when I was studying this, even at the first service, I wish I could really amplify this in bold, big letters, because this is where we seem to miss it. This is the part that we don't seem to like. Jesus said, if anyone comes after me, wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Go, yeah, it wasn't that nice, that's what we say now. But back then, they knew what the cross meant. The cross was a point of death.

You're carrying, can you imagine carrying this wooden cross that you're gonna be hung on in a few hours or an hour? You're carrying your death. You're walking with your cross as Jesus walked up the place to Golgotha, the place of the skull, to be crucified. So Jesus says, you wanna follow me? You need to deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow me, basically saying you need to deny yourself and lose your life, because he goes, whoever, who would pursue this world and lose his own soul? Who would pursue riches and give up his own soul? So when he's saying deny yourself, denying and follow me and pick up your cross, that is not terms we like to hear.

Can we fast forward, Shane? That's when we wanna get to the good stuff. This is the good stuff. But let me keep reading.

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father and with his angels, and they will reward each according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the man coming in his kingdom. This is a very important passage.

He's saying that we have to deny ourself and follow him. And here's why it's not popular. Denying ourself is not popular.

Did you know that? This is why many Christian arguments arise in the Christian community, is over this topic of denying ourself. You look at alcohol, you look at food, you look at media, you look at this, you have all these people going to movies and watching things they shouldn't, and media, posting things they shouldn't, and having this and shouldn't. And you say, but that's my liberty.

But no, where's the denying yourself coming in there? Deny yourself, follow me. The flesh, you have to put the flesh in submission because the flesh will destroy you. That's what denying is all about.

The Christian should go throughout his day. There should be some aspect of denying. I don't stop at every market and get a Snickers bar.

My flesh feels like it. Or every, you know, getting upset at this or getting the last word in, you're denying your flesh on a daily basis. There's a denial there.

There has to be. That's why the article I put in the bulletin entitled, we cannot love both Christ and this world. You cannot love both Jesus Christ and this world.

Throughout history, Christians have vacillated between two extremes. Compromising with the culture on one extreme or isolation in the other. You know what this one is? Compromising, right? How many times have I talked about this? I don't need to belabor this point.

But there's no difference. You look just like the world. In what we watch, what we view, what we listen to, everything looks just like the world.

There's no distinction. There's no difference. If you were arrested for being a Christian, is there any evidence in your life to convict you? We look just like the world.

But then the other side is what they used to call monasteries. I'm not gonna touch the world. I'm not gonna touch the culture.

I'm gonna stay out of it. Well, Jesus said, you're the salt and light. You have to.

You have to engage the culture. So it's finding the difference here and the distinction. The world will know that we are Christians by our love for one another and by our obedience and by our sacrifice.

Not by how well we imitate the world around us. I will tell you right now, as God is my witness, if I wanted to win a popularity contest and build a big church, I would avoid this topic. Just skim right over that one.

Let's get into the love and forgiveness stuff and the treating people good. Let's get, Shane, come on. Folks, that's where true peace and freedom come from.

That's why people are dead at church. The Bible's boring. Church is irrelevant.

They wanna hurry up and get out of here. They can't make church that often. They haven't prayed in two years, just quickly.

They are dying spiritually. And here's why, they are not denying themselves. Denial is you're starving the flesh and feeding the spirit.

When we don't do that, we quench and we grieve the Spirit of God. We quench and we grieve the Spirit of God by not denying the flesh. Because the flesh says, let me take over, let me control, let me get in the way, and we just succumb to it.

We don't deny ourself. So when we talk about denial and carrying the cross, this is so you can be filled mightily with the Spirit of God. That's where true joy and peace comes from.

It doesn't come from Hollywood. Ask most of the major superstars. They're miserable, they're depressed.

They've got tons of money and 14 houses. Why? It goes back to this. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Denying yourself is very, very biblical and it's very, very healthy spiritually, isn't it? I mean, we laugh at practical examples, but when I deny a huge coffee and a Krispy Kreme donut in the morning, I feel happy later, but upset when I do it.

Or you out there, what you click on the computer, what you drink, the pill you pop, what you do, the association you keep, the relationship you keep going. We know what it is. We know what those things are

that quench and grieve the Spirit of God.

We know, right now, you could give me a list of the top three things God is wanting you to deny yourself. And Jesus is saying, if you truly want to follow me, deny yourself, deny these sinful impulses so you can be filled with the Spirit of God. Carry your cross, which means, Lord, my life is yours.

I did this when I was 29 years old, 1999. I said, Lord, my life is yours. You take control.

I'm tired of trying to earn the big bucks. I'm tired of trying to take a name for myself. I've ruined everything.

My checkbook is yours. My relationship is yours. My marriage, everything is yours, Lord.

It is yours, take it. I'm dying to self, because I can't do this. And then tremendous peace and joy comes in, because that's how I was designed as a Christian to live.

Me following Christ and him leading and dying to the self and crucifying this world. If we look just like the world, we watch the same things in the world, the darkness comes in, the occult, all these things, and we're allowing the world to come in, it will kill us spiritually, because he who loves the world does not have the love of the Father in him. We cannot serve two gods, two masters, basically.

We sure try, don't we? Because we wanna please the flesh and we wanna please the Spirit. The problem is when we're pleasing the flesh, we're miserable. And you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Are you happy when you're defeated all the time? We come home grumpy, angry, mean, and guess who we take it out on? The family, the spouse. And then the spouse gets grumpy, angry, and mean, and guess who they take it out on? It's an endless cycle. When the Bible says walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

How do you walk in the Spirit? Very simple terms, you deny the flesh. It's that simple. Does my flesh wanna get up early in the morning, open the Bible, and go to prayer? No, sir, not at all.

Does my flesh want to praise God and worship? No. So you can see denying yourself, this is crucial. This is the difference between a Spirit-filled believer, one filled with love and joy and peace and contentment, long-suffering and gentleness and kindness, and somebody who's dying spiritually.

This is the difference. They've denied themselves, not perfectly, but there's a denial there, there's a seeking God. That's one of the whole points of fasting.

We love to read it, but nobody wants to do it. That's the whole point of fasting is to starve the flesh, to crucify the flesh, and you say, flesh, you're in submission to me. And when those hunger pains come, oh, Lord, and we take it to prayer, and about five minutes later, there's so much peace and joy, you're filled with the Spirit of God because you denied the flesh.

Listen, God knows what he's doing. The flesh is not a friend. What I think we need to remember as believers, our flesh is not a friend.

Let me tell you up front, my flesh, if given full reign, would destroy me. I'd be disqualified from being a pastor very soon. If I did, flesh, I'm all yours.

It would be done, over. Because it is an enemy. It's enmity with God, and the flesh will destroy.

Back to what I was saying, the world will know that we are Christians by our love for one another, and by our obedience and our sacrifice. Here's an interesting thing on this point. I have rarely ran into anybody who said, I don't like Christianity.

I think it's phony. I think it's false, because people wanna live like Christ. But I often hear, I don't wanna follow Christianity.

There's a bunch of hypocrites. They say one thing and do another. The world sees.

The world sees the difference and the distinction, and it's very hard to work in a secular job and be a Christian there. When I was working 10 years ago in heavy equipment, operating heavy equipment with the water district, and those guys, man, you think drunk sailors can curse? It was unbelievable, and they would try to get me. They would try to get me so bad.

I mean, they just wanted to see me. And one guy finally told, I said, listen, the wick on my stick of dynamite is about this big. You better just leave me alone the rest of the day, because I'm, you know, they just push, and one day, you know, I just, you know, he got to me.

And I actually came back and apologized, saying I'm sorry. Oh, man, no problem. And that kind of broke their resistance.

Like, man, this guy's apologizing, and then they started asking questions. Well, how long have you been going to church? What happened? And because they saw what I'm supposed to do. Yes, I acted out.

I didn't cuss, but I quit, and I said, you know, some other things about fighting. I said, if you don't, you know, be quiet, I'm gonna knock you out right here. It's 10 years ago, okay? It doesn't happen anymore.

But so I had to come back and apologize to the guy. I said, listen, that wasn't right, and it opened up a whole new dynamic in the workplace. So living it out, not perfectly.

They know we're not perfect, but you tell them I shouldn't. And you, that purity of the gospel, it draws them out. When you live like Christ, people are attracted to the light just like those bugs that hit the little light things.

They're attracted to that light. So people are not attracted to hypocrisy. When are Christians, especially young adults, gonna realize you don't have to make Christianity cool.

There's no power in the church being cool. There's power in the pastors and the leaders and the church praying and petitioning God and spending time on their face and worshiping God so they're filled with the spirit of God. They can preach with boldness, with passion.

You don't have to be cool to change lives. As a matter of fact, Christianity isn't supposed to be cool. The world shouldn't come in and go, man, this is so cool, I just love it.

There's smoke and there's lights and there's mirrors. The worship doesn't offend me. The message doesn't offend me.

Sunday morning television, right, most of the time. That's why so many people love it. There's no offense.

The world will know that we are Christians by our love for one another and by our obedience, not by how well we imitate the world around us. Oswald Chambers said that a sinner who is now saved by grace proves that he is forgiven by being the opposite of who he was. We prove that we are forgiven.

Do we have to prove it? No, it's a use of words there. But you show that you are forgiven by being the opposite of what you were. When a person is born again, they're opposite.

To me, I understand the dilemma because I can be pulled into the world too, you know, and watching the same things and the same music and the same, you know, I know you can't picture me watching Lady Gaga, but I'd probably turn on, you know, country music and just, you know, the love of the world and pulling me back into that lifestyle and pulling me back into that lifestyle. But there has to be a point where you come out, there's a distinction. I don't live like I used to because I'm now saved.

The things of the world, yes, they're enticing, but they're also repulsive. How can something be both enticing and repulsive? It is. The flesh is enticed, the spirit is repulsed.

So he's saying a true person who's been converted, you live the opposite from the way you were. That's why I think there will be a great falling away in the church because there isn't ground, there isn't a solid, strong faith. A lot of people aren't really living for Christ.

There's just not a difference there. Carnal Christians give God his due. A few hours on Sunday, but they forget his call to come out from among them and be separate, to deny themselves.

I've read this last year, but I'll read it again. In times past, the hero was the father, not Edward from Twilight. The greatest influence was the mother, not Caitlyn Jenner.

Kids once quoted scripture, now they're casting spells. They found their identity in God, now they're finding their identity and changing their sexes. Carnality destroys our relationship with Christ and genuine fellowship with other believers.

It destroys our prayer life as well. A carnal Christian does not pray, really pray and seek the heart of God. A deep prayer life exposes facades and crushes hypocrisy.

Carnality also destroys spiritual power and hinders the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Do you think that carnal Christians are filled mightily with the Spirit of God? No, there's nothing there. Same applies with pastors.

If a pastor fills his mind with the world all week and expects the Spirit of God to speak boldly through him, he will be gravely mistaken. Because who I am on Monday is who I'll be when I step to the pulpit. Same with you.

Same thing I would say to the outsiders worship team and our worship team. What you're filled with all week is gonna come out in your worship. Are you anointed by the Spirit of God because your life has been set apart and there's a distinction? Or are we carnal, filled with the things of the world and we're just going nowhere fast because the Spirit of the Lord has departed from us, has been quenched and grieved because of carnality? That's how serious this is.

It ruins our relationship with God. It kills our prayer life. The Word of God becomes dead and dry and formal.

We don't live for the things of God. We have no passion for purity and holiness. Why? Because of carnality.

So you see, this isn't some topic to glance over. This is crucial to Christian living. Carnality not only affects the pew, but it affects the pulpit as well.

A carnal pastor still offers motivating sermons, but he will lose unction, boldness, and spiritual insight. The world and carnal Christians will love him. Let me say that again.

The world and carnal Christians will love him, but Spirit-filled believers will leave the service starving for more of God. And that's what I said to, alluded to a few minutes ago, 20 minutes ago now probably, is I can tell a difference between the people who don't like what I'm saying and the people who love what I'm saying. The difference is, many times, this group is convicted, so they want me to shut my mouth, pardon my French.

That's it, shut your mouth. I already know I'm getting emails from people watching this online, but that's what it, basically you're saying, be quiet, leave us alone. We want you to motivate us in our sin.

We want to continue in our destructive lifestyle, and we don't want you challenging us. I say, but guys, when I get home, I gotta stand before God and say, I did what you called me to do. I preach your word with gentleness, with meekness, hopefully with some humility, with brokenness, not perfectly.

I listen to my sermons later sometimes, but how do I get through that? It's just, man. Because it's God speaking to us, and he wants to address, I believe, these hard issues. These hard issues.

This is the exact point, I'm not gonna mention his name on TV, very famous guy. This is why carnal Christians love him, or unbelievers love him. They can't get enough of him, because he never challenges anything, nothing.

So you can have 15 different religions watching this guy on TV, and they love what he's saying, because there's no conviction, there's no boldness of the Holy Spirit convicting and drawing. But on a closing note, you may be saying, why try? This is hopeless, I've drifted too far. So let me bring in the hope.

No doubt this convicts people, no doubt it draws people, upsets them, they're like, man, Shane, I've drifted so far, I'm so far off the radar, my life is not pleasing God. Guess what? The whole point of what I just said is to offer hope, not condemnation. It's not to condemn, it's not to point fingers, it's not to bring out the big sledgehammer of God and slap you on the head with it.

It's say, okay, good, now your heart's in a position to hear, now you can say, you know what? I need to hear that, I need to turn back to you, God. Let me reassure you, God doesn't let our relationship with Him hinge on measuring up or on following rules. He wants us to come as we are, recognize our need for a Savior, and commit our life completely to Him.

To return to Him for the first time, or return to Him, it doesn't matter. Change is not your job, obedience is. God will change your heart, God will change your life, God will make these changes in your life, but you have to surrender to Him.

There's obedience there, and that's really what this boils down to.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/XFNsstEkUxM.mp4>
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