



## **Part 1: The Pattern: Life Through Death**

Matthew 16:21-28

The pattern of the Christian life follows Jesus: life through death.

### **I. Jesus' Countercultural Call**

Jesus' call to follow him – to trust him for eternal life with the living God – his demand for our ultimate allegiance and devotion – has always been radical and countercultural.

The idea that anyone would consider it wise or good to swear allegiance to a 1st C Jewish Rabbi, who was crucified by the Romans, has been widely mocked as foolish, naïve, superstitious and dangerous.

Ex. 2C graffiti in Rome mocking Christians.

The sentiment depicted in this graffiti still alive in the world despite the surprising and explosive growth of the Christian faith around the world.

In the secular West, where we live, there are signs that some intellectuals are embracing the ethical virtues of Christianity like basic human rights, care for the poor and oppressed, and attributing dignity to women. But this movement is a far cry from these intellectuals professing their faith and devotion to Jesus Christ. For many, that is simply a bridge too far.

Jesus' call to follow him is radical in any culture for a variety of reasons, but it is disruptive and threatening to many in our culture due to our exalting of the "sovereign self" as our ultimate authority.

Consider the widely accepted vocabulary of our cultural moment ... "be true to yourself... you do you ... speak your truth ... the heart wants what it wants ...."

Consider how widely accepted is the belief that the only real problems with you and I becoming our “authentic self” is either the oppression of others or the cultural pressure to repress our internal desires.

And on top of all of this, layer the digital technology and algorithms that rewire our brains to expect instant gratification and offer us the illusion of control.

“The pursuit of self-awareness, self-esteem, wholeness and wellbeing is paramount. One who fails at the project of self must gaze at the mirror and confess ‘against you alone have I sinned.’ The only sin of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the failure of self-actualization.” – Author unknown (quoted by Jon Tyson)

We are left facing massive cultural obstacles to any of us following Jesus. I agree with Jon Tyson, who has said that one of the subtle temptations for professing Christians in the West is that we will simply “want Jesus to be our chaplain in project self.”

With this honest assessment of our cultural moment, we must be willing to ask the Lord for the grace and courage to hear his call as he actually offers it.

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## **II. We Follow a *Crucified King* (v. 21-23)**

“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” Matthew 16:21

Having learned that Jesus is God’s promised King, now the disciples begin to learn *how* Jesus will be King. Jesus will be both the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 and the Son of Man of Daniel 7. This is the great mystery of the Kingdom.

“Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, ‘Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’ Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’” Matthew 16:22-23

Peter cannot fathom Jesus’ words. His only vision of the Messiah is one of power, who comes to destroy the Lord’s enemies and restore the earth with His righteous people. Jesus rebukes Peter sharply telling him he is not thinking correctly.

“Get behind me, Satan.” The place of a true disciple of Jesus is behind him – following him – not out in front of him.

“If you believe what you like in the Gospel and reject what you don’t like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself.” – Tim Keller

## **III. We Follow a *Crucified King* (v. 24-28)**

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’” Matthew 16:24

### **The pattern of the Christian life follows Jesus: life through death.**

A. The call is to Jesus Himself not a Creed or an abstract ethical system.

Salvation is more relational than transactional. “Eternal Life” is relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ that starts now and never ends (John 17:3).

This is stock language in 1<sup>st</sup> C Israel of becoming a disciple of a rabbi. Every disciple of Jesus must monitor our heart daily to discern our true position with Jesus (Luke 9:23-24).

B. Jesus’ call to discipleship is universal to everyone in the same pattern.

It’s to “anyone” and it includes his “must” (1 John 2:5-6).

C. The pattern is life through death.

Jesus takes his own literal crucifixion and applies it to his disciples both literally and metaphorically. For these early disciples and many Christians throughout history, literal death has been the cost of swearing love and allegiance to King Jesus.

For every disciple, it is a metaphor for describing the consent of our wills to deny ourselves by putting to death our self-oriented life. Self-denial is surrendering ourselves as lords of our lives and submitting to King Jesus as our Lord.

This surrender happens at the moment of our true conversion to Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10; Mark 1:15; Acts 2:32-39). And it happens daily as we monitor our hearts (Luke 9:23-24).

Note: Jesus is not asking us to repress our personality or even our heart’s righteous desires or dreams. These are part of us made in God’s image. Both Jesus and Paul command us to deny or “crucify” our “flesh/sin nature” which is that part of us diseased by sin that insists on self-gratification, control and living independently of the Lord’s righteous commands.

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” Galatians 5:24

“I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’” Matthew 16:24

This isn’t just a command. It’s a statement of reality about the way the Christian life works – how we enter the Eternal Love and Joy of the Trinitarian Community that is “Eternal Life.”

Ex. *Band of Brothers*: All true soldiering depends on counting yourself dead already.

“If you want Jesus with you, you have to give up the right to self-determination. Self-denial is an act of rebellion against our late-modern culture of self-assertion. But that is what we are called to do. – Tim Keller

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#### **IV. Relational Fidelity and Devoted Love**

“I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20

Our salvation in King Jesus is more relational than transactional. We will be helped to recalibrate our images of salvation to more of the relational images in Scripture like adoption or marriage. Consider the covenant of marriage as the Lord has intended it to be (not as we often experience it in our fallen world) ... “The gift of love brings the obligations of love.” This is what we vow to one another in the presence of God and public witnesses. We forsake all other lovers to be faithfully devoted in love to our spouse. This is a picture of the gospel.

In modern American evangelicalism, we are stuck in thinking transactionally rather than relationally. “Well, I prayed the prayer so I’m saved. How much do I have to do? Or how much can I get away with?” It’s like asking how many lovers are permitted in your marriage!

In the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are loved first by God in His Son. The only sane and faithful response is to vow our devoted love and relational fidelity to Jesus. Every day with the help of the Holy Spirit.

“The way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one.” – Thomas Chalmers

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How was the gospel communicated to you? What was communicated as your faithful response to the gospel (explicitly or implicitly)?
2. Were the words of Jesus used in any way?
3. Read Matthew 16:21-28. What stands out to you?
4. What has been your understanding of Jesus’ call in Matthew 16:24? Does this sermon help? What questions do you still have?
5. Is it helpful to think of the gospel as a marriage rather than an employment contract?
6. Does thinking of faith as relational fidelity and devoted love help you consider the response Jesus and the Apostles are calling for in the gospel?