

Dying to Live  
Matthew 16:24-26  
May 29, 2011

When I have watched movies like Saving Private Ryan or film footage from especially WWII it makes me wonder what it took for soldiers to march forward in the heat of battle. You see the scenes of them running out of a boat as it lands ashore and they keep moving forward even though they are being fired upon.

Every soldiers goes through training before they go into battle. They are put through training that changes their bodies to meet the demands of battles and training that gets their hearts and minds ready for battle.

Jesus was doing some basic training with his disciples. Because lets remember the scene. Last week we were in this same chapter from the book of Matthew and we heard how Peter confessed that Jesus is the messiah and the Son of the living God. Jesus promised on that type of faith God will build the church = the people who live by God's calling.

Right after that Jesus began to tell his disciples how he was about to go to Jerusalem and he will suffer, be killed but on the third day he will be raised to new life. In a sense Jesus was telling his disciples I am about to go Jerusalem for the big battle, and the bullets will be flying and I am going to take a hit that will be **fatal; but not final.**

Peter's reaction to the prediction of Jesus missed the mark. Peter attempted to discourage Jesus that suffering and death would be in Christ's future. And that is when the next level of basic training starts for the disciples of Jesus. What Jesus then taught his disciples was that there is a time when dying is living. He would teach them we get a grip on life when we surrender control to God.

He taught them the steps of how we spiritually must die to ourselves in order that we live for him.

### **Read the scripture “NRSV Bible”**

#### **Deny himself = Lay down self will.**

Jesus said dying to live starts by denying our selves. Denying ourselves means we lay down our self-will. Now right off the bat that type of talk can scare a lot of people. The talk of denying ourselves sounds like we don't count. Our happiness to God doesn't matter. Denying ourselves may mean to some that we can't enjoy life. But that is not what denying our selves means.

**Denying our selves means we aren't in sole control of how we live our lives.** I like the way the Message version of the Bible translates the word deny, **“Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver seat; I am”**

If you have ever helped your kids learn how to drive a car you ought to be able to get in touch deeply within your soul with the way the Message Bible translates this verse. To sit on the passenger side of the car for the first time to let your kid drive. Your son or daughter has never driven before. They have within their power a hunk of metal that can go from 0 to 60 seconds faster than you know they are ready to handle. You sit there as they drive down the main highway and you have no brake pedal to slow the car down, no steering wheel in case they are riding the middle yellow line. They are in control and you're not. You know that so much is out of your hands and now you are trusting them.

Jesus was telling his disciples if you are going to discover the truth about dying to live you have got to let God do the steering over your life. This is about surrendering our will our deepest desire and drive for living over to God's will.

Pastor John Ortberg tries to describe what it means to surrender to God. He writes,

**“Surrender is the glad and voluntary acknowledgement that there is a God and it is not me. His purposes are wiser than my purposes, and his desires are better than my desires. Jesus does not come to rearrange the outside of my life the way I want it to be. He comes to rearrange the inside of my life the way God wants it to be. In surrender, I let go of my life. It's a kind of Copernican revolution of the soul, where I am no longer at the center of the universe. (preaching today.com, John Ortberg)**

**Take up your cross= pick up God's will.**

We are to deny ourselves and then Jesus said “take up our cross.” Not only is God in the driver seat, but basic training to be a follower of Jesus means carry your cross. It means to be willing to turn toward suffering, the unpleasant, and discomfort in order to do God's will. Like soldiers who run into the line of fire and face the enemy. The Message version states, **“You're not in the driver's seat, I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it.”** = carry your cross.

New testament scholar Michael Wilkins has said, **“To deny ourselves and take up our cross points to the over-riding principle of adopting God's will for our lives over our own will.”** (NIV Commentary, Wilkins, p.586)

As I think about the image of the cross I don't think of the actual wooden cross. For me to get what it means to take up our cross, I think of two lines intersecting. Two directions intersecting. The first line or direction is my will.

My will is flawed sometimes.

My will at times is limited in vision and purpose.

My will is often loaded with looking out just for me.

Then comes the second line or second line of direction. The second line of direction is God's will.

God's will is perfect.

God's will is pure.

God's will is no respecter of persons rich or poor learned or illiterate, color of skin, old or young, or nationality.

God's will is eternal; not limited.

Our will and God's will don't naturally run parallel, they often cross in conflict, competition and then a decision has to be made. Will I deny my self, my direction and take up God's will or insist on my own wishes being done? It's the basic truth of being a follower of Jesus. It's a basic truth about living a life that day after day seeks to surrender to God.

It's the reason why the Apostle Paul used the phrase "I die daily." Daily the aim of our lives according to Jesus is to pick up God's will. Pick up God's will and live and apply it in every circumstance of life over self-will. Pick up God's will in every twist and turn life hands us.

### **Following = Going in same direction.**

Jesus qualified what we have to do if we are willing to pick up that cross. He said we are to carry our cross. Two quick points about the word carry.

- The word carry has an on-going connotation to it. It is not off and on agreement with denying of our will. It is not only doing God's will when it is convenient to our preferences. The word carry means continually constantly living a lifestyle seeking to live God's will.
- The second thing the word carry means is going in the same direction God is going. Jesus said he was heading to Jerusalem. He was calling his disciples to follow him to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem symbolizes a place of ultimate sacrifice. We all have our Jerusalem to face, our moments, conditions to face and be obedient to God.

Carry your cross means look into the scripture and see if the flow of your life going with Jesus.

Is the flow of your life consistent with how the life of a Christian is defined.

Look into the scripture and is the habits of our shared life together going in the same direction as the church of the New Testament?

**“Those who lose their life for my sake” = have life v.25**

Jesus said those who are willing to lose their life for his sake find life. In the Greek the word life can mean animal life, the very physical life. But in the Greek there is also the word for life that means the intensity of life at its most noblest quality. I believe what Jesus is trying to say here is that second or latter form of the word life is what he offers. To let God be in the driver's seat of our lives is the best possible way to find the noblest of life. The reward for self denial, the blessing to carry our cross is to find the noblest of life - God present and approving of how we handle life. The Apostle Paul once said, “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18) It is to find Jesus in the midst of whatever we have faced because we faced that situation living out God's will; not just our will. We faced life putting first the kingdom of God, “God's will” and trusting whatever God's sees that we need will be provided.

There is a song Tiffany Rogers is going to sing entitled “Blessing.” You'll be able to see the lyrics as she sings. As she sings consider whether you can hear the challenge and the invitation to find and embrace God's will.

Jesus was calling his followers to find blessings, real life in ways only God can give us.

## **Conclusion**

Here is one truth I believe this passage of scripture lays out for us. We cannot avoid giving Jesus an answer. He is giving to each of us the invitation to follow him. As Pastor John Ortberg has stated there are three types of hearts. There is the rebellious heart that will answer to God with a life and that says, no thanks. To live that way is to miss out on blessings now and no hope for eternity.

The second heart is a divided heart. A divided heart won't let God be in total control and tries to have Jesus around only when needed; a funeral, a wedding, a bad report from the doctor. A divided heart won't work either. Because Revelation 3:16 reminds how **Jesus once said those who are lukewarm about him will be spewed out of his mouth.**

The third heart is a heart that answers with surrender to God and says your can have the driver seat of my life. Your will Lord is what is most important; not my will.

And please hear this point. We don't surrender situations to God, our money, our bad habits, our sickness, or our talents. We don't have to wait to be something different than we are until we pick up our cross and follow. We surrender ourselves to God so that His will can begin to come and change us. Bad habit by habit. Old grudge by old grudge. Fear by fear, lust by lust, messed up priorities one at a time; whatever the case might be.

It's the third type of heart, a surrendered heart we're called to live individually. It's the surrendered heart we're called to have as a church and follow Jesus Christ.