

Take Up Your Cross

Matthew 16:24-28

What does it mean to become a disciple? In Japan, one becomes a disciple to a certain craftsman, living and sleeping under the same roof as him and learning his skills through imitating what the master craftsman is doing and trying it out on his own. In the case of Rakugo, you would live in the master's house and accompany him to his workplace and other places of work, learning his way of speaking and his art, and working on your own training. In the case of Jesus, he told his disciples, "If you want to follow me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me." What does he mean when he says "take up your cross"? Today we will take a look at Matthew 16:24-28 to see what it means to take up our crosses.

Today's Scripture is from the New Testament in the book of Matthew Chapter 16, verses 24-28.

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. 28 "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

This is the living word of God. Amen.

Jesus says in order to become His disciple, take up the cross, but what does that exactly mean? First, taking up the cross means to deny oneself and surrender one's entire life to Jesus. Second, taking up the cross means to live for the Kingdom of Jesus instead of seeking to gain the treasures of the world for oneself; third, taking up the cross means to live confident of His victory. To summarize the sermon, taking up the cross and becoming a disciple of Jesus is to deny oneself, surrender to Jesus, live for his kingdom, and be confident of his victory.

In Matthew 16, we see that Jesus and His disciples had been living in sync for quite some time. Jesus indicated to His disciples that He would be arrested by the people in Jerusalem, have to suffer, be killed, and rise again on the third day. When Peter heard that Jesus was going to be killed, he took Jesus aside and said, "Never Lord, This shall never happen to you," but Jesus rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind me, Satan," and then Jesus

told the disciples about this passage in the Bible.

First, taking up the cross means denying yourself, and giving up your life in entirety. Let's take a look at verse 24. And then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." I'm sure the disciples were surprised and overwhelmed when they heard this. Jesus had told them that he is to be arrested and killed by the people. And he had proceeded to tell the disciples that he would die by the way of crucifixion on a cross.

The cross has long been a symbol of Christianity, and it is even worn casually as an accessory, but at the time, the cross was something that elicited much fear. In the Roman Empire, crucifixion was reserved for slaves and others who had committed a great crime, such as treason against the state. The Jews also regarded those who were to be hanged on a tree as cursed, based on the Scripture found in Deuteronomy 21. Crucifixion is said to be the most gruesome and brutal method of execution in the world because it does not take a person's life in an instant, but rather causes him to suffer and die over a long period of time. Yet Jesus had just told his disciples to deny themselves and take up the cross, which was the most brutal execution. What was the true meaning behind Jesus's words?

To deny oneself had a specific meaning. It meant to stop living for oneself and instead start living for others. In this case, it meant to live for Jesus. The disciples of Jesus were former fishermen and tax collectors. When they were called by Jesus, they gave up their professions and followed Christ. However, they were still unable to completely submit themselves to Jesus. They would even argue among themselves who was the greatest.

Yet Jesus himself lived a perfect example of self-denial. Despite that he was both God and man, He denied himself and followed the heart of the Father, withstanding temptation and serving the people, healing people of their sicknesses and giving them forgiveness. Jesus never performed a miracle to fulfill his own worldly desires. In the same way, Jesus is requiring that his disciples completely die to themselves and offer up their lives to Jesus.

Then He says, "take up your cross." The modern use of "take up your cross" sometimes refers to the burdens of one's life, mistakes, illnesses, etc., but that is not what Jesus had meant in this passage. In the days when the Bible was written, the cross represented the humiliation of a person who had committed a great sin, such as rebellion against his country, and he

was dragged across bearing the cross, subject to the ridicule and abuse of the people. Accordingly, Jesus was mocked and cursed by people for the sins of others, and walked bearing the cross, before he was crucified.

"Take up your cross," as Jesus said here means be prepared to suffer, struggle, and face persecution and death. It means to follow Jesus and God's will in obedience. It was a solemn and difficult call to "deny ourselves and take up one's cross," to serve Jesus, and follow God, being prepared to suffer and even die for him.

My grandfather was the captain of a tanker ship that sailed around Japan and carried large supplies. From the stories I heard as a child about my grandfather's profession, I think I can understand what it means to "deny yourself and take up your cross," as Jesus told his disciples. The crew of a tanker ship that travels around the country is expected to stay on the ship for up to three months, eating and sleeping, and devoting themselves to their assigned duties of navigation, communication, and engines. When they're on duty, they are literally required to abandon themselves.

They leave behind their families, hobbies, and other favorite pastimes to board and work on a boat from which there is no escape. If they do not deny themselves and perform their assigned tasks, accidents involving the ship, supplies, their own lives, and the lives of the crew may occur. If a ship is in danger of sinking for any reason, the crew must be prepared to risk their own lives to ensure the safety of the ship and its cargo. In particular, the captain is responsible for everything, and if an accident were to occur and the ship would sink and his own life were in danger, he still had to do his best to protect the crew, supplies, and the ship itself until the very end.

Brothers and sisters, what a solemn and stern call it is to "deny yourselves and take up your crosses"! Yet Jesus is calling us to respond to this solemn invitation to discipleship.

Jesus also indicates that the invitation to take up one's cross does not mean you'll gain the whole world, but rather gain a new life in Christ. In verse 26, it says, What good is it if a man gains the whole world, but loses his life? What does one have to offer to buy that life back? After Jesus' invitation to "deny yourself and take up your cross," He asks His disciples even more pointedly.

This same question comes to us today. In the eyes of Jesus, there are only two ways a person can walk. One is to walk as a disciple of Jesus, and the other is to not walk as a disciple of Jesus. The life that does not walk as a

disciple of Jesus is the life that "gains the whole world," as Jesus said. It means using one's life to obtain the good things that the world has to offer. For some, this may mean seeking financial wealth and the admiration and approval of others. For others, it may be a way of life where they want to be beautiful and put everything they have into obtaining beauty so that they can be recognized and noticed.

And for some others, it may mean they are blessed with family, a home, and relationships so that they can live for their own happiness. Money, beauty, family, etc. are not bad things in themselves. However, to live one's life for the sake of these things, placing them more at the center of one's heart than God, is what Jesus meant when he said that this is the way of life that seeks to gain the whole world.

In the former half of Matthew 19, Jesus has a conversation with a young affluent man. The young affluent man was probably an object of respect for Jesus' disciples, as the man was clearly a man of influence in Jewish society, who possessed much wealth and kept the laws. He was trusted and esteemed by many,

16 Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" 17 "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." 18 "Which ones?" he inquired. Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, 19 honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" 20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

This young man, a successful member of the Jewish community, could not become a disciple of Jesus. Why was that? The Bible says it was because he had many possessions. He could not give up his worldly possessions, honor, and recognition in order to follow Christ.

And where do those who do not become disciples of Jesus end up? Jesus says that they will lose their lives. No matter how successful one's life is in this world, the world has been corrupted by man's sin, and as a result, death has entered this world. And that death comes to everyone, suddenly, without notice. Jesus tells His disciples that no matter how successful a life one leads in this world, one cannot have it forever. One cannot buy back one's life because of one's own sin, and the only way to

buy it back is to believe in Jesus Christ as one's Savior. But if one will deny himself, becoming a disciple of Jesus and take up his cross and follow Him, then he will have life in Christ.

A Swedish man named Tim Bergling, who liked music, was born into a rich family and started writing music from his older brother's influence. Starting from when he was 18 years old, he started uploading the music he wrote on the internet and prayed for his success as a musician. He was soon discovered by a British Radio DJ and signed a contract with a record label. Tim decided to go with the stage name Avicii, which he derived from Avici, meaning hell in Buddhism. He soon gained popularity as a DJ and producer. His song "Wake me up" was the most sold dance music in 2010, and was played more than 2 billion times on Youtube. It was as if he had truly gained the whole world. But he was by nature a shy young man who, because of this job, had to socialize and party all the time, which led to his addiction to alcohol, which, in turn, caused his internal organs to suffer. He announced his retirement from such music activities in 2016, but took his own life in 2018 at the age of 28. He was about to have the whole world, but he could not bear to be himself, so he took his life. His life is an example that shows what good is one's life even if one gains the whole world?

Brothers and sisters, we can already see where we will end up if we do not walk as disciples of Jesus. If we use our lives to gain the whole world for ourselves, what we will gain is emptiness. And we will eventually lose our lives. But if we deny ourselves as Jesus' disciples, take up our crosses and follow Him, we may suffer, we may grieve, but Jesus will give us true life. Which will you choose? May we, guided by the Holy Spirit, make the right choice.

Finally, Jesus shows in this passage that the life of taking up the cross and walking in discipleship is a life of assurance of His victory; see verse 27, "And the Son of Man will come to the Father, and the Father will be with Him, and the Son of Man will be with His angels, and the angels will be with Him. The Son of Man will soon come with His angels, clothed with the glory of the Father. And when he does, he will reward each one according to his deeds.²⁸ Truly, I say to you, the Son of Man will come with the Father's glory, and the Father's glory will be his. There are some standing here who will never taste death until they see the Son of Man coming with His Kingdom.

The Son of Man is used in the Gospels to refer to Jesus Himself. He told them that Jesus would soon come with His angels, clothed in the glory of the Father. A short time earlier, Jesus told his disciples that he himself would die on the cross and that he would be resurrected from the dead on the third day. Since he spoke this way afterward, this is speaking of after his

resurrection and ascension to heaven. According to this, he promised that he would return to this earth with the glory of God the Father, accompanied by his angels, also known as the heavenly hosts, to Jesus.

After Jesus returns, He will reward each according to his deeds. Jesus tells us specifically what will happen in John 5. John 5:27-29, 27 And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

28 "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

When Jesus comes again, those in the tombs, that is, all who have ended their lives on earth, will be resurrected. And those who walked as disciples of Jesus will be resurrected to receive eternal life. But those who did not believe in Jesus and did not become His disciples have been condemned to eternal judgment from God. Jesus promises that when He comes again, He will come as Judge and will give eternal life and victory to those who have become His disciples.

Jesus declared to His disciples, "I have overcome the world." Nevertheless, we may experience difficulty in accepting the reality of Jesus' victory. How can we accept with certainty the reality of Jesus' victory?

I am a fan of the New York Giants, a member of the NFL, American football league. The last time the Giants won the league championship game called the Super Bowl was in 2011, so it has been 10 years. Their opponent at that time was a formidable opponent, the New England Patriots, led by Tom Brady, the greatest athlete in American history. Sometimes I watch the highlights of that game, and I find myself watching the game, excited and happy for the victory, even though I already know that the team had already won this game. And as a fan, I feel like the team's victory is also my own victory.

This is what it means to walk confidently in the victory that Jesus gives us. Jesus had already died on the cross, but on the third day He rose again and triumphed over death. His victory is also the victory of those who believe in Him and become His disciples. No matter what we are going through, Jesus will come again and confirm His victory. When we are confident of His victory, we can walk as His disciples with joy in our hearts.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus will surely come again to give victory to those

who have believed and become His disciples. This is a sure thing, and if you are His disciple, the victory will be yours. If victory is promised to us, then we will be able to overcome any of the difficulties that come our way. Let us always remember this truth and walk daily as disciples of Jesus, confident of the victory he gives us.

Jesus invited his disciples to deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow him. He invited them to become His disciples. Becoming a disciple of Jesus will require profound changes in our lives and ways of living. And at times, we will experience suffering, conflict, and persecution because of these changes. But Jesus also died on the cross that you were to bear. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, died, and triumphed over the world. Let us become disciples of Jesus, give Him our all, and walk toward the coming of the Kingdom of God, confident of His victory.

Let us pray. Today, let's take five minutes to share with the person next to you what you learned today about what it means to become a disciple. Then please pray together.