

June 1st, 2008 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 2”

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Matthew 16:21-28, Mark 8:31-9:1, Luke 9:22-27

Then Jesus called everyone to join His disciples, and He said to them all, “If anyone chooses to come after Me, he must put his own desires to one side, pick up his cross every day, and follow Me.

Whoever intends to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for My sake and for that of the good news will save it—he will find it.

“What good is it if someone obtains the whole world but destroys himself or loses his soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin this our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

We are continuing our review of the last year of the life of Christ, using Johnston Cheney’s book, “The Life of Christ in Stereo” as a text. In today’s lesson, Jesus is continuing His charge to the disciples as He prepares them to spearhead the creation of the New Testament Church. Jesus describes the selflessness required to live for the Lord in our text, when He says, in **Matthew 16, Mark 8, and Luke 9:**

Then Jesus called everyone to join His disciples, and He said to them all, “If anyone chooses to come after Me, he must put his own desires to one side, pick up his cross every day, and follow Me.

Whoever intends to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for My sake and for that of the good news will save it—he will find it.

The great spiritual problem of the human psyche is selfishness. We are, of necessity, totally selfish when we are born into the world. A baby cannot focus on the concerns of anyone other himself because a baby has no capacity to meet needs, his own or those of anyone else.

Children develop the ability to care for themselves as they grow. Parents need to progressively modify their response to their child’s needs so the child can develop both self-sufficiency and patience, which is the ability to endure delays in having one’s needs met without complaining. Parents have the responsibility to encourage their child to change their focus from themselves and their own needs to the needs of others in their environment, which ultimately leads the child to develop the maturity needed to have a marital relationship and then a parental relationship, at which time the cycle from total selfishness to maturity begins again.

In the foundational episode of human history, God stood in the place of a parent, in that God meet the need of the man and woman for sustenance by creating fruit trees in the garden. God, however, created the man and the woman as adults rather than babies, demanding a certain maturity level from them. Even as God provided abundant sustenance for them from the fruit of the many trees in the garden, God also commanded them to restrain themselves. God's restraint was not deprivation, but simply discipline, as God only prohibited them from eating the fruit of one of the many trees in the garden.

Something happened that created a complication for the first couple, as **Genesis 3:1-5** records:

1 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; 3 but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

4 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.

5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

The complicating emotion that the woman experienced was covetousness, which is the inordinate desire for something that we do not and/or ought not have.

Part of covetousness is self-deception, as the evil one tricks us into thinking that we will be better off if we can just obtain something that God denies us. The serpent deceived and tempted the woman to covet by telling her that the fruit of the poisoned tree was beneficial to her and the consequences for disobedience that God specified did not exist. God instructs us to suppress or overcome the emotion that causes covetousness in us by using our intellect. Paul explains to us in **1 Timothy 6:6-12**, which says:

6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

11 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Covetousness is not in our best interest for two reasons; first, that covetousness leaves us open to the temptations and snares of the evil one, as **Genesis 3** demonstrates, and second, that covetousness is actually the cause the evil that we generate internally. God desires that we be content with that which He makes available to us, but a covetous desire for more than sustenance gives the evil one an avenue upon which to tempt our emotions and to lead us away from faith in God. The main reason that people choose not to believe in or follow the teachings of Jesus Christ

is that to do so will deny them some pleasure that they want to experience, even if it is nothing more substantive than sleeping in on Sunday morning.

The story is told of the dog whose master had given him a bone, and he was carrying the bone to his favorite spot to gnaw on it. On the way the dog passed a pond, looked in, and saw his reflection, which the dog mistook for another dog with a bone in his mouth staring back at him. Being covetous, the dog said to himself, "I'll take that dog's bone, and then I'll have two bones." He opened his mouth to bare his fangs and scare the other dog, and then watched as he and the dog in the pond both lost their bones.

The sin of covetousness makes us susceptible to deception, as the evil one tricks us into thinking that we will be better off if we can just obtain something that we do not have. God warns us against believing the lie, but, as **Mark 4:19** tells us:

19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Jesus commands us to not be covetous but to change our focus from ourselves to Him in our text, which says:

Then Jesus called everyone to join His disciples, and He said to them all, "If anyone chooses to come after Me, he must put his own desires to one side, pick up his cross every day, and follow Me.

Whoever intends to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for My sake and for that of the good news will save it—he will find it.

"What good is it if someone obtains the whole world but destroys himself or loses his soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Putting our desires to one side is the opposite of covetousness, as is picking up our cross every day. At first glance, this seems like a tremendous sacrifice, but most adults actually demonstrate the capacity to follow this instruction every day that they go to work. We put our desires to one side when we enter the workplace, and doing the work that we are called upon to do by our supervisor is analogous to picking up our cross. We put our personal life on hold while we work, which is analogous to losing our lives for the sake of the job. While thinking of our Christianity as a job gives us some perspective, the Scripture amplifies our perspective by describing our interaction with Jesus Christ as a marital relationship, which is designed to be a more dedicated perspective than working on a job. Compare our text with **Ephesians 5:22, 24**, which says:

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

To follow this commandment, a wife would have to put her desires to one side and pick up her cross, meaning to be subject to the instructions of her husband as the church is subject to Christ. Compare the admonishment to lose your life for Jesus' sake to **Ephesians 5:25**, which says:

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

Giving yourself is analogous to losing your life, as **John 3:16** tells us:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in

Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Let us briefly look at a couple having a marital problem to more clearly see the link between being a committed spouse and being a committed Christian.

Twenty-three year old Veronica and her twenty-six year old husband Justin are going to talk to their counselor. They have two children, boys aged two and four, and they have been married to one another for six years.

Veronica started by saying, “Justin and I got married when I was 17½ years old because I was pregnant. We decided to try to work it out, to get married for financial reasons, for insurance reasons...

“Wait a minute”, the counselor interjected, “you didn’t love each other?”

“At the time, no”, Veronica responded, “We both agree on that now.”

Justin added, “I don’t think that either one of us knew what love was at that point.”

“Hmm, okay. Alrighty”, said the counselor, “Well, do you love each other now?”

“That’s why we’re here,” said Veronica, “being twenty-six and twenty-three, we are trying to find out who we are and what our relationship is about. Should it be about the fact that we have kids, or should it be about the fact that we love each other?”

“Right now”, said the counselor, “whether or not you love one other, your relationship is about the fact that you have kids.”

“Exactly. Exactly.” said Veronica, “and I need to know what to do about the situation. I don’t believe in staying in a marriage just because you have kids.”

“I do”, said the counselor, cutting Veronica off.

“You do?” asked Veronica.

“Of course I do”, said the counselor, “You owe that to your children. You have a moral obligation to not destroy your children’s lives over the whim of ‘I don’t think I’m in love’. Neither one of you is violent, neither one of you is a substance abuser or an addict, and neither one of you is out having extramarital affairs. So what the two of you have to do is to simply have the patience to grow in love. You have an absolute moral obligation to stay married and to do your best to make each other’s lives happy, filled and warm, regardless of whether or not you think that you can define the word ‘love’, because it is in the best interest of both of you and it is in the best interest of the children that you do that.

“Let me repeat one part of the last thing that I said. It is in the interest of both of you not to lose each other and the family unit. If you think you’ll be happier with kids bouncing back and forth between you and new relatives and new kids and all of the chaos that comes from that, I’m here to tell you that you are wrong. People think that they would be happier and so they go out and make chaos. The children suffer, and they find that nothing is better. So it each of you would change your perspectives, and I’ll bet you five bucks that each of your wakes up annoyed at the other because of some circumstance or some trivial reason...

“Where do I send the money?” Veronica quipped.

“Right,” said the counselor, “Thank you. But if you woke up instead with the attitude of ‘I have been with my spouse for almost a decade. I know my spouse and my spouse knows me. We’ve created life together. We are a family. What can I do to make my spouse really happy

today?’ If that was the question that you had on your mind when you woke up, you wouldn’t need counseling, you wouldn’t need to separate, and you wouldn’t need to obtain a divorce.

“Love is not born of emotion, but of commitment to someone else and personal sacrifice. Veronica, when you walk by Justin and you just touch the back of his neck, you will feel warmer towards him. Justin, when you walk by Veronica and you just touch her hand, you will feel warmer towards her. I don’t understand why people think that the feeling of love is just supposed to come out of thin air. Love is born of what you give each other.

Veronica asked, “What do you do when you start having feelings outside of the marriage for another person?”

The counselor replied, “You put extramarital desires aside. You eliminate your contact with that person. You get them out of your life. You don’t see them or talk to them. You change whatever circumstance that you have to make sure that there is no contact.”

“Okay”, Veronica said.

Justin asked permission to ask a question. “I found out”, he said, “that Veronica was making plans to go somewhere with another man. How do I get beyond that, because I’m an emotional wreck over that?”

“Of course you’re emotional over that” said the counselor. “That’s a reasonable reaction. But, you have to recognize that you’re going to have problems in your marriage, and that she didn’t actually go, and that she’s here in the session with us now. You get past the circumstance by recognizing that it didn’t actually happen. She’s still here talking,”

“The big mistake that you both made”, continued the counselor “was to expect an emotion to form spontaneously. You have to realize that you give birth to love by your actions. It doesn’t just come and hit you over the head. Actions are the key. Veronica, you have to terminate any romantic relationship that you have with any man outside of your marriage. That’s step one.”

“Yeah”, said Veronica, “Okay”

The counselor said, “Veronica, any man that would wish to destroy your two kids’ family is a pig. A man that would tell a mother to be separated from her children, have them go back and forth, have them be robbed of their intact home and their father, is a pig. Anyone that doesn’t care about your kids doesn’t really love you. He just wants your butt, if you get my drift.

Veronica laughed. “Yeah, I get your drift.”

“Okay”, said the counselor, “Here’s the prescription for love. When you both wake up in the morning, your first thought has to be, ‘what can I do to make my spouse happy today?’ Force yourself to think about this if you have to. Your thought can’t be about someone outside of your marriage, and it can’t be on hurt feelings. It can’t be ‘I wish life was different’, or ‘I wish I had waited to marry’. It can’t be on anything except ‘what can I do to make my spouse happy today’. Watch the change in the feelings that the two of you have toward each other, and watch how fast your feelings change when you change your focus.”

“Yeah”, said Veronica, “Okay”

The counselor continued, “Do not separate, do not go to any therapy or counseling sessions separately, don’t discuss your marital problems with anyone, family, friends, professionals, whomever, unless you are together and mutually agree to talk to that person. I’m

warning you right now, don't have anything separate. Don't let anyone, layperson or professional, put a wedge between you. Do this for a week, and let's talk then."

"Okay, doctor", said Veronica.

"Thanks for your help", said Justin.

It is my opinion that God created marriage as a training tool to prepare us for the type of interactions that we are to have in heaven. The first marriage describes the unity that God wants in the Kingdom as well as in marriages, as **Genesis 2:24** describes:

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

A man married to a woman is to become one flesh with her. This idea of oneness applies to more than just the unity of sexuality, but also to a sharing of life with one another. **1Peter 3:7** tells us:

7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

Unity and understanding of one another in marriage, according to Peter, leads to grace and to a better prayer life. It is my contention that communion in the marital relationship prepares us for communion with the Godhead. **1John 5:6-7** tells us:

6 This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.

7 For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.

The Word to which John refers is Jesus Christ. **John 1:1, 14** tells us:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

There is an essential unity, an essential oneness in the Godhead that we can only parallel on earth by giving ourselves to one another in our marriages. The evil one will try to tempt us to covet some relationship outside of marriage so that he can prevent us from achieving the marital unity which God has in store for us.

The extramarital relationship does not even have to cause a divorce or be a sexual one. Some women are "sports widows", as their husbands forsake them to root for their favorite sports team. Some women wrap themselves up in the lives of their children and forsake their husbands and their marital relationship. Some people are "workaholics" and focus on their careers to the exclusion of their spouses. Some even focus on church functions so much that they neglect their marriages and then deceive themselves that they are neglecting their spouse "for the Lord".

Jesus said, in **John 9:4**:

4 I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.

Although Jesus spent His share of time in prayer and preparation, Jesus also spent time both in ministry to the masses and in ministry to his disciples, who were those with whom He

had his primary human relationship. He healed the multitudes, and then he broke bread in private sessions with the disciples to explain that which He was doing. Jesus spent the night before He was betrayed breaking with His disciples in a private upper room, preparing them for the agony that was to occur. I know this because we still celebrate that private ceremony twenty-one centuries later, in the sacrament that we call communion.

Telling people about Jesus Christ is important, but witnessing is not really the crux of Christianity. Now don't get me wrong; it is good to spread the Good News about Jesus Christ to someone that does not know Him. But Jesus explains, in this parable, in **Luke 8:11-15**:

11 “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

12 Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

13 But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.

14 Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

15 But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.

If you don't actually live the life that Jesus Christ would want you to live, your witness is like seeds on the wayside, or seeds on the rock, or seeds among thorns.

Yes, you are spreading the seeds of witness, but your seeds cannot bear fruit because of the environment that your witness creates. It is tough to believe someone who espouses a set of principles but does not live by them. I know of a preacher who is a great technician of the preaching arts. He knows the Scriptures, can tell a great story, and can almost make the Word come to life. Unfortunately, he's divorced two wives, and my cursory observation of his situation is that many of his members divorce after they become members of the church because of his counsel and example.

But, in our text,

Then Jesus called everyone to join His disciples, and He said to them all, “If anyone chooses to come after Me, he must put his own desires to one side, pick up his cross every day, and follow Me.

Whoever intends to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for My sake and for that of the good news will save it—he will find it.

“What good is it if someone obtains the whole world but destroys himself or loses his soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?

While salvation is a function of belief in Jesus Christ, for those of us whom the Lord chooses to save while we have the opportunity to live for Him, just mere intellectual assent to historical facts is not enough. I believe, for instance, that Millard Fillmore was the thirteenth President of the United States, serving from 1850 to 1853. That information, while true, has no relevance to my life and no effect upon any decision that I would make. The fact that you believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead on that first Easter Sunday morning could be, for you, a similar kind of historical information. You could believe it, but not allow it to have any relevance to your life or effect upon your decision making.

Jesus tells us that although we need to believe the facts, we need to do more in order to be saved than just believe the facts; we must put our own desires to one side, just as we do on the job or as wives do when they obey their husbands, and then pick up the cross, just as when we do the things that the boss asks us to do or as husbands do when they love their wives and give themselves for them, following the instructions and commandments of Jesus Christ. What is Jesus' instruction and command? Jesus says in, **John 13:34-35**:

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 3:16 says:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life

The parallels that we can perform are in two passages of Scripture. **1Peter 3:1** says:
1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,

Ephesians 5:25, 28-29 says:

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.

Marriage is the laboratory of the Lord, the place in which we can most effectively live out His commandments. The combining of the lives of husbands and wife in marriage gives us the opportunity to be truly one with one another akin to the oneness of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in heaven.

We truly learn to love at home with our spouse, by putting our desires aside, taking up the burdens of the one to whom we are married and carrying them, giving ourselves, even to the point of losing our lives, so that our marriages will be an example and an exhibit and an emulation to those watching of our allegiance to the life of Christ.

To truly emulate Christ, we must give our all for someone else. In **John 15:13**, Jesus says:

13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

Jesus laid down His life for us, and then sends us into the world to lay down our lives for someone else. There is no more appropriate person for whom we can lay down our lives than our spouses. Once we become one with our spouse, install their concerns into our thinking, and begin getting up every morning considering that which we can do to make their lives worth living that day, we begin truly doing the will of God. Once we have that loving marital relationship in place, we can provide a credible witness to others that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

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