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Becoming Fully Devoted Followers of Christ

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Introduction:

Fully devoted followers of Christ deny themselves and are willing to give up their lives for Christ. **Matthew 16:24-27**-Then Jesus said to the disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me. If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life. And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul? For I, the Son of Man, will come in the glory of my Father with his angels and will judge all people according to their deeds.

The original meaning of "come after me" implies turning or disowning oneself. To follow one has to be willing to be led. All people who have decided to follow Christ as the Leader of their lives have had to come to the place where ambitions of self were put aside. That is not something that happens only once in a lifetime. It is something that is revisited many times during our lifetimes. Dealing with selfish ambitions can be a real challenge. At times it can be quite a battle. Who is going to win? Who will make the calls for your life?

Anyone who has ever dealt with self has found a battle waiting for him/her. Self wants to preserve, persevere, and make all the calls. Battles that are very real include how we spend time, money, how we invest talents and resources that God has equipped us with. If we are quite honest, we will admit that we want to be noticed, want to be in control and want to make the decisions. Quite frankly, we belong to Him and not ourselves. We all must fight the battle of who has top priority in our lives. Is it our family, our education, our hobbies, our careers, our entertainment or our Lord?

I. Devoted followers will deny self.

One of the things that is very strong within a person is self preservation. We will do everything we can

to protect ourselves from embarrassment, injury and doing what we really don't want to do. We will do everything we can to appease our desires and satisfy them. Listen to what Charles Finney said about self-denial:

“If a man resolutely declares, By the help of God, no lust, no appetite, shall have dominion over me, then, holding on, he comes off conqueror.” A Treasury of Great Preaching.

Relationships are important to human beings. Jesus never calls us to not love anyone, but He does call us to love Him more than anyone else. Our personal relationship with Him is the most dynamic, most important relationship that we could ever develop. In every relationship there is a leader and a follower. For us to truly follow someone we have to deny ourselves. Whoever leads gets to determine the direction, the speed and the places where they will lead and Christ wants to be the leader of our lives. What are the selfish battles you fight?

II. Devoted followers will take up the cross.

The cross to followers of Christ is more than a symbol. The cross is the instrument that speaks of justice and judgment. The cross was the place where criminal activity was paid for. The cross was a reminder to society that criminals would be put to death using this instrument. Lest we forget, devoted followers of Christ are sinners who have been redeemed. The cross stands as the line of separation between Christ and the world. The cross speaks of death and life, death to self, death to sin, death to the past and eternal life. So often we feel like we are the ones being torn between Christ and the world. For the followers of Christ, we embrace the cross and it becomes to us a boundary, the place where we are safe within its' confines. We live there safe from evil. If we get away from that boundary, we are vulnerable and exposed to evil and sin.

The cross that speaks of death reminds us that the world and our former master has no control or power over our lives. We are freed by the death of Jesus and we reckon ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to Christ. **Galatians 6:14 - As for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that**

cross, my interest in this world died long ago, and the world's interest in me is also long dead.

III. Devoted followers are willing to give up their lives for Christ.

Jim Elliot said.... *“he is no fool who will give up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose”.*

There is greater risk involved in holding onto something sure which will never become more, than to give it to God with the expectation that it will multiply. Exchanging something small for something much greater is far more beneficial. The dynamic of holding, protecting and hoarding is selfish while the giving, releasing and risking our lives for Christ is selfless. In fact, doing so follows the pattern and example of Jesus our leader. **Philip. 2:7-8 - He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross.**

Jesus conveys the idea that if we attempt to save and isolate and protect our lives, we will perish and suffer loss. But on the other hand if we will destroy the selfish desire to hang onto and protect our own interest and desires, we will find life everlasting. Giving up our lives for Christ is the secret to fulfillment and living.

The idea of a seed illustrates very well the point I'm trying to make. A couple of weeks ago, on a nice Saturday, I went out and dug out the petunias that I had planted back in the spring. The frost had killed most of them. Before I uprooted them, I took a small sandwich bag and went and harvested some of the seed pods on them. I can keep those seed pods and think of the potential that each one of them has. Within each of those seeds is the possibility of a petunia plant. Or I can plant those seeds in dirt, losing them to my sight, taking the risk of giving them up and committing them to factors that are beyond my control and watch them sprout up and grow and produce beautiful flowers. It is the giving up and surrendering control to someone other than self that is a big part of the struggle. I hope to start some petunia plants this winter inside and have some beautiful flowers in the spring. My point to all this is to say that you and I can hold onto the small

seed of life we have. We can say it's mine. We can hoard our time, our resources, our very existence and it will be limited in what it accomplishes. When we hold onto the seed of our own life, it remains minimal.

On the other hand, you can give your life away and risk losing it so it will grow and blossom. The end result if you release it to Christ is much more than what you started with. When we risk following Christ, He is the one who gets to lead us. In His leading there is life, growth, abundance and beauty.

IV. Devoted followers value their souls.

What would the benefit be if we gained everything in this world and lost our own souls in the process? Jesus asks the question – is there anything worth more than your soul? To answer that question, we have to attempt to place a value on our souls.

Have you ever tried to do that? It is impossible to do. Remember that everything we touch and claim here as our own is only temporary and passing. It is all going to be burned up eventually with fire. If we could purchase everything in this world so we owned it all, the value of that would not even come close to what our souls are worth.

What would a man give in exchange for his soul? The word exchange conveys the idea of the value paid for a ransom. Jesus is the one who gave His life in exchange for our souls. Some people sell out for their business, their family, their passions, their

CONCLUSION:

We have been reminded again that we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Christ wherever He leads us. We also need a proper perspective on what we cling to, things that are eternal or things that are temporal.

I have decided to follow Jesus.....

I have decided to follow Jesus.....

I have decided to follow Jesus

No turning back, no turning back

The cross before me, the world behind me

The cross before me, the world behind me

The cross before me, the world behind me

No turning back, no turning back

sin, their pleasure. When Jesus died, His death paid the price to secure your salvation. Don't let anything cheapen the value of that price or diminish what it cost Christ.

Finally, in our text this morning we see that we have the promise of Christ's return. There will be reward given for the way we have functioned in life. The Lord will be eager to make payment or give to us according to the way we have functioned.

Revelation 22:12 - And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

The profit or reward for anything comes at the end of the investment. After the risk has been taken and there has been exposure at the close of the time period then the profit is realized. The Lord wants us to be reminded that His return will be quick and that His reward is with him. Every person will be rewarded for his work. Think about your work for Christ and His kingdom. How are you working for the Lord? If your work is half-hearted, that will be the basis of how you will be rewarded. If it is shoddy, that is how you will be rewarded. If it has been done with diligence, with excellence, with your best effort, that is how you will be rewarded. Don't work at gaining the whole world because it will pass away. Work at eternal things that will never pass away. Those things include your relationship to Christ and sharing the message of Jesus Christ in order to lead others to Christ.

