**Matthew 16:13-28**

I. Who is Jesus (v. 13-20)

A. The people’s answer: a prophet (v. 13-14)

B. Peter’s answer: The Christ, the Son of the living God (v. 15-16)

 1. See Psalm 2

 2. Christ = “anointed one”

3. Son of God = the coming king who would rule the nations with God’s authority

C. Jesus’ response to Peter’s confession

1. He affirms and blesses Peter and his confession (v. 17-19)

 a. He acknowledges God is at work in Peter’s heart and mind

b. He renames Simon to Peter = rock

b. He promises to use Peter in a foundational way in the building of his church

2. He warns them not to tell anyone he is the Christ (v. 20)

II. What does it mean for Jesus to be the Christ? (v. 21-23)

 A. He will suffer and die for his people

1. Jesus was drawing on other OT passages such as Isaiah 53:3-6 that talk about a suffering servant who would suffer and die for the people

2. No one in that day thought those suffering passages related to Messiah

3. The Israelites greatest enemy was not Rome but their own sin. To defeat that enemy, Jesus has to suffer and die to save his people

B. Peter has a worldly and misguided view of what it means for Jesus to be the Christ

 1. Peter pulls Jesus aside to correct him (v. 22)

2. “Get behind me Satan”

 a. Jesus hears the temptation of Satan behind Peter’s perspective

b. In the wilderness, Satan tempted him in the same way to be a Messiah who used his power and authority for his own comfort and privilege rather than going the way of the cross

c. Peter is thinking the way the world thinks, not the way God thinks (the world thinks in terms of power, status, privilege; but God thinks in terms of humility and service)

C. That is why Jesus warned them not to tell anyone he was the Christ. Even though that title is accurate, it is misleading based on the people’s expectations of what the Messiah would be like

III. What does it means for us to be his followers?

 A. Deny yourself, take up your cross, follow me (v. 24)

 1. Follow me: the fundamental command of discipleship

 2. Deny yourself: = reject, denounce, claim no relationship to

 a. Peter “denied” Jesus 3 times: “I swear I don’t know this man”

b. We are to deny our agenda, comforts, expectations, etc.

3. Take up your cross

a. In that day there was no spiritual connotation to a cross. It was simply a tool of execution used by the Roman government

b. Jesus is saying, “If you’re going to follow me, you need to accept that the end result might be death. You’ve got to expect persecution, rejection, humiliation, and possibly death”

c. He’s also saying, “you need to accept death as a way of life. You need to daily die to yourself, your plans, comforts, safety, etc.

d. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “when Christ calls a man he bids him come and die”

4. The opposite of “deny and take up your cross” is trying to “save your life” (v. 25)

a. It’s the desire to save, preserve, keep safe, hold onto things such as our own physical safety, reputation, material possessions, comforts

b. Jesus is saying, “you need to die to that desire to hold onto and save all of that. I have to be first, and at any time I might ask you to do something that threatens any one of those things, and you need to do it.”

c. C.S. Lewis: “Christ says, "Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good...Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked--the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.

B. The great perspective and motivation for following Jesus (v. 25-28)

1. The seeming paradox (v. 25)

a. Jesus is not mainly referring to a principle of how life works in the here and now; he’s referring to eternal life: “if you try to save your life in this life, you will lose it for all eternity. If you lose it for me in this life, you will find it for all eternity.”

b. v. 27 is referring to Christ’s second coming and the judgment we will all face

c. At the judgment, we will realize that gaining everything in this life is not worth comparing with receiving eternal life. At the judgment, we will have no bargaining power to offer in exchange for eternal life.

2. Jesus is inviting us to consider how precious our life is and to value it, not just in this life, but for all eternity. He’s encouraging us to have an eternal perspective on our lives. He’s actually appealing to our self-interest in the deepest sense.

 3. Consider the parable of the treasure in the field in Matthew 13

The man was willing to deny himself and sell all his possessions because he realized there was something far more valuable

IV. Conclusion

A. What are we holding onto that is getting in the way of following Jesus more faithfully?

B . How can we begin to believe in our hearts that Jesus is offering us the greatest treasure in the universe?

1. C.S. Lewis: “It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

2. Hebrews12:2

The joy Jesus anticipated in saving his people and living eternity with them as their king enabled him to endure the cross and scorn its shame. How can we share with him in that joy so that we can faithfully endure whatever we are called to endure?

**Discussion Questions**

1.  Consider Jesus’ call to deny yourself and take up your cross.  What do you think Jesus actually means by this and what does he *not* mean by this?  What are you holding onto or trying to save that is getting in the way of following Jesus more faithfully?

2. Discuss the idea mentioned on Sunday that Jesus is actually appealing to our own self-interest when he calls us to follow him (“if you give up your life you’ll find it in the deepest way”)? How do you feel about this appeal to our own selfish interests? Is that consistent with the way Scripture speaks in other contexts?

3. Jesus’ comments about radical self-denial and potential suffering and death are not often brought up in evangelistic appeals today. Do we do people a disservice by presenting the gospel in a “softer” way without presenting the need for total self-denial and abandonment to Christ? Why or why not?

4.  Consider the parable of the treasure hidden in a field mentioned on Sunday (Mt 13:44).  What 'half-hearted desires', attitudes, or beliefs about God prevent us from purchasing that field in our own lives?  How might we cultivate eyes to see God as the greatest treasure in the world, and then act accordingly?

5. How can Jesus say, “my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Mt 11:30) in one context and also say “you must take up your cross and follow me” in another context? How do we fit those two statements together?