

Living through Dying

Matthew 16:21-28 - NCBC, September 27, 2020

Main Point: **God grants true life through death.**

- **Jesus had to die to give us true life. (21-23)**
 - He had to be mistreated (21)
 - He had to be killed (21)
 - He had to be raised (21)
 - Because sin deceives us to think that life is found apart from God (22-23)
- **We have to die to self to find true life. (24-28)**
 - Because my self-centeredness destroys life (25)
 - Because my soul is worth more than this world (26)
 - Because my joy is linked with the glory of Jesus (27-28)

Application: **Find who God created you to be through dying to self.**

Opening Announcements:

- **Invite a Friend Sunday and Newcomer's Breakfast Next Sunday – October 4th!** Pray about who you could invite to join you (either onsite or online) for our worship next week! For those onsite, all guests and their hosts are welcome to a Newcomer's Breakfast at 9:30a to learn more about NCBC.

¹ Galatians 6:14-15

- **Please keep praying for our pastoral search** this month! Check out our FB page for daily prayer requests.
- **Remember to visit mynCBC.org** and follow our NCBC Facebook page to stay informed on all ministry/event updates during this season of careful regathering.

<<The Power of the Cross>>



We sing and boast in the cross of our Lord simply because it is through the cross that we die to the world.¹ For whoever dies with Christ has been set free from sin, so that we might live forever with Him.²

This miraculous paradox of Living through Dying is our focus this morning as we open our Bibles to **Matthew chapter 16, verses 21-28.**

If you're joining us online, please notice the links alongside the livestream offer fill-in-the-blank sermon notes, the preaching manuscript, and children's coloring pages to assist your worship. At any time you may pause

² Romans 6:7-8

this video, print those files, and then rejoin our worship with those notes in front of you.

Now while you're preparing to read from **Matthew 16**, I want to make sure we're all aware of the significant Gospel ministry we are preparing to launch together in a week and a half.

October 7th kicks-off an effort here that truly depends on God's mercy, and the prayerful involvement of every one of us. By God's grace, our campus will be overrun by souls – people created in the image of God – most of whom are not yet saved – who are willing to hear how their sins can be forgiven through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, we don't just offer Christian education on Weds evenings...we don't just offer babysitting alternatives for busy parents. Our AWANA children's program and our Rooted Student Ministries exist to share the good news of salvation from sin through faith in Jesus Christ. And each week scores of sinners show up on our campus willing to be loved, taught from God's Word, and spiritually encouraged to put their faith in Jesus!

Talk about an amazing opportunity for God's glory! Church, don't miss the eternal significance of what we are starting on October 7th. This is the church's supernatural work of sharing the Gospel with sinners! All our prayers and sacrificial energies are required. We still have several openings for volunteers, with only a few days until launch. So now's the time to pray for God to glorify Himself through our Gospel-proclaiming disciple-making efforts every Weds evening through the fall. I'm not sure if there's ever a time that we are sharing the

Gospel of Christ with more unbelievers than when we are all doing it together on Wednesday evenings.

You won't want to miss this opportunity to be part of what God is doing through us for His greater glory in our community.

Now our Bibles are open to **Matthew 16** where Jesus foretells His death and resurrection and helps us see that true life is only found through dying to self.

Please stand for the public reading of God's Word as I read the ESV translation from **Matthew 16 verse 21**:

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 on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. ²⁸ Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

This is God's Word.

Let's Pray Together.

Many moons ago, while Jody and I were engaged to be married, we traveled together to visit a church for a weekend. Now in this church men and women sat separately, and since Jody didn't know anyone, she went in and sat down in a pew besides two older women who looked friendly enough.

During introductions, Jody mentioned that she was engaged to be married, which caused quite the reaction by these two ladies.

First, they looked at each other with twinkles in their eyes, as if they both knew that they were thinking the same thing...and then one of the women asked the other, "Should we tell her?" The other woman laughed and said, "She looks like she can handle it...yeah, let's tell her," and the whole time Jody was become more nervous about what was really happening!!

Then one of the sisters leaned over with a determined look in her eye and said, "Jody, prepare to die!" Jody giggled ... sat up straight, and asked nervously, "What do you mean?" And the woman, now a bit more forcibly, repeated her warning: "Prepare to die!"

"You said you're engaged to be married right? So then, as women who have been married for many years, let us save you some trouble. Marriage is a call to die! Not

physically of course...but die to self! Marriage requires you to say no to yourself in ways that you could never expect in the tender joys of engagement. Marriage is a ministry which calls you to die to self, so that you can truly experience the joys of God's design for oneness with your husband."

Now, as you might imagine, that impromptu counseling session with those "Titus 2 women"³ left quite an impression with my bride-to-be! And while their "shock and awe" approach was interesting, their counsel was actually quite wise!

For unless a husband dies to his own selfishness, and a wife dies to her own selfishness, marriage cannot fulfill its God's created purpose. Marriage, like all true ministry, inherently requires suffering – even death to self – since love by its very nature sacrificially gives itself away for the eternal good of another.

In fact, this is the same lesson that Jesus wants to teach His disciples at the end of **Matthew 16**. He's just blessed the disciples with a huge encouragement – assuring them that He will build His church, and Satan and all the powers of death will not be able to withstand the advance of His gospel. But then in **verse 21** He keeps talking about death so we understand that,

³ C.f. Titus 2:3-5

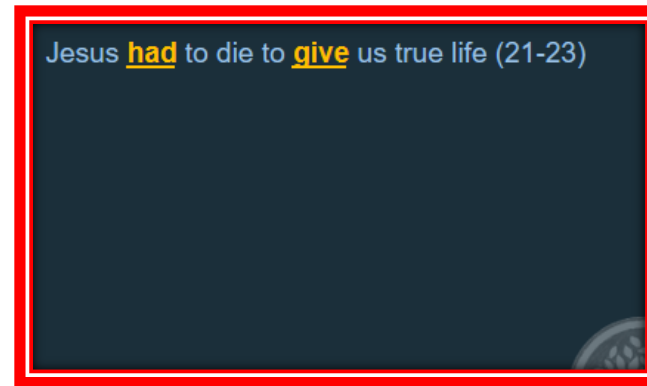


God always grants true life through death.

Caterpillars don't turn into butterflies unless they die to their caterpillar nature and miraculously receive the life of a butterfly!⁴ And in the same way, you and I will never experience the true life that God created us to live unless we die to our self-focused thinking.

Let's not miss this miraculous paradox today: God grants true life through death.

First in **verses 21-23** we learn that,



Jesus had to die to give us true life.

Verse 21 begins with the words, *From that time*, which is a significant marker in Matthew's gospel. The last time Matthew used those words was in **chapter 4 verse 17**, when Jesus officially began His public ministry. Now **verse 21** indicates that Jesus is entering his final season of ministry where His focus turns away from the public crowds towards preparing Himself and His disciples for the waiting cross in Jerusalem.

Now that the disciples clearly understand Jesus is the Son of God – the long-promised Deliverer,⁵ He didn't want them to misunderstand what He had come to do.

And so, from this time onward, Jesus begins to repeatedly show His disciples⁶ that He must go to Jerusalem and surrender to His enemies.

Try to put yourself in the disciples' sandals as you read **verse 21** again,

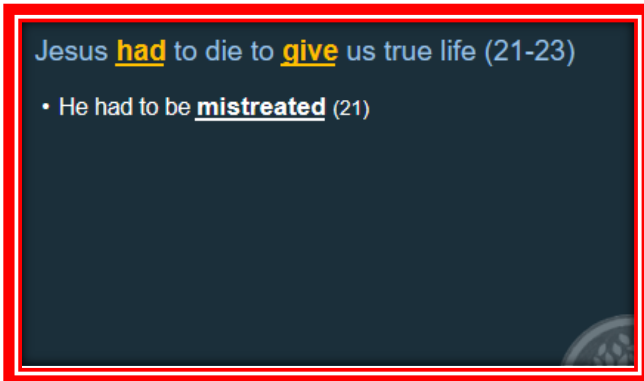
⁴ Cf. <https://www.faithgateway.com/butterflies-story-of-rebirth/>

⁵ Matthew 16:16

⁶ Jesus had referred to his death and resurrection earlier (12:40), but this is the first of three major predictions from this point on (c.f. 17:22; 20:17-19).

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 on the third day be raised.

Jesus keeps clearly⁷ and repeatedly telling His disciples that since He was God's Son,



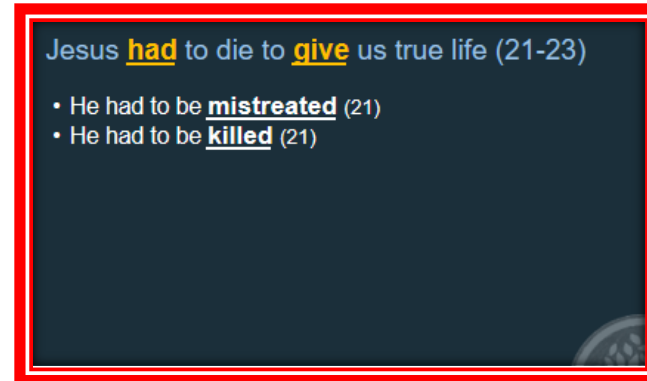
He had to be mistreated. He doesn't just predict that this will happen. He says it *must* happen. It's the necessary plan that He would suffer many things by all the religious leaders over whom He had shown such superiority thus far in his ministry.

Let's not be too hard on Peter's rebuke in **verse 22**...for the disciples had just come to the glorious conviction that Jesus indeed was the Son of God! And God never dies. God never loses. God can't suffer, can He?

But Jesus' words were painfully clear:

⁷ C.f. Mark 8:32

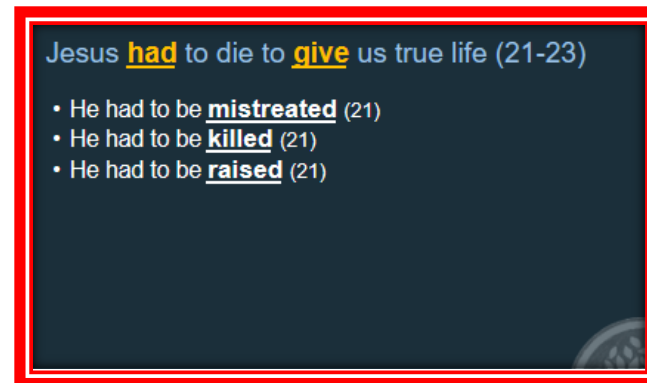
⁸ John 1:12



He had to be killed.

Since He was the Christ, the Son of the living God, He had to suffer death. For He was the Lamb of God, sent to take away the sins of the world.⁸ His mission was to save His people from their sins,⁹ not deliver a nation from political oppression.

Therefore He had to be mistreated, He had to be killed,



And He had to be raised on the third day.

⁹ Matthew 1:21

Now the disciples probably couldn't hear the glorious hope of the resurrection because they kept chocking on the words, *must...be killed*.

Listen church... Jesus had to die to give us true life.

Jesus was way more than just a good teacher or a good example for us to follow. Jesus had to die in our place, as our substitute, so that God's anger against our sin could be satisfied through His death.

We must never domesticate Jesus and turn Him into some kind of a soul-guru who cures us of our deepest problems simply by drawing near with unconditional love.

Yes, Jesus loves us and is forever with us! Hallelujah for that! But Christianity without the cross is worthless, and no better than any other self-improvement offer in the airport bookstore!

Make no mistake. **Romans 6:23** says *the wages of sin is death*. So ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, our entire human race has been condemned to death¹⁰ and enslaved to sin.¹¹ My sin, and your sin, separates us from God and obligates His wrath.

The fact that every one of us will eventually physically die is a constant witness to the truth of God's Word: every one of us is a sinner,¹² and all sinners die.

But Jesus is God. And since Jesus never sinned, His life is eternal. Sinless perfection means no death for Jesus. And God so loved the world, that He sent Jesus to be the substitute¹³ – the sacrificial lamb – the payment for the sins of all who would believe on Him. This is why Jesus had to die!

Jesus had to die to break death's power¹⁴ and set the captives free.¹⁵ Jesus had to die to satisfy God's wrath that was stored up against our sins.¹⁶ Jesus had to rise again 3 days later to reconcile our relationship with God, and restore us back to the joyful worship of God forever.

So listen carefully – when Jesus rose from the dead, death died for all who believe on Jesus.¹⁷ For although our physical bodies still die, our souls are forever reconciled with God – transformed into the image of Christ's righteousness¹⁸—all because of the death and resurrection of God's Son in our place!

Do you believe this good news?

Do you believe that your sins were the reason for Jesus being whipped and mocked and beaten in Jerusalem? Do you believe that when Jesus gave up His life on the cross, that He was paying for all your sins – past, present, and future? Do you believe that when God rose Jesus from the grave on that first Easter morning that Jesus' resurrection also gives you newness of life?

¹⁰ Romans 5:12

¹¹ Romans 6:6-23, especially vv. 6, 14, 17-18, 20, 22

¹² Romans 3:23

¹³ John 3:16

¹⁴ Hebrews 2:14

¹⁵ Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18; c.f. 2 Timothy 2:26

¹⁶ Romans 5:9; Colossians 2:14; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 John 2:2

¹⁷ Romans 6:9; 1 Corinthians 15:57

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:21

The Bible says this is all true – for everyone who believes.¹⁹ So trust in the substitutionary death and resurrection of Jesus today – for only by believing in Jesus' death and resurrection can we truly live free from death's power today!

Now back in **verse 22**, Peter was struggling. The concept of a suffering and dying Messiah was just not something he was willing to consider. And so he begins to rebuke Jesus: "You're the Messiah – You don't have to do this. Save yourself!"

Like all of us, Peter's faith was still imperfect. Although he believed Jesus was God, Peter was still evaluating life from the perspective of this world.

So Jesus rebukes him in **verse 23**,

Get behind me Satan!

In **verse 16**, Peter had been a mouthpiece for God. But here, Peter is the mouthpiece for Satan. He's actually repeating Satan's temptation from **chapter 4** where Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms of this world without his death on the cross.²⁰

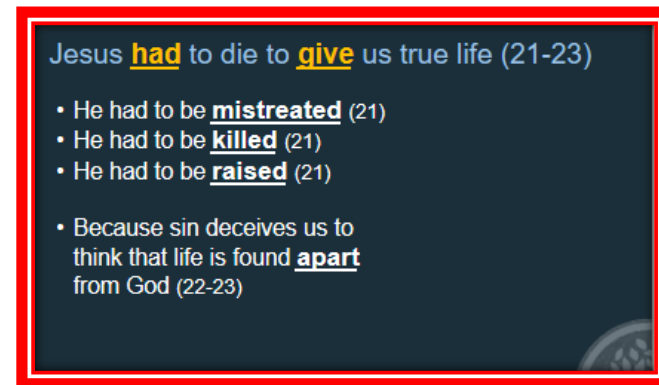
You are a hindrance to me.

In **verse 18** Peter was a blessed "little stone," but now he is a "stumbling block," seeking to turn Jesus away from the death which was necessary to reconcile sinners to God.

You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

This is the biblical definition of worldliness. Peter, you're living for the wrong world and the wrong kingdom. You've embraced the wrong understanding of life itself.

And this is why Jesus had to die,



Because sin deceives us to think that life is found **apart from God**. From the very first sin in the Garden with Adam and Eve, sin's lie has been that true life is found apart from submission to God's Lordship.

Sin whispers, you can't trust God to really know what's best for you. You need to look out for yourself! Just be you. Live for you!

Peter was thinking about what he wanted from the perspective of the here and now. So what about you?

¹⁹ Romans 10:9-10, 13

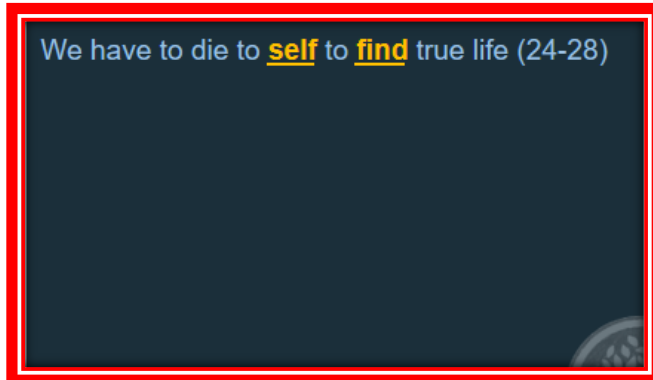
²⁰ Matthew 4:8-9

Do you believe your life – or satisfaction – is found in the abundance of worldly possessions?²¹ Do you believe you know better than God’s Word on how you should live?

What causes you to say, “I’m really living now!”?

Sin has infected our souls with this conviction that true living amounts to me getting what I want, when I want it, how I want it! We hoard our resources, harm others to get ahead, isolate and protect ourselves...all because we believe such actions will save our lives.

That’s why Jesus turns to address all of the disciples in **verse 24**. Because every Christ-follower needs to clearly understand that,



We have to die to self to find true life.

²¹ Luke 12:13-21

²² This doesn’t mean that Jesus’ followers could die for either their own or others sins, as Jesus did, but Jesus rather insisted that following Him meant self-denial, suffering, rejection, and perhaps even physical death.

²³ Romans 12:1-2. Interestingly, the word for “transformed” in this verse is

Just as Jesus had to die so that we could be reconciled to God, we have to die to selfishness to find God’s true life for us.²²

While God created us to be beautiful flying butterflies who drink the sweet nectar of His glories, Satan’s spell has hardened our contentment as earth-bound leaf-eating caterpillars. And so Jesus teaches,

If anyone chooses to be my disciple, they must deny self, take up the cross, and follow me.

Every disciple of Jesus must be transformed through the renewal of the mind²³...so that we die to living for the things of this world and live for the glory of God.

Now notice, there’s three verbal commands²⁴ in **verse 24** which combine to explain what it means to follow Jesus. This is Jesus’ explanation of what is required to find life in Christ.

First, you must say no to self-worship, and then you must say yes to the Lordship of Jesus. And not just as a one-time decision, but a continuous lifestyle following Jesus.

Let’s quickly unpack each of these commands.

the Greek root for the word “metamorphosis” that describes the miraculous transformation of caterpillars into butterflies!

²⁴ All three verbs are third-person imperatives in the Greek language, for which there is not exact English translation. “He must” carries the force of the commands. Holman’s Commentary on Matthew

We have to die to **self** to **find** true life (24-28)

- Let him deny himself =
Turn from self-rule

Let him deny himself is a very strong command for self-denial. Put aside the self-righteousness and self-indulgence of worldly thinking. Put aside all your self-preservation and your self-worship. Turn from your self-rule, and live submitted to something bigger than yourself.

We have to die to **self** to **find** true life (24-28)

- Let him deny himself =
Turn from self-rule
- And take up his cross =
Submit to Jesus' authority

Take up his cross means to submit to the authority of Jesus' Lordship over you. It doesn't mean to endure some burden or inevitable difficulty like a physical handicap or a broken relationship.

Sometimes we talk about difficult suffering in our life like it's "just the cross I have to bear." But that's not what Jesus is referring to here when He commands every disciple to *take up his cross*.

In Jesus' culture, a cross was a horrific instrument of execution. In the Roman Empire, a convicted criminal was forced to carry his cross on the way to the crucifixion, publicly showing that his will had been broken, and he was now under submission to the authority he had previously opposed.

So then likewise, all of us who follow Jesus must be willing to show our submission to the Lordship of Jesus which we previously opposed in our self-seeking sin.

Therefore, to *take up his cross* is a word picture that refers to the transfer of authority in my life. I deny myself the right to rule my own life, and I submit to King Jesus as the controlling authority for my life.

We have to die to **self** to **find** true life (24-28)

- Let him deny himself =
Turn from self-rule
- And take up his cross =
Submit to Jesus' authority
- And follow me =
As your new way of living

*And then the third verb means, let him keep on following me.*²⁵ Because Christianity is not a one-time decision, it's

²⁵ The Greek verb is a present imperative, which suggests ongoing, continual action.
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a lifestyle. This is not a box that can be checked once. We must *take up our cross daily*,²⁶ since our submission to Jesus is to be our new way of living.

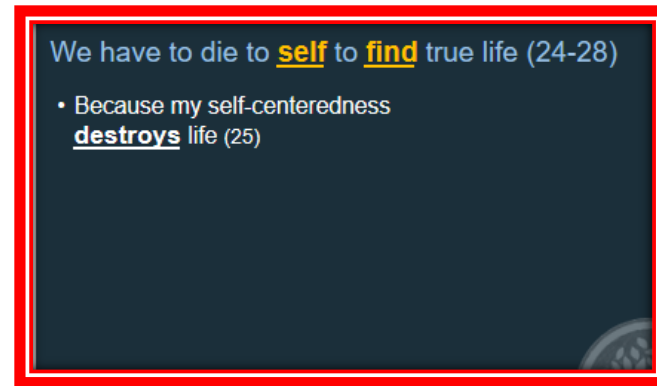
This is what it means to be a disciple – a Christ-follower. To lay down the short-sighted self-centeredness of worldliness, and live in complete submission to the authority of Jesus.

Now Jesus is fully aware of how sin-hardened hearts will respond to this demanding and costly teaching. Like Eeyore, we moan and say,

“Well, since I have to...I’ll give up all my joy and live as a martyr for Jesus. After all, a life of doom and gloom on earth is better than an eternity in hell...so I’ll try to die to myself now.”

But this misses Jesus’ point entirely! Look at what Jesus does in **verses 25-28**. In our English Bibles you’ll notice Jesus uses the word, “For” – “F-o-r” at the beginning of **verses 25, 26, and 27**. Here Jesus reveals 3 reasons why dying to self is the path to the most joyful life!

Three reasons why costly submission to Jesus discovers true life through death.



First, **verse 25**, **Because my self-centeredness destroys life.**

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Don’t miss this marvelous paradox. If you live for yourself, you only layer more death upon your soul. But if you die to your selfishness, you will truly live!

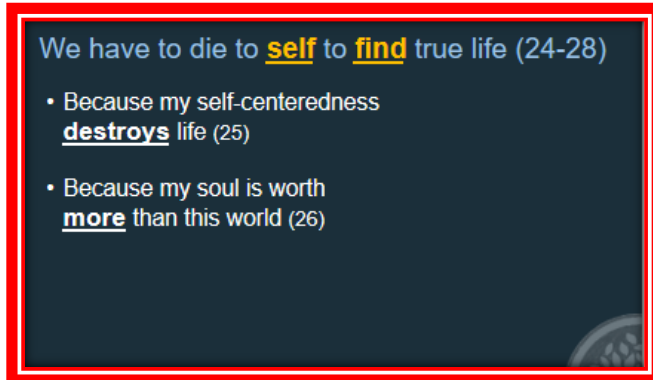
Just like a seed must die before it can produce a fruitful plant, so we miss life’s entire purpose whenever we try to preserve our own seedy selfishness.

The world tells me that getting what I want now is the meaning of life. But whenever I feed my own selfishness I wake up deeper into isolation and emptiness.

True life is found only as you become transformed into the likeness of Jesus Himself – through submission to His Lordship in your life.

²⁶ Luke 9:23-24

The second reason we have ought to pursue life through dying to self is from **verse 26**,

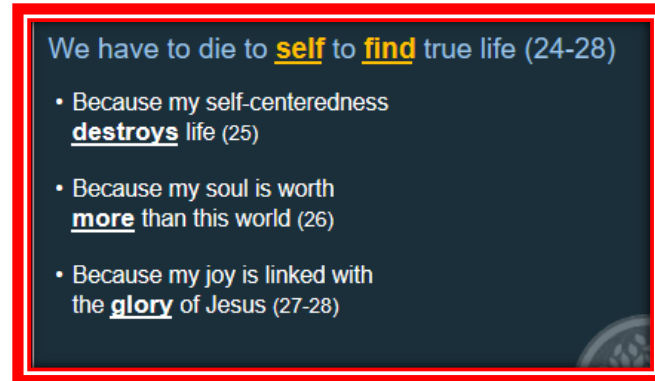


Because my soul is worth more than this world.

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

Here Jesus is clear: your soul is more valuable and long-lasting than anything else in this world. So if you look to any financial statement to see how much you are worth, you've missed the point of true living. The greatest asset on your balance sheet is "One Soul." And true life is defined by who you are becoming rather than how much you have accumulated. Your soul will last for eternity, but this world dies and offers you no lasting advantage.

Finally in **verse 27-28**, we see that we ought to die to live,



Because true joy is linked with the glory of Jesus.

Yes, Jesus says He is going to die and rise again in **verse 21**. But in **verse 27** He is going to return to the earth as the triumphant King – with all His angels, in the glory of His Father. And then all the wrongs will be made right, and He will reward every person according to what he has done with the soul that God has given him.

So listen carefully– lasting joy is never achieved by getting what your selfishness wants here and now. The greatest joy and satisfaction in life is found when you are experiencing the glory of God.

In fact, to encourage the disciples in **verse 28**, Jesus says that some of the twelve will actually see a glimpse of His coming glory even before they begin to experience the cost of dying to self. I believe this happened with James, John, and Peter 6 days after this conversation when they saw Jesus transfigured in front of them and beheld His kingdom glory on the mountaintop!²⁷

²⁷ Matthew 17:1-13

Therefore, don't believe this world's lies that you can find lasting satisfaction by getting what you want here and now. True joy is linked with the eternal glory of Jesus, and a soul will never be more alive than when in the presence of Jesus' glory!!²⁸

Can you see how surrendering your will to the authority of Jesus is actually the most satisfying life to live?



Because God grants true life through death.

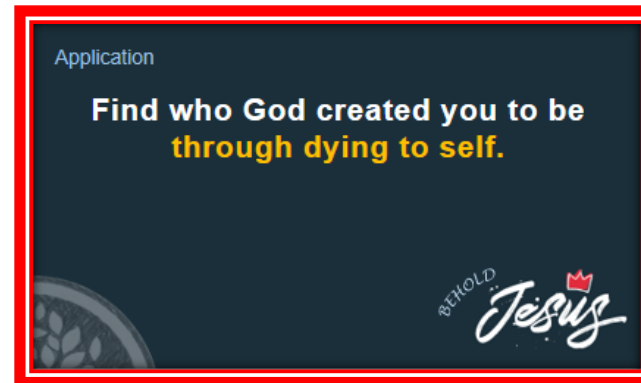
Through Jesus' death we receive a life of resurrection power. And by Jesus' Spirit in us now, we can lose our life in Christ, and actually find the life that God created us to have.

Only when we give up our selfish caterpillar living, and submit to obeying God's Words, can we soar like a butterfly and delight in our eternal life in Christ.

So then today I urge us each to,

²⁸ Psalm 16:11

²⁹ Colossians 3:1-3



Find who God created you to be through dying to self.

Matthew 16 calls us to set our minds on things above, not on things of this earth!²⁹ Remember the 3 reasons Jesus gives to say yes to Christ before instead of ever saying yes to yourself.

Cast off the Eeyore martyr mentality that believes Christians really got the short-end of the stick here on earth. Sure, following Christ requires suffering and heartache. But what better life could we ever have than to know God and experience His glory both now and forever?³⁰

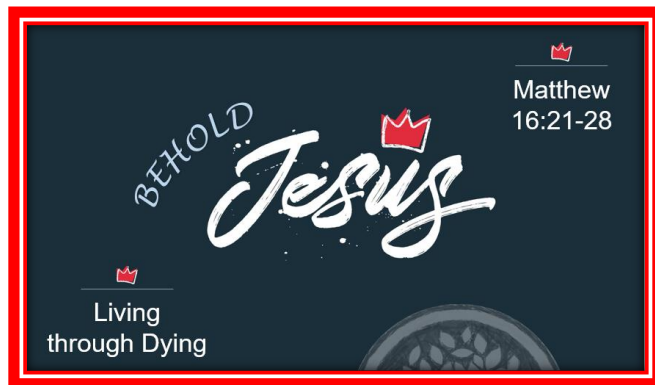
So when you become frustrated because of unmet expectations, or unresolved difficulty of some kind... take a deep breath and ask yourself, what am I really wanting right now? Am I wanting the things of God, or am I just wanting what I want, when I want it?

Pray that God will transform your heart's desires to truly desire His glory and praise more than your own comfort

³⁰ The famous quote from Jim Elliot is appropriate here: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

or self-preservation. Pray that God would help you to see the eternal rewards of your choices today more than the temporary costs of Christ-likeness.

Because every time you choose the glory of Christ over your own short-sighted selfishness, another layer of death is peeled off your soul, and the true life of Christ Himself will be revealed in you.



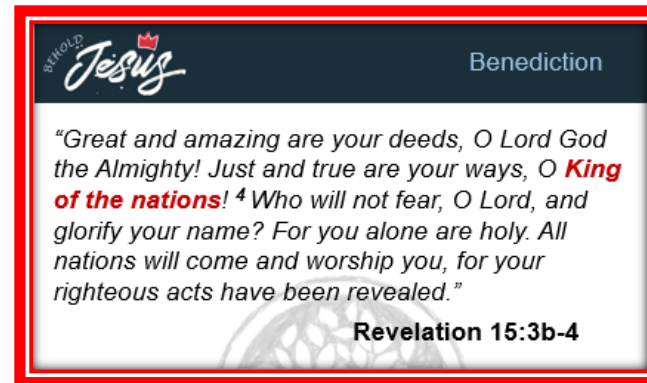
The only way you will discover the fullest joys of your new creation in Christ is by losing your life for Christ's sake. Will you forsake your self-rule, and submit to Jesus' authority as your new way of living today?

Let's pray.

<<Come Thou Fount>>

Remember to take advantage of the online Downloads and links!

Let's pray our benediction together as we dismiss.



*Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O **King of the nations!** ⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.*
Revelation 15:3b-4

Recommended Resources on Living through Dying:

- Psalm 37:4
- Matthew 10:37-42; 24:30-31
- Mark 8:31-9:1
- Luke 9:22-27; 12:13-21
- John 12:24-28
- Romans 6:5-14
- 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:17
- Galatians 2:19-20; 5:16, 24; 6:14-15
- Philippians 1:21; 3:7-10
- 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

- <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/denying-yourself-is-loving-yourself>

- *Don't Waste Your Life*, Piper
- *Christ's Call to Discipleship*, Boice
- *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, Burroughs
- *The Cross-Centered Life*, Mahaney
- *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Review Matthew 16:21. If you were in the place of the twelve disciples, what would have been most shocking to you about Jesus' revelation here? Why did Jesus have to die to take away the sins of the world? (c.f. John 1:29; Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 5:21)
2. Read Matthew 16:23. How is Peter's rebuke similar to Satan's temptation in Matthew 4:8-9? Where do you most clearly see the lying influence of worldliness that focuses on yourself and today more than God and eternity in your pursuit of a joyful life?
3. Read Matthew 16:24. What does it mean to "take up your cross daily"? (c.f. Mark 8:34 & Luke 9:23) How does the promised rewards of 16:27-28 influence your sacrificial love for God today?
4. Read Matthew 16:26 and Luke 12:13-21. Are you laying up treasures for yourself on earth? Do you believe that your life consists in the abundance of your possessions? Share testimonies about how sacrificial generosity has crucified greed and helped you experience true living in Jesus.
5. Read Galatians 2:20. Share what you found most helpful from this sermon. Pray for each other to find true life in the lasting glory of Jesus rather than the fleeting glitter of this world.