

# The Gospel Of Matthew

Title: True Followers

Text: Matthew 16:24-27A

I want to begin with some important truths that this text does not say, or better yet, some things we may read into the text that aren't there. It doesn't say you have to sell everything you have nor you can't have anything to be a true follower of Christ. There isn't a bible text that says you can't have "stuff", but the stuff you have can become your god, and that's where you must be on guard. For where your treasure is, there your heart is also.

We should also note, and rejoice today with unspeakable joy, that God has blessed this land, even now, for us to worship and freely preach the gospel. The ugly truth is American churches have become so "americanized" many think suffering is some inconvenience in their life that gets in the way of their plans. The hideous, clown style preaching, theatrical worship services, prosperity gospel, false teaching, and cultural relevant churches is a fulfillment of 2 Timothy 4:8 "**lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.**"

This isn't the first time Jesus has spoken about the cost of following Him. In Matthew 10 Jesus spoke in terms of "**I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves**", "**scourge you in their synagogues**", "**you will be hated by all because of My name**", and the instruction when enduring this was "**whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next.**"

*This passage sets for the heart of Christian discipleship and strikes a blow to the self centered false gospels that are so popular in contemporary Christianity today.<sup>1</sup> It leaves no room for the genie style god that modern American christianity has created. The health and wealth gospel, where all you need to do is have enough faith to be set for life. No struggles, no suffering, no problems. This isn't biblical discipleship. And by the way, I am not asking for suffering, or trials either. I don't like them. I don't like enduring things that are uncomfortable. But 2 Corinthians 12:9 applies, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.**"*

We see in the New Testament repeatedly that *there's a cross before a crown, suffering before glory, sacrifice before reward.*<sup>2</sup> It has been noted that Christian discipleship is giving before gaining, and losing before winning.

## **POINT 1 - THE PRINCIPAL OF FOLLOWING (Vs. 24A)**

I think its important to make a clear distinction here between a true follower and one who follows for the sake of following in name only. We always refer to John 6:66, "**After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.**"<sup>3</sup> The reason they turned back is because they weren't true followers. The truth, the hard way, the reality of being a follower was something they weren't willing to do.

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<sup>1</sup> The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary; pp. 45

<sup>2</sup> The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary; pp. 46

<sup>3</sup> ESV

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1A - Let him deny himself. What exactly does this mean? The biggest problem in your life today, isn't anyone else, it's you. The word deny is from the Greek word *aparneomai* which means, "to completely disown, to utterly separate yourself from someone." It is the word Jesus used to describe Peter's denial of Him while He was being questioned by the high priest, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (Matthew 26:34).

The straight and narrow gate is a sign of denial of oneself. The wide gate you can carry anything you want on it, but not the narrow. As Matthew Henry notes, "We must not admire our own shadow, nor gratify our own humor; we must not lean to our own understanding, nor seek our own things, nor be our own end." The self which is referred to here isn't your personality, but the natural, sinful, rebellious, unredeemed self that is at the center of every fallen person and what the Christian has to fight against everyday. Ephesians 4:22, "To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires." The phrase "to put off" is a continual action. You have to be intentional about denying yourself. This body will be redeemed into a new body when sanctification is complete, Romans 8:23, "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." Romans 7:18, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not." In the garden before the death of Jesus, the disciples couldn't stay awake for one hour, and finding them sleeping Jesus said, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Notice the willing and the doing. This is essential in our Christian walk, it's warfare to do right. It's the true follower who has been redeemed that can overcome.

To be a true follower of Christ we must deny ourselves so as to consider Colossians 3:5, "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry." We are to lay aside these old things, Ephesians 4:22-23, "That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind." There is a former life, conduct and way of life, but you have to fight against it, deny its reign over you. But you have a new life!

### POINT 2 - TAKE UP ONE'S CROSS (24B)

In context most, if not all of us, today do not properly apprehend the meaning of the cross. In the time of the disciples the cross was representative of death. As John MacArthur notes, "A cross in not having an unsaved husband, nagging wife or a domineering mother-in-law. Nor is it a physical handicap or suffering from illness. To take up one's cross is the willingness to pay any price for Christ's sake." To the disciples a man who carried his cross was on a death march.

We know that not all suffer at the hands of martyrs, and it's our prayer that none of us ever do. However, the willingness to do all for Christ's sake must be present. The common illustration was greatly understood in this time. The book of Acts gives us great details about the threats against those preaching the gospel, and the willingness of those to still preach, plant churches, and share the gospel. We should not be surprised at those who want to say negative things, or mock or spread lies about a Christian. The fact is one must be willing to go to the cross for Christ. 1 Peter 4:12-14, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some

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strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

Earlier in Matthew 10:34-36, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household.” Jesus never initiated nor does the Christian initiate violence, but the truth of the gospel stirs up hatred in others. The fact is they don’t hate you, they hate who you represent. The truth.

Christ doesn’t call disciples to Himself to make things easy and prosperous, but holy and productive. To take up the cross and follow me is a sign of obedience. True discipleship is submission to the Lord. It comes only after denying one self. 1 John 2:6, “the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” Romans 1:5, “through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith.” These texts give us the truth about being a true follower, they will follow the Lord. It will be evident in their life, their works, and their behaviors.

### POINT 3 - THE PARADOX OF FOLLOWING CHRIST (Vs. 25-26)

Paradox defined is a “seemingly absurd or self-contradictory” statement. It is Matthew Henry who comments, “He that forsakes Christ, to preserve a temporal life and avoid a temporal death, will certainly come short of eternal life, and will be hurt of the second death, and eternally held by it.” Or one can say concerning this verse, “He can go for it now and lose it forever, or he can forsake it now and gain it forever.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus also says there are those who make initial gestures to follow Christ, but will not let go of the world and all its tentacles, Matthew 13:22, “And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.” Some of you are there now. You say you follow, but you still have one foot in the world.

Jesus adds a postscript to this as well, for what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what will one give in exchange for his soul? Let me illustrate this, if it’s for you possible to gain the whole world and all its goods, yet lose your own soul to hell, is it worth it for temporary satisfaction? To gain every possible possession, fame, comfort in this world and yet not have Christ is to be bankrupt. Jesus warns in the Sermon on the Mount, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Will you exchange the eternal for the temporary? Remember Moses and what was said about him in Hebrews 11:25, “Choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.” Are the passing pleasures of sin something you hold to in exchange for eternal life?

### POINT 4 - THE FUTURE HOPE (Vs. 27A)

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<sup>4</sup> The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary; pp. 51

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The Lord is coming again. I want to focus in closing on this statement, "is going to come." The phrase used here is from the Greek word *parousia* meaning to come and is often used with the return of Christ. There is one thing that is clear, at the coming of Jesus there will be judgment. John 5:29, "And will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment." The fact is those who are true followers of Christ, who deny themselves, pick up their cross and follow Him, will give evidence of such in their life. It's the faith that produces work. Work does not produce faith. If you believe in the coming of the Lord, then you will find yourself working and not slacking. You will find yourself prepared and not sleeping. In the closing verse of the longest Greek sentence in the New Testament, Ephesians 2:10 tell us, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." We will come back to these verses concerning judgment and accountability, but consider this today.

Have you denied yourself? Are you still attached to the things of this world? Are you willing to go the length for the cause of Christ?