

August 30 **Matthew 16:21-28**

People ask a very important question. What am I here for? What is my purpose for living? If I asked each of you to write down what you want to do with your life what would you write? If there ever was a man who knew what to do with his life it was Jesus He knew-without a doubt-what his purpose in life was and He was determined to fulfill it.

But there was a difference between what Jesus knew his purpose was and what others thought it was. In the verses prior to our text Peter had made a remarkable profession of faith. In response to the question as to who Jesus was, Peter said that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God.

Jesus commended Peter for giving the correct answer. But having given the correct answer, the follow up question to be answered was this: and how was He to carry out His mission as Messiah? What was Jesus to do? Starting in verse 21, Jesus explained what the Messiah had to do with his life.

He had to go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders, scribes, and chief priests. He would be killed and be raised on the third day. But Peter said, "This can't happen to you. You are the Messiah. You are to bring hope, freedom, and liberation for our nation. This can't be."

Upon hearing this Jesus called Peter a devil. Satan was using Peter as a temptation for Jesus to forsake his purpose for living. Jesus knew what he had to do. He knew what he had to suffer. He was determined to fulfill the purpose for his life. But the devil was using Peter to persuade him to take the easy way out. The devil was using Peter to focus on human desires and designs for Jesus rather than God's plan for his life. Peter was looking at things from a human perspective rather than a divine one.

Then Jesus began to tell His disciples that they had a purpose for their lives too. He let them know: You have a choice to make. You can follow me or you can go your own way in deciding what to do with your lives. But, He says, if you want to follow me you are going to have to follow my purpose for your lives. I am the example. I am the model. I am the way. Follow me and you will have a purpose for your life.

Even though we live in a different time and era, what Jesus told the disciples can be applied to us today. So, what are we to do with our lives?

NUMBER ONE: We are to discipline our lives. Jesus said we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. To deny ourselves means to discipline ourselves. By nature we desire to please and satisfy ourselves. We are born that way. Sin is nothing more than the desire to satisfy ourselves rather than God. That was the original sin of Adam and Eve. They wanted to have their own way rather than obeying God.

We can see this in a newborn baby. A newborn baby doesn't care about anything but getting its needs met. He wants to eat. He wants to be changed. He wants to be held. Everything is centered on his needs. This is natural. But if we want to follow Christ and his purpose for our lives, we must leave our baby and selfish desires behind and focus on God's purpose for us. That takes discipline and it doesn't come easily.

A disciplined life is one that has its priorities straight. It involves renouncing anything which is in competition with our love and service of God. God doesn't want to be first in your life. God wants to be your life. Education is fine, but don't let it compete with the salvation of your soul. Money is fine, but don't let it compete with your treasure in heaven. Fame is fine, but don't let it compete with who you're in Christ Jesus. Houses are fine, but don't let it compete with your home in glory.

So discipline yourself that God is your life. Then everything else falls into place. But the sad thing is that many of us are turned in on ourselves. We don't like discipline. We want to do what we want when we want. And we want to do it our way.

Some people come to church to get their needs met. They come seeking to get something from God, rather than to do something for God. They are looking for prosperity, health, peace, contentment, satisfaction, confidence, and so many other things. Those things are important, and many of those things can be supplied by God.

But Jesus wants us to love and serve him first of all. He wants us to seek him for his name's sake rather than for what we can get out of him. Discipline takes time, sacrifice, study, prayer, meditation, and reflection. Discipline is costly. That's why so few people are into it. They don't want to pay the price of disciplining and denying themselves. They want the benefits of Christianity without the costs of discipleship and discipline. They come to church to feel good, but they don't want to do anything good for Christ. Live a life of discipline by denying self and serving Jesus.

NUMBER TWO: we should do it to save our lives. How do we save our lives? We save our lives by losing them. Jesus told his disciples to take up their crosses and follow him. Jesus bore his cross to death. We must also surrender our lives to Christ in order to save them. We are to dedicate our lives to Christ. We are to lose our lives so that Christ may live his life in and through us. Real life can only be found in Christ. Jesus Christ can save our lives, not only for eternity, but for now also. We give our lives to Christ so he can save them.

Some people give everything to God but themselves. They want to present to God the good things they have done. They have lived a good life. They have been good family members. They have helped many people. Some have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and done many other good and commendable things. They think that surely all the good things they have done will save their life. But you can't save your life by doing good things. Only life in Christ can save your life. Only the Christ life in you can save your life.

To receive the life that God has for you means to get rid of all the baggage of your good works and present yourself to God just as you are. God says, "Your good works are fine. But I want you to give your life to me. I want you to surrender your life to me so I can save it." Jesus Christ is saying, "I want you. All the things you have done are fine. But I want you. I want you to give your life to me so I can use you for my purpose. I want you to give yourself to me so I can give you my life. Seek me and all those other things you want can be added to you. Give me yourself and then you can bring all that other stuff as a sign of your love for me. Let me give you a life that is really worth living. Don't come to me with the baggage of your good deeds and self-righteousness. Come just as you are."

In 1925, a woman by the name of Betty Stam wrote this: **"Lord, I give up my own purposes and plans, all my own desires, hopes, and ambitions, and accept your will for my life. I give myself, my life, my all utterly to you, to be yours forever. I hand over to your keeping all of my friendships; all the people whom I love are to take second place in my heart. Fill me and seal me with your Holy Spirit. Work out your whole will in my life, at any cost, now and forever. To me to live is Christ. Amen."**

Nine years later, on December 8, 1934, Betty and her husband, John Stam, laid down their lives for Christ when they were martyred by Chinese Communists.

Are we that committed? Our pray must be, **'whatever the cross, whatever the loss, I give my life to Thee.'**

Only Jesus Christ has the life you are seeking. Only Jesus Christ can give you a real purpose for your life. Come to Jesus with nothing in your hands. Come just as you are with no baggage in your hand. As the hymn Rock of Ages says: **" Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling. Naked, come to thee for dress. Helpless look to Thee for grace. Foul I to the fountain fly. Wash me, Savior, or I die."** Only Jesus can save your life. Life is in Jesus.

NUMBER THREE: invest your life. Some people invest their lives in themselves. They invest themselves in attaining houses, money, popularity, fame, and in all the things they think will satisfy. They invest their time in getting things which will pass away. But we need to invest our lives in things which shall last forever. Even if you gained the whole world and everything you wanted, but lost your life, it would be a poor investment. Don't trade the eternal for the temporary. You could be the richest person in the world, but if your soul is lost you have lost everything. You are lost forever. How foolish it is to invest your life in things of this world and lose your eternal life forever.

Remember that only what you do for Christ will last. The song says, "**You may build great cathedrals large or small. You can build skyscrapers grand and tall. You may conquer all the failures of the past. But only what you do for Christ will last.**"

Invest your life in service to God and others. You can discipline your life. You can save your life. But unless you invest your life in something beyond yourself, it means nothing. Service to God involves loving, thoughtful, active promotion of the good of others and the causes of God in our world. We give our lives to God so he can use us. Jesus is our example. He came not to be served, but to serve. He came to save us from sin.

But he was also mindful of the physical needs of people. He healed the sick and fed the hungry. Jesus is our model. Whatever he gives you, invest it in service to God and to others. Jesus Christ gave all for us. He wants us to invest ourselves in service to him and to others, to leave something that will last to other generations.

What God has given you pass it on to somebody. Don't keep it to yourself. When you enjoy the peace that passes understanding, pass it on. If you know something about God's amazing grace, pass it on to somebody else. If you have the joy of the Lord in your heart, pass it on to somebody else. If you have faith that can move mountains, pass it on to somebody else. Whatever you have, pass it on to others. Invest your life in service to God and others. Pass it on. Pass on mercy. Pass on truth. Pass on understanding. Pass on goodness. Pass on patience.

Pass on kindness. Pass on generosity. Pass on gentleness. Pass on purity. Pass on praise. Pass it on. Invest it in somebody else. Pass on what you have to somebody else.

Reach out and touch somebody's hand. Make this a better world. Reach out and touch a soul that is hungry. Reach out and touch a life torn and dirty. Reach out and touch a friend who is weary. Reach out and touch someone who needs you. Make a difference in somebody's life.

If you can help somebody as you travel along, if you can help somebody in word or song, and if you can help somebody from doing wrong, then your living shall not be in vain. Share what you have with somebody else. Invest your life. Reach out and shed God's light in the darkness. What should you do with your life? Discipline your life. Save your life. Invest your life. That's what to do with your life!

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