

The Cost of Discipleship

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Preacher: Patrick Sookhdeo

- [0 : 0 0] And we're going to turn to our Bible reading now. We have Patrick Sukdeo with us this morning from the Barnabas Fund. And we'll be hearing from him a little later.
- He's going to be preaching to us from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 16. So do turn that up. And we're going to read together Matthew, chapter 16, from verse 13 to the end.
- Matthew 16, verses 13 to 28. Now, when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked the disciples, who do people say that the Son of Man is?
- And they said, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, but who do you say that I am?
- Simon Peter replied, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.
- [1 : 2 0] And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
- Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. 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.
- And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you. 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. Then Jesus told his disciples, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.
- For whoever would see of his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?
- [2 : 4 7] Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? 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.
- 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. Well, amen.
- This is God's words, and we'll return to it shortly. Let us pray. Our most gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for your presence here with us.
- We pray that our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified in all our thoughts, in all our words, and in all our deeds. We pray this in his glorious name.
- Amen. Will you turn with me, please, to Matthew's Gospel and chapter 16 and to the passage that was read to us earlier, that is verses 13 through to 28.

[4 : 02] I'm sure you agree with me that we live in a broken and suffering world. We're faced with war, with pandemics, with disasters, with famine, and from a Christian position, increasing persecution.

And we get to the point where we want to escape that world. But not only is this world broken and suffering, it is also a world that is disillusioned.

There's a sense of hopelessness within it. No one knows what to do, what are the answers to the great problems of our day. And we live in a world of increasing pluralism, competing ideologies.

Everyone has his own way, his own mind, as to what is right and what is wrong. New philosophies arise that take over previous ones. And we're left confused in all of that.

And so the question comes to us naturally as Christians, what is the place of Christianity in this kind of a world? What is my place within it?

[5 : 15] What does God want of me? What does it mean to be a follower of Christ in this kind of world?

And what does Christ expect of me in this kind of world? This is the theme, really, which I want to address. In verse 24, Jesus said the following, Then Jesus told his disciples, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

So he gives three aspects that would define the follower, his follower, in that kind of world. He speaks of his followers in terms of his disciples, his servants.

And what is it that would characterize the lives of his servants, those who are his disciples? He speaks of three things.

Very simply, they are to have a life of submission. They are to live lives of sacrifice. sacrifice. They are to live lives of service.

[6 : 34] Submission, sacrifice, and service. And this would define his disciples. So we take the first.

We look at submission. If anyone would come after me, let him deny. The word deny means literally to give up all rights to yourself.

To recognize literally that you have no rights because you have handed them over to someone else. So effectively, it is a life of renunciation.

But you are renouncing your life to someone, not just to something, not to an ideology, but to a person. Now, if you look at the context of this passage, and we start in verse 13, you will find there the context.

Now, when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, whom do people say the Son of Man is?

[7 : 48] So the question is a very real one. Who is this Jesus that is worthy to be followed? And it's in the context of Caesarea Philippi. But why is Caesarea Philippi important?

Well, firstly, the name tells you Caesarea, Philip, Caesar, that's the name of the city. Whenever a Roman emperor conquered a city, then he changed the name of that city onto his own.

And effectively, he was saying this, Caesar is God, the city is mine, everyone in that city are now followers of me. You see, what the Roman religion did was to deify humanity.

Caesar is king and he is God and he is a human being. You can believe what you want so long as you put a pinch of incense before him on his altar affirming him to be God.

but the Roman religion was based on power, on might, on military proudness. So here is a God who wields a very heavy sword, who controls all of life.

[9 : 05] We would term that today secular humanism, an ideology which pervades every aspect of our existence and defines for us the very nature of the lives in which we live.

humanity is God and humanity rules. The pandemic, it is science that will solve it. Climate change, it is science that will solve it.

Wars, it is the greater power that will intervene. There is no place for God. It is humanity that is on the throne. But there is a second aspect to Caesarea Philippi.

Caesarea Philippi is located in the very north of Israel. It was old Syrian territory. And the area in Jesus' day would have been literally littered with temples to the God Baal.

And the God Baal was known to be the God of prosperity and the God of fertility. He is the one that you pray to if your crops were to have, were to succeed.

[10 : 16] If you wanted rain to fall, you turn to him. If you wanted children, you turn to him. And this God, there are often images made of him up to 30 feet high.

I have seen in the museum at Damascus great statues to the God Baal. You see, he was a demonic figure. He was the one that human beings turned to for assistance in their everyday lives.

They prayed to him. They lived under his shadow, believing that he would protect them. They had no need of a true universal God.

They had need only of a God whom they had created with their own hands, shaped by their minds. and so they came to this God.

And so the God of prosperity is what defines the age in which we live. Not the true heavenly king, but rather the God who meets our day-to-day needs that we can turn to for help and assistance.

[11 : 30] And so here in Caesarea Philippi was Baalism with its policyism and its demonic outworking. But it was a third element to Caesarea Philippi.

There was a grotto in that city, a cave. And it was held that the Greek god Pan actually came out of that cave.

And Pan, of course, is known, if you know your Greek history, as being half man, half goat. he's a randy fellow whose objective is to seduce young maidens.

And so it speaks of sensuality. It speaks of pleasure. It speaks of the fulfilling of desires. And so Pan now develops into a nature religion.

Every tree has its spirit. Every river has its spirit. The whole world is inhabited by spirits, and which we must appease, and who in turn satisfy our deepest needs.

[12 : 40] But there was a fourth element to Caesarea Philippi. In this grotto, in this cave, it was held by the Jews that the river Jordan actually had its source there.

And of course, for the Jew, the river Jordan was very important. It was sacred. And Judaism represented classical monotheism at its highest, the purest belief in the divine transcendence, the all-powerful, majestic Lord, the creator of the world.

And so if you are in Caesarea Philippi, as Jesus is, and he's saying to his disciples, whom do men say that I am, am I an earthly king like the Roman religion, a human being that rules?

Am I Baal, simply another incarnation of God? Am I Pan, there to meet your deepest needs and fulfill your deepest longings and your pleasures?

Jesus, am I a prophet? Am I Elijah, Jeremiah, according to Jewish religious tradition?

[14 : 07] Who exactly am I? And you can now begin to understand, when you get to Jesus saying, follow me, it's in that context of these ideologies, these elements that satisfy deepest human needs that people turn to for religions and positions?

Is he simply one amongst many, or is he the sole one? But then he poses a second question to his disciples, but who do you say that I am?

Never mind what people say that I am, what about you? And at this point, Peter, under divine inspiration, speaks out.

And here he recognizes who Jesus really is. Verse 15 and verse 16. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

You are the Christ, the Messiah, the promised one, the longed for one, the heavenly king, the eternal son of God, the one who had no beginning and no end, the one who brought this world into being, the one who sustains this world by the word of his power, and the one who ultimately will bring this world to an end when he comes again.

[15 : 47] This Christ who rules as our heavenly king, as king of kings and lord of laws. And when we think of all life and all space and all being and all of existence and all that makes up this world, and when we think of all human needs and all human desires, they are met in this Christ who alone can bring to fulfillment what the deepest needs of humans are and what they need.

You are the Christ, the son, the only son of the living God. That supreme deity of Judaism now finds its fulfillment in the son, Jesus Christ, our precious Lord.

It's very difficult to preach a sermon like this without you grapple with the words and I find that I have to turn to hymns.

The Lord is king, lift up your voice, O earth and all you heavens rejoice, from world to world the song shall ring, the Lord omnipotent is king, king, the Lord is king, who then can dare, resist his will, distrust his care, or quarrel with his wise degree, or doubt his royal promises.

The Lord is king, child of the dust, the judge of all the earth is just, holy and true are all his ways, let every creature speak his praise.

[17 : 38] Jesus said, if anyone would be my disciple, let him deny himself. Submission.

Submission to whom? Not to an ideology based on humanity, not based on a desire based on pleasure and prosperity and materialism.

Not one who satisfies those earthly cravings, but rather our heavenly king. And it is before him that you and I bow.

It is before him that we submit our lives. It is before him that we say, all that I am and all that I ever be, it is yours and yours alone, O Lord, for thine is the power and thine is the glory.

and all that is heaven and earth belongs to you and therefore I belong to you and therefore I renounce self and all that goes with self.

[18 : 49] If you would be my disciple, you start here with this very, very basic principle of renunciation.

salvation and by affirming Jesus Christ is our Lord and King and only he will we worship and only he will we adore and it is he that takes center stage of our lives and he becomes the foundation of our life and our very existence.

Paul writing in the Hebrews chapter 1 speaks of being in son and wheels. In other words, we live in Christ. He is the air that we breathe.

His is the life that we live. Our existence cannot be separated from his existence. The very nature of ourselves becomes Christ and Christ is reflected in us and we are reflected in Christ.

both as a corporate body, the body of Christ and as individual followers, those who are loyal and true to him.

[20 : 14] But secondly, we have here a life of service. Jesus said, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself take up and take up his cross.

What is this cross we are to take up? It is none other than the cross of Christ. In other words, Jesus is saying, if you want to be my disciple, you must be identified with me.

not with the world around, J.B. Phillips translation of Romans chapter 12, don't let the world shape you into its mold, but rather your mold is Christ and he is in us and we are in him and we are defined by the cross just as he is defined by the cross.

And of course, this was an unacceptable message for the disciples. We turn back to our context and we find Peter in verse 21.

Peter, who had affirmed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ, now gets himself into hot water. 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.

[21 : 50] And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him saying, Far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you. 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.

Peter wanted a Messiah that would lead to earthly glory, because he would establish an earthly kingdom, and with it would come material wealth, status, and position in that kingdom.

kingdom. And so Jesus, he conceives of as being a revolutionary leader, the messianic leader who would set up a messianic kingdom. And in that kingdom, there was no place for suffering.

There was no place for a cross. There was no place for a Jesus who takes the road to Jerusalem. Jerusalem. And when Jesus said, I am going to Jerusalem, I must go to Jerusalem.

[23 : 10] The must is underlined. It is obligatory. It is necessary. It is essential. It is essential that I take that road, that pathway of suffering, knowing that on that road I will be ridiculed.

I will be betrayed. I will be sold for thirty pieces of silver. I will then be arrested.

I will then be tortured. I will be beaten, falsely accused and imprisoned. And then after being whipped, I will be nailed on a cross.

On that road, I must go through Gethsemane with its loneliness and with its horrors and with its agony. And there swept blood, tears as if there were blood, and to be left alone, knowing he had no disciples for they're all gone.

And then finally he arrives on that cross. It seems that even the father forsakes him. And he is left alone. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me, alienated and broken?

[24 : 37] He lies on that cross, suffering for our sins, for the sins of Peter and those disciples. And this was the road to Jerusalem that Jesus had to take to purchase our salvation.

Not the kingly road riding upon a white stallion, but a humble donkey that ushers his entrance into Jerusalem, speaking of his humility and leading to that pathway of pain, agony, and suffering.

And this is our faith. This is what defines us. For the Jew, it was a stumbling block, as Paul wrote in Corinthians.

For the Gentiles, the Greek, it was foolishness. They could not conceive of a crucified savior. And many of us want to be disciples of Christ, but no cross.

We do not want to be identified with a cross. I was going to say I had the unfortunate privilege of carrying a cross once, but I think it wasn't unfortunate.

[25 : 56] I think it was a great privilege. I was in Egypt, and the patriarch of all Egypt, of the Coptic church, gave me the cross of his predecessor, Shenouda.

And it wasn't a little cross. It was a cross about this big. And here am I thinking, how am I going to get this thing back to the UK? You can't say no. So the cross is wrapped up, but you can see it is a cross.

And so I take it to my hotel, I take it to the taxi, I arrive at the airport, and you can see everyone looking at me carrying this great big cross. And then I had to go through security.

I watched the Muslims. They were afraid of the cross. So when they saw the cross, they immediately stood back and they let me get on with it.

When I was on the plane, those who were Oriental Christians like Greeks, as soon as they saw me, they made the sign of the cross. When they were British people, they smirked and laughed.

[27 : 05] And when I got to the Heathrow and got to immigration with this great big cross, you could see the smirking smile of the immigration officer. The different responses to the cross.

And having to carry this cross made me realize, literally, what it is to be identified with a cross.

This cross of shame. This cross that speaks of powerlessness. This cross that speaks of pain and suffering which now defines you and me.

And you know, without sacrifice, what are we? If Jesus gave himself for you and me, if he sacrificed himself for us, how can we do anything less?

And when we speak of the persecuted church, there is a misnomer about that. It isn't a persecuted church out there, but rather a persecuted church here.

[28 : 12] For Jesus said, whoever will follow me will be persecuted. And why will they persecute you? Because they persecuted me. Why will they hate you?

Because they hated me. And if you are identified with me and you go through this world bearing that cross, you will be a laughingstock.

You will be despised. You will be ridiculed. You will potentially not get the job you want. You will be at the butt of every joke. And you can even know outright anger and being despised and being hated.

But this is the nature of our faith. Our heavenly faith. For we follow one who is our crucified saviour and lord.

The one who gave himself out of love. That divine love that came down for you and me. This is why we sing as we were playing earlier, were we not, about the cross.

[29 : 23] When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the prince of glory died, my greatest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.

For he is the one that we love, the one who loved us and gave himself for us, and who in turn we now love and give ourselves to him.

But thirdly, we are to live lives of service. Submission, sacrifice, and service.

But when we think of this service, what form does it take? What defines this service that Jesus speaks of? He speaks of it in terms of following me.

If anyone would be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. In other words, it's the pathway of obedience.

[30 : 37] It is planting our footsteps in his as he journeyed through life. So we have his attitude. We find that in the beatitude, the attitude of humility, of true service, born of a servant.

In Philippians chapter 2, though he was God, he emptied himself of all that he had possessed in glory. And taking the form of a servant, he becomes man and he serves us.

This self-emptying of all that he is, he becomes the slave, the bond slave. And we know that famous passage, do we not, in the early books of the Old Testament.

After the slave had served his time of servitude, and he does not want to be set free by law, he had to be. His master had to say to him, come on, your time is up, you go off, off be with you, and I'll get myself another servant, another slave.

But he says, but I don't want to leave you, how about I like it here? I love you, master, please don't send me away. So the master would take him to the door, the front door, and on the door post, he would get himself a great big nail and a hammer, and says, give me your ear, and he would take this bit, and he would put the nail there, on the door, and he would hammer it into the door.

[32 : 13] And as the master was doing that, the slave would say, I love you, I will not go out free. This is what Jesus is speaking of.

I love you. As I served my master, my king, I loved him, so must you. If you're going to follow me, then you have to do the divine will.

And it is not born out of servitude, but born out of love. The love for a servant, for their master. But we have a heavenly master who is our friend, and who is our king, and who gave himself for us, so how can we not love to serve him?

And if there are the beatitudes that define our attitudes, the sermon on the mount defines our actions, that the whole of life is one of servitude.

All that we possess is one of servitude, for we have nothing else but to live lives of absolute service, born out of obedience as we plant our footsteps in his.

[33 : 35] But you know, life is made up of choices, and we all have to make those choices, and it is how we see life.

Earlier in the week, I was reading of the great writer, Solzhar Nitskin, I pronounced that wrong, Solzhar Nitskin, so any of you who are Russian experts, make sure I get my pronunciation correctly.

When he's lying there in prison, in the gulag, this is what he said, bless you, prison, bless you for being in my life, for there lying upon the rotting prison straw, I came to realize that the object of life is not prosperity as we are made to believe, but the maturity of the human soul.

The maturity of the whole of the human soul on that rotting bed of straw. You make your choice.

Is it the pathway of power, prosperity, pleasure, desires, or is it that soul that is truly mature, that is given to God?

[35 : 05] And so the choice lies before us. Verse 25, for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

But what does it profit a man if he gains the world and forfeits his life? You know, in life there are no absolute freedoms.

There are only choices. And every choice we make carries a consequence. consequence. And that consequence leads you either closer to God or further away from God.

So don't see life in terms of freedoms. See it in terms of choices. And then pose the question, what is the choice that I'm going to have to make?

I have a friend who trained as a terrorist. He was a medical doctor, psychiatrist, and when Ben Laden died and Zachari took over, he became Zachari's assistant and who would have replaced the great terrorist, Zachari.

- [36 : 29] And he told me this story. He said, I'd been trained to kill. And such was my training that I was given command of a unit.
- And I was told I had to attack a given target and I would have killed a lot of people. But he says, as I was about to give the command to kill, I heard a voice speaking to me.
- And the words that the voice said to me were these, and what shall it profit a man if he gains the world and forfeits his life?
- And he said, at that point, I could not give the command. I went home because I realized that Jesus had spoken to me and I had to make a choice.
- The choice of killing, of death, mayhem, and destruction, of being a terrorist, or the life of being a follower of Jesus.
- [37 : 41] Having heard his voice, I had to choose. You see, you and I make this choice in the context of eternity.
- 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. That's what we are faced with.
- We're faced literally with eternity. And every choice we make, every decision that we take, guides us to that ultimate end.
- So I come back to where we started. it. How do we live our lives in this broken, fractured, disillusioned, and suffering world?
- We are disciples of Christ. We are not perfect. We are mere learners. And in this world, we renounce our life.
- [38 : 48] We submit. Secondly, we identify. In other words, we sacrifice. And thirdly, obedience.
- We serve. And every decision we make carries the consequence. And we make a choice. And so today, I want to end with this thought.
- Will you bow your heads, please? And pray with me. What choice are you going to make on this great journey that Christ has called us to, to be his disciples?
- Do we choose life or do we choose death? Do we choose the life of submission and renunciation? Do we choose the life of sacrifice and identification?
- salvation? Do we choose the life of service and obedience? Or do we choose the life of self-will and self-desire and the satisfaction of what we want in this world today?
- [40 : 07] God bless you. Our most gracious heavenly father, we bow before you and worship you and thank you for sending your only son to be our savior.
- How we praise you for him and for his death on the cross, that he fulfilled your divine will and went the way of the cross.
- life. And we thank you that because of that he rose from the dead and we have life. And we live that resurrection life. Enable us now, Lord, to choose life and not death.
- Choose to be his followers, his servants, his disciples. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.
- Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.