

Introduction: Many times there is a big difference between what we want and what we need. When what we need is made clear to us, we may feel it is too difficult for us. How can we do it? Or, as is often the case, what we need feels to us like it would cause us more pain than we think we can bear. I experienced this the year I turned thirty, at the beginning of my fifth year of following Jesus. I do not want to reduce this real pain that we all go through to a cheap sports cliché, but maybe coaches are right after all when they say, 'No pain, no gain'. *** Essentially, this is what Jesus is teaching His disciples at the beginning of our Scripture reading for this morning. *** He then goes on to explain two alternatives and their end results. To try to gain life with our own efforts and goals results in loss; but, to lose our life for His sake, taking up the cross, results in finding life. *** He then illustrates this from the Psalms of David. When it seems the enemy will knock us down and out, we may call on the powerful, gracious Covenant God to lift us up. *** Then He reveals all His glory to His inner circle of apostles so they know He can and will supply them with all they need to take the cross and lose their life for His sake. *** Now let's dig deep to know God and His will; and, to have our faith built up by The Holy Spirit and The Word He inspired. And so we know God will give us grace and strength to do what we need to do.

I. Jesus tells His disciples what He expects of them and what their reward will be when He comes in the glory of His Father.

(Matthew 16:24-28; Psalm 41:7-10)

A. Jesus says those desiring to come after Him must die for His sake to find life. *(Matthew 16:24-26)*

1. Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If any is desiring to come after Me, he must deny himself and he must take up his cross, and he must be following Me'. *(Verse 24)*

Deny self: We all have thoughts, feelings and abilities that define and fulfill us. It is not easy to let go of any of these qualities; but, this is exactly what Jesus is requiring of His disciples.

Die: To take up our cross and follow Jesus means to die. He just told them He is going to Jerusalem to suffer, die and live again *(verse 21)*. Just as He will die to live again, His disciples must learn ...

Death is required to enter life

2. For whoever may be desiring to save his life will destroy it; but, whoever may lose his life for My sake will find it. *(Verse 25)*

Self-desire destroys: If we want to keep our identity totally unchanged, we will be destroyed.

Lose for Jesus: However, if we are willing to give our identity to God for the sake of who Jesus is and what he has done, we will find the life for which God made us. But first we must die to ourselves, because ...

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3. For what will a man gain if he may win the whole world but lose his life; or, what will a man give in exchange for his life? *(Verse 26)*

Two-fold warning: Is gaining everything in the world worth losing my life? And, once my life is lost, do I have enough to buy it back? An honest answer to these questions allows us to accept the truth ...

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B. David prays for grace to be raised up over his enemies. *(Psalm 41:7-10)*

1. They will whisper together about me, all hating me they will plan evil to me, 'A thing of wickedness is being poured out in him, and he has laid down and will not rise again'. *(Verses 7-8)*

Haters: David is talking about wicked people hating him.

Evil planners: Together, they plan evil to him.

Speak death: They seek to take his life. So, Jesus is asking His followers to give their lives up for Him in a world where wicked people are already seeking to take their lives.

2. Even the 'man of my peace', in him eating my bread, he has made great upon me, his heel. *(Verse 9)*

Crushed: A man David trusted to keep the peace has now crushed him.

3. And, Thou, Yahweh, must be gracious to me, and Thou must raise me up, and I will recompense them. *(Verse 10)*

Grace: David petitions God for grace in the face of enemy death threats and violence of a friend.

Raise up: Then he requests he be lifted up from death to life based on God's way that ...

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Recompense: David's plan is that he will respond to people according to how they have treated him.

C. The Son of Man is about to come and will reward each according to his works; and, some will see His Kingdom come. *(Matthew 16:27-28)*

1. For The Son of Man is being about to come in the glory of His Father with His angels. *(Verses 27a-b)*

Second coming: Jesus is now talking about His second coming as immanent, even before He has completed the mission of His first coming.

Glory: He will come in the full glory of His Father – God. With this He declares Himself to be God.

2. And then He shall reward (recompense) to each man according to his works. *(Verse 27c)*

Recompense: Jesus uses the word David used in the Psalm we considered, but He quotes a different Psalm of David: 'For Thou dost recompense each man according to his work' (see *Psalm 62:11-12*).

What we do matters because God recompenses according to how we respond to His grace.

3. Truly, I am saying to you all that some of those who have stood here in no way might taste death until they see The Son of Man coming in His kingdom. (*Verse 28*)

Who: Here Jesus is not talking about His second coming. He is saying some of His disciples will still be alive when the church grew from one hundred twenty disciples to three thousand in one day; and it added non-Jews in Antioch, Asia Minor, Macedonia and Achaia, and Rome all by the time Paul was executed in 68 AD.

II. On a high mountain Jesus is transformed in front of His inner circle; and, His Father commands people to hear His beloved Son. (*Matthew 17:1-8*)

- A. Jesus is transformed, to shine brighter than the sun, Moses and Elijah appear with Him, and Peter responds. (*Matthew 17:1-4*)

1. After six days, Jesus is taking Peter and James and his brother John and He is bringing them into a high mountain to be apart. (*Verse 1*)

Inner circle: Jesus chose these three men to be His 'inner circle' among the Twelve.

Location: They likely climbed Mt. Meron, Israel's highest mountain, ten miles northwest of Galilee.

Recharge: Jesus wanted His disciples to be recharged after a difficult teaching on denial and death.

2. And He was transformed before them: His face shined as the sun and His clothing became white as the light. (*Verse 2*)

Transformation: For the first time the glory of His divine nature broke through His human flesh.

Jesus shined: The face of Jesus shined like the sun and His clothes became the brightest white.

3. Behold! Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. (*Verse 3*)

Moses and Elijah: Moses represents the Torah and Elijah represents the writing prophets, including those who wrote the 'historical' books. Their appearance must have been startling.

4. But Peter answered to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You are desiring, I will make three tabernacles here: one to Thee, and one to Moses and one to Elijah. (*Verse 4*)

Good us: He begins by assuming it is good for all three to be with Jesus at this time.

I make: Then he personally offers to build a tent for Jesus and two people God used in a mighty way.

- B. A voice from an overshadowing bright cloud says, 'This is My beloved Son in whom I am pleased: you all must listen to Him'; and the disciples fear greatly. (*Matthew 17:5-8*)

1. Yet while He is still speaking, Behold! A bright cloud overshadowed them and, Behold! A voice is saying out of the cloud, 'This is being My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; you all must be listening to Him'. (*Verse 5*)

Paradox: A bright cloud was a shadow over them. It blocked the sun. It became the temporary dwelling presence (*shekinah*) of The Father with Jesus and His disciples.

Father and Son: Father God calls Jesus His beloved Son and says He is well pleased with His Son.

Obey: Finally, they must obey Him. This anticipates the end of the Gospel when Jesus tells His disciples to teach people of all nations to obey everything He has commanded them (*Matthew 28:20*).

2. The disciples, having heard, fell on their face and were very much afraid. (*Verse 6*)

Worship: Falling on one's face is an act of deep worship.

Much fear: The event, the voice and the words all put 'the fear of God' in the disciples. When we truly hear God, we are left in reverential, worshipful fear of Him.

Those who hear God fear Him

3. Jesus came, and having touched them, said, 'You all must be raised up and you all must not be afraid'. (*Verse 7*)

Two commands: It is good that they responded in humility to all God was doing. Now Jesus indicates He wants them to serve Him. To do this, they need to be on their feet to fulfill His purpose for them. (See *Luke 1:68-75* where Zechariah says God: 'is sending a savior ... to enable us to serve Him without fear ... all our days'.)

4. But, when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus only. (*Verse 8*)

ONLY Jesus: If we can only see one person, he needs to be Jesus! He should be the focus of our life: All our thoughts and feelings, attitudes and actions. People are blessed who always put Jesus first. All these events acted to increase their faith in the person and mission of Jesus.

Conclusion: All who desire to come after Jesus must take up their cross with Him for His sake in order to find life. Then, they may pray for God's grace to lift them up to be rewarded at Jesus' coming the second time. And, in order to increase the faith of His followers, Jesus was brilliantly transformed on a high mountain as His Father blessed Him and called His fearful disciples to obedience to His words.

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