

Matthew 16 • Understanding the Times

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It begins in chapter 16 by saying, *“And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. ² He answered them, ‘When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ ³ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.” (ESV)*

I'd like you to pause there with me for just a minute to understand first of all what's going on. The fact that the Sadducees and the Pharisees came to Jesus and said, show us a sign is, it sounds on the outset like, well, what's necessarily wrong with that?

But what they're saying by saying this is that we essentially are rejecting everything You've ever shown us up to this point. Because it's not like they hadn't seen signs and wonders up to this point. They'd seen plenty. And essentially what they're saying is, we refuse to acknowledge any of the previous signs that You've done. Now do a new one and make it better and bigger.

And so essentially what they're doing, or what they're saying, and the heart of what they're saying is grounded in unbelief. This is not a statement of faith on their part. It's a statement of unbelief.

And so you'll notice that as Jesus begins to speak to them here, He talks about signs. And He tells them that they've learned over the years to correctly identify certain signs in the heavens or in the sky as it relates to the weather patterns, and they've done that fairly accurately.

And yet He then goes on to tell them, even though you're surrounded by this plethora of signs and wonders that have been going on, not just recently, but for years, you somehow have missed them. And you have to remember, and this is something we forget, the signs of the times have been going on for over 30 years. This is the part we forget.

We think that Jesus started His ministry and now He's been doing signs and wonders, and they just didn't believe it. Oh, heavens, there's a whole lot more that they just weren't paying attention to.

I mean, you got to remember that these signs began with the supernatural birth of John the Baptist. You remember how Luke tells us that Elizabeth conceived and gave birth to John some 30 some years previously through supernatural means.

She was far past the age of childbearing. She was through menopause. She was past menopause, you guys. And the baby factory had shut down a long time ago. And yet she conceived and she gave birth in her old age. And that kind of news doesn't stick close to town, it spreads like wildfire. It starts with these signs that have been going on. Hey, did you hear about this high priest's wife? She gave...

And then we begin all of the stuff that goes on with the birth of Jesus. We just got to look at all this stuff at Christmas. Do you think that the angels appearing to a bunch of shepherds out in the field is something that's going to stay a secret? No, that's going to spread like you wouldn't believe and people are going to be talking about it. Did you hear about that? There was this light and these angels. And they were declaring the birth of a king, and the Messiah, and so forth.

And then there was the star that hovered over Bethlehem. Good grief. It got the attention of some stargazers from the east who traveled all the way to Israel to find out what this star was all about and so forth. And the Bible says that the star came to rest over Bethlehem. I didn't know stars could do that but this is obviously a supernatural event. And when the wise men came, that was not a privatized sort of a deal. The Bible even tells us that the whole city knew about this. It's in, I don't know if you remember, this is back in Matthew chapter 2. Let me put it on the screen. I'll remind you of this. It says,

Matthew 2:1-3 (ESV)

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who

has been born king of the Jews? (that's what they assumed the star was all about) For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” (and) When Herod the king heard this, (listen, look at this) he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;

You think that news stayed close to home? Hey, that spread through the whole land of Israel. So there's all these signs and then we've got John the Baptist ministry that happens, starts happening. And there was a general expectation of the coming of Messiah at that time. The people expected the Messiah to come.

In fact, when John came and started preaching and baptizing in the wilderness, people came to him and they said, Are you He? Are you the Messiah? And John would say, no, I'm not the Messiah. He comes after me. I'm here to prepare the way for Him. I'm not even worthy to untie His shoes But I'm not Him.

But you see the fact that they asked shows that there was an expectation. And so, there's all these signs, and then, of course, the ministry of Jesus comes along, and He starts doing miracles. Raising people from the dead, and giving the blind their sight, and the deaf could hear, and the mute could speak, and on, and on.

And they're coming, and then they come to Jesus, and they go, show us a sign. And it's the dumbest thing in the world. And again, it's a request that is born out of unbelief. And Jesus knows it and, and so He responds by saying, it's a wicked generation that comes and asks “*for a sign, ...no sign will be given to it.*” Right?

Here's what's interesting. What Jesus is basically chastising them about is their lack of paying attention. We have a thing today where we talk, we'll say to people, read the room. Have you ever heard somebody say that? Just, cause some people are oblivious. I don't know if you're aware of that. You might be one of them. And it's funny actually but the ability to read the room means to figure out what's going on in the room and respond in kind.

And, that's in a larger sense, we're, talking about people who are struggling to read the signs of the times to understand the time in which they live, right? And this is what Jesus is chastising these men for. But there are people who can read the room and read the nation and read the times.

And there's an interesting statement I want to show you here in a moment that's couched in an Old Testament book in 1 Chronicles and the time frame is the time of David just before he rose to reign over all of Israel. You might remember that after king Saul died, was killed in battle, David took the throne

but not over the entire nation of Israel immediately. He only ruled and reigned over the southern portion of Israel for about 7 years before the northern portion of Israel eventually came and acknowledged him as the anointed king over all of Israel. Took about 7 years.

After that 7 year period, the tribes of Israel from the north began to come down and acknowledge to David, yes, we realize you're the one who's supposed to be the king.

Well, there's this interesting statement about what one of, that is mentioned about one of the tribes that came down to acknowledge David as the king. It's again from 1 Chronicles, up on the screen so you can see it together. It says,

1 Chronicles 12:32 (ESV)

Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, 200 chiefs, and all their kinsmen under their command.

Of Issachar, (that's the tribe) men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, (and then it mentions they came down they were numbered) 200 chiefs, and (then) all their kinsmen (and so forth) under their command.

But notice that sentence or that paraphrase. That phrase in there, "...men who had understanding of the times." Now in the context of 1 Chronicles, that was understanding that it was time for David to be king of all Israel.

But in Jesus's day, it was understanding the time of Messiah, which they didn't get. What about our times today? You're living in times, I don't know if you knew that, but I mean, this is a time just like any other time in history.

What's going on? What's happening? What do you see happening? What do you sense the Holy Spirit is communicating to you about the times in which we live?

There's a great many Christians today who believe that God is setting the stage for the return of Messiah, the return of our Savior. Which we know is going to happen. I mean, Jesus said it. The angels declared it. We've got all kinds of biblical references to the second coming of Jesus.

And, of course, nobody knows the day or the hour, we're not about to be dumb enough to do that. But by the same token, we know it's near. Why? Because we're understanding the times, right? We're just looking at the stage and we're

saying, hey, the pieces are in place more so now than ever. In fact, ever since 1947 when Israel became a nation, that really set the things in motion. And so there's a whole lot more that are pointing to the return of our Lord, and so forth.

Now, concerning what the Pharisees and Sadducees asked of Jesus to give them a sign, notice again, verse 4. It says, *“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.”* Which we talked about in chapter 12. Jesus said it there as well.

And we talked about what the sign of Jonah is and it just has to do with how Jonah was in the belly of the fish for a certain amount of time. And the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth, in the tomb, if you will, for an amount of time before the resurrection. And so the resurrection was the sign of Jonah that was given.

Anyway, it goes on to verse 5 and says, *“When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. (oh dear) ⁶ Jesus said to them, “Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ⁷ And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, “We brought no bread.” ⁸ But Jesus, aware of this, said, “O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? ⁹ Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? ¹¹ How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” (and) ¹² Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”*

Yeah, these guys are thick headed. Because the fact of the matter is, they were raised as Jews. And they knew, as Jews, that leaven was a picture of sin and that which is evil. And it's really a beautiful picture. It's a very powerful picture because as you know, leaven is something that a woman works into the dough of the bread before it's baked, and it permeates the dough, and it corrupts it.

And that corruption, that decomposition, if you will, is what gives air that causes the dough to rise. Of course, we like it in the sense of bread, right? But it's a great picture of what sin does in our lives. It infiltrates and it corrupts.

And in the case of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, Jesus is using this picture to describe their teaching that also infiltrates and corrupts. And essentially what Jesus is doing is He's talking about all that I've been harping about for 30 some years. It's what I call religion.

I call it man-made religion and it was going on in the in Jesus's day and it's still happening today. Where people take the simple Word of God and add to it the rules and regulations of man. And there are a lot of people that don't know the difference between what's in the Bible and what they're taught based on tradition and man-made rules.

And because they don't know the difference, they embrace it like it's the Word of God, and they end up being shipwrecked by the very thing they think is God's Word. And it's just, it's a tragedy. And Jesus had some pretty strong things to say about the way the Pharisees and the Sadducees taught.

We're going to see this in a later chapter of Matthew, but I'll give you a little preview of coming attractions. On the screen, Matthew 23. Jesus said,

Matthew 23:13 (ESV)

“...woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.”

“...woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.”

And that is the bottom line. When man gets a hold of God's Word and starts messing with it and adding to it, it becomes this legalistic mess of rules and regulations that shut the kingdom of God in people's faces. Why? Because they can't do it. They can't do it.

Man likes to put all these rules in place that says, well, if you're going to be a Christian, you got to do this, and you got to do this, and you got to, and they put all these rules in place, and you can't do it.

And eventually people realize they can't do it. And they're like, well, I guess I'm not, I'm not one of the chosen, I suppose. God doesn't love me enough, or this might work for other people, but it just doesn't work for me. And meanwhile, the Bible tells us all along that salvation is by grace through faith, not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.

When's the last time you worked for a gift? You didn't. Because if you did, it ceased at that point to be a gift. The Bible says salvation is a gift. That's pretty easy. But see, man doesn't like easy. We try to make things hard. And so we put

up all these rules and that's what Jesus called the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. It's a dangerous thing and it's going on today.

Verse 13. *“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”¹⁴ And they said, (well) “Some say John the Baptist,…”* We saw that a couple chapters ago, remember? Herod Antipas, who actually had John beheaded, then started hearing about things Jesus was doing and he goes, oh, it's John the Baptist come back from the dead. And he was just overwhelmed with guilt and remorse and whatever all else.

But then they go on to say, *“...others say Elijah, and others (some of you say You're) Jeremiah (not sure where that came from) or one of the prophets.”* The prophets of old who's come back from the dead.

What do you notice about all of these things that these, the people are saying? Well, A, they're wrong. Right? All of them. Not one of them got it right. Which tells you a little something about popular opinion. People love to take polls and get popular opinion and then we base things on polls. Well, the majority of the people say that.... Whatever the thing is they're saying, right? And we all go, oooh, you know, 87% of the population says, do-do-do-do-do, something about it. Yeah. Well, they're usually wrong. Popular opinion is usually wrong.

Anyway, He gets the, all these interesting opinions, which are nothing more than opinions. And then verse 15, *“He said to them, “But who do you say (or who do you say) that I am?”* I wish I could have been there to hear this or it'd have been a fly on the wall.

Because you can imagine, this is a heavy question. So, what about you guys? Who do you say that I am? And I can imagine, eyes darting back and forth. Who's going to be the first one to talk? Oh yeah, it's Peter. Cause he's always the first one to talk. Well, in this case, he gets it right.

Verse 16, *“Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ,…”* Of course, he wouldn't have said Christ, he would have said Messiah. Or the Hebrew, Mashiach. *“You are the..., (Messiah) the Son of the living God.”*

And so Peter acknowledges correctly who Jesus is. But I want you to notice something about this acknowledgement because he goes on. He goes beyond simply correctly identifying Jesus in His ministerial role, which is Messiah. He says, you're the Messiah. You're the Messiah. We got that. But he doesn't stop

there. Look what he goes on to say. He says, you're "...*the Son of the living God.*"

Guys, can I just tell you something? The Jews weren't expecting the Messiah to be the Son of the living God. You know why? Because to say that He is the Son of the living God is to say He is equal to God. It's to say He's God.

The Jews were not expecting God to come and be their Messiah. They thought it was going to be like an Elijah character, or a Moses character, or a Joshua type character. That's what they were expecting. You see, Peter has gone far beyond what the expectation was related to who the Messiah would be and he has nailed it on both counts. Okay?

Jesus responds here, in verse 17 and says, "*And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! (which means son of Jonah) For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."*"

Oh, okay, see, this is why he got it right. This was a direct revelation from God the Father. You are the Messiah. Oh, You're more than that. Cause, you see, when I say You're the Messiah, I'm identifying You in, really, Your human ministry. But he went on to say, you're "*the Son of the living God.*" Now I've just identified your deity, okay? You are God.

Now there's a lot of groups going around today like the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons and stuff like that, and they have tried to convince the world and honestly they've done a pretty good job of it. But they try to convince the world that somebody could be the Son of God and not equal to God. And they do that all the time.

I've had many conversations with Mormons at my doorstep. In fact, I had a couple guys show up just last week. Showed up and I was wearing some of my Calvary Chapel merch. Which I thought, oh, I shouldn't have done that cause I want to start talking to them before they immediately realize, that I'm either a believer or a pastor.

And I walked out, I opened the door and it said, Calvary Chapel, Ontario, right on my shirt. And the guy goes, oh, are you a Christian? Are you a pastor? He's like, just like that. And I was like, meh, busted. And so then I had to proceed from that point.

But I love to talk to them before they know that I'm even a believer because I like to challenge them on this point of who is Jesus Christ. And they always say,

well, He's the Son of God. I say, Well, you know what? That means He's God. No, no, that's not what it means. Oh, yes it does and I can prove it. Do you like when I say that? Up on the screen from John chapter 5.

John 5:18 (ESV)

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Boom! There you go. That's it. You see, anybody who tries to tell you that you can be the Son of God without being equal with God is just, they don't know what they're talking about.

To be the Son of God, the unique Son of God, is to be equal to God. And the Jews understood that. Why don't we? Well, because we've had people walking around ringing our doorbells for decades telling us that there's a difference. And we believed it. And it's unbiblical. You cannot be the unique son of God without being God.

And so what Peter declared was not only are You the Messiah, You are God in human flesh. And it was a powerful revelation. And it probably even went to Peter's head.

But anyway, Jesus goes on here in verse 18, and He says, “*And I tell you, you are Peter, (you are Petros) and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was (the Messiah) the Christ.*”

Well, here we go. We got to talk about these verses, don't we? I'm probably not going to surprise anybody in this room when I tell you that there have been, there's been a lot of disagreement on what Jesus meant when He spoke of the rock on which He would build His church.

And I know that some of you probably came out of Roman Catholicism. Let me see a show of hands. How many were raised in a, like a Roman Catholic background or Roman Catholic church? Oh, a few of you. And those of you

who weren't, you're still aware of the fact that in Roman Catholicism, they teach that what Jesus was saying was, you're Peter, you are the rock, and I'm going to build My church on you Peter. In other words, He declared him at that time to be the first Pope, and it's been passed down through the centuries. And we still have popes carrying on that tradition today.

And that's why Roman Catholics believe that popes can create doctrine, frankly. Even if it, even if it's not in the Bible. If the Pope says it, that's good enough. Well, and the reason is because they believe that the popes are a succession of the rock, the first rock.

Here's the question we got to ask. Was Jesus saying to Peter, you are the rock and on you, I'm going to build my church? Because I got to tell you something, I have my problems with that. I have problems with the church being built on any person other than Jesus Himself. And frankly, so did Peter. Because when Peter got to writing things later on in his letters; 1 and 2 Peter. And he talked about the rock, he didn't say it was him. He made it very clear it was Jesus. Let me show you 1 Peter chapter 2 up on the screen. It says,

1 Peter 2:4-8 (NIV84)

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him — you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.

As you come to him, (he's talking about Jesus) the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him — you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him (not me) will never be put to shame.

Peter went on to say,

1 Peter 2:4-8 (NIV84)

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” (or the cornerstone) and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

You see, when Peter sits and starts writing about the, the rock on which everything is built. On which our lives are built. On which the church is built, he can say, he can talk about nobody but Jesus. Nobody. The fact of the matter is, not one other biblical writer says that Peter is the rock on which the church is built. Not one. And so what you have is you have this single verse.

And guys, one of the things I learned early on when I was studying through the Word of God is that the first and I believe most important rule of biblical interpretation, is to allow the Bible to interpret itself. In other words, it is unwise to take a single verse of Scripture and create a big doctrine out of it without corroborating evidence from the rest of God's Word.

And as I said, there's not one other reference in the Bible about Peter being the rock upon which the church is built. In fact, over and over again, the biblical writers point to Jesus as the rock on which the church is built. The rock on which our lives are built and Jesus Himself declared He was the rock foundation of our lives. Check out Matthew chapter 7. It wasn't just a few weeks we were there. It says, this is Jesus talking.

Matthew 7:24-27 (ESV)

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine (Jesus said) and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

Jesus said very clearly, My Word is a rock to you on which you build your lives.

But honestly, I got to tell you, one of the most powerful and telling verses was given in the Book of Psalms. I want to show you this. Psalm 18:31. Look at this.

Psalm 18:31 (ESV)

For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?

For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?

Boy, that's a great rhetorical question, isn't it? Well, the answer to that question is there's none. There's no other rock, but our God.

Now, Peter was the recipient of the name Rocky. That's what Jesus basically said, and you are Rocky. And Peter would become a pillar in time. He had some sputterings along the way. He eventually became a pillar in the church. A pillar, not the foundation. The apostles became pillars. And so Peter's life stabilized, we're very happy to say, after a period of time. But yeah, he's not the rock. Jesus is the rock.

And as for the statement that Jesus made about giving the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter, that part actually I believe. Not that he maintains those keys today, but if you look at the Book of Acts, you find that Peter was there preaching when the gospel went to the two major people's groups in the world.

Here in the world today, we have so many different racial divisions for people. The Bible has two. There's two different kinds of people on the earth; Jews and Gentiles. Just like gender. There's just two. Right? And that's it. It's like, you got Jew and Gentile. Yippee! Well, guess what? Peter was there when the Gospel got preached to both of those groups.

First on, when people gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, Peter rose up and preached to the crowd, and declared Jesus Christ the Savior, and thousands of people got saved that day.

And then Peter was the man who preached to the household of Cornelius when it was jam packed full of Gentiles. And they all got saved that day when they heard the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus. And Peter was there turning the key each time to open up the Gospel to those two people's groups of the earth. There you go.

Now, check out the next passage. Verse 21. *“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”* ²² *And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, (if you can imagine that) saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”* ²³ *But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”*

You'll notice how I said Peter had some sputterings along the way. Here's one of them, right on the heels of being told that he had given a proper and correct revelation from God the Father of who Jesus was. And then he turns around and rebukes Jesus for talking about His impending death at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders.

And Jesus told him, you have in your mind the things of man. You're not thinking as God thinks now. You received a revelation before and that was wonderful. And you got it right but now you're thinking like a man. And man's ways are not God's ways and God's ways are not man's ways. And so He rebukes him. Literally calls him Satan. Not to say that he is Satan. Not to say that even Peter was possessed at that moment. He wasn't. He was just thinking like the world thinks.

Because, frankly, what Jesus had said about His death didn't fit in with Peter's expectations for the Messiah. The Messiah's not going to die a death on a cross for heaven's sake. He's our Savior. He's our leader, our hero. He's going to conquer the Romans and make Israel the focal point of the world.

Well, that is going to happen, but not until the Millennial Kingdom. They jumped ahead a little bit. A few thousand years. And they just missed the whole idea of the suffering servant. Isaiah 53 is one of those powerful passages that foretells the coming of Messiah to suffer. But they missed it. They skipped over it. They interpreted it wrongly.

And so they jumped ahead in their understanding of what Messiah was going to come and do. And all they saw was a conquering Messiah. They didn't realize He came to conquer sin and death. They thought He was coming just to conquer the Romans, so, it didn't fit. It didn't fit with their expectations. So he rebukes Jesus and gets a rebuke himself.

But since Jesus is talking to the disciples about His own death and beginning to help them to understand that this is something that's coming, He then turns to speak of death in a different way in verses 24 and through the last part of the chapter.

And He begins in verse 24 by saying, *“Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself...”* And those words. in your Bible are very important, *“deny himself.”* If they're not underlined, circled, or otherwise highlighted in your Bible, they ought to be because they're very important words. And He goes on to say, and to elaborate, *“...and take up his cross and follow me.”*

That must have been a shocking statement for the disciples to hear. Because you see, crucifixion wasn't a Jewish form of execution, it was a Roman form of execution. And it was hideous in the extreme. We've romanticized it, we've made jewelry out of it. And I'm not saying it's wrong to wear a cross. I'm just saying we've softened it.

They saw the cross as probably the cruelest form of execution that could possibly be dreamed up by sinful man. Because not only did you nail the man on the cross and wait for him to die, which often took days of intense horrific suffering. But when the Romans decided that someone should be crucified, they began by making that person carry the instrument of their death; the cross, through the streets of whatever city it was, to announce to everyone this man was condemned, and he was going to very soon die. And so he had to carry that cross. Jesus wasn't the only one to carry His cross to the place of execution. It was a common Roman practice.

So, when Jesus says to his disciples, and again, this must have been shocking to them to hear it. If you would come after Me, you must deny yourself and take up your cross. And that means carry it. Carry your... And we're not talking about taking a hunk of wood and dragging it through the streets to get attention about the Gospel. Not that that's wrong. This is a completely different thing altogether.

It's a lifestyle of saying no to me and yes to God. Okay? That's what it means to deny yourself. And by the way, denying yourself, and however you say it, denying yourself, dying to self, or even frankly following Jesus. You boil them all down and they mean the exact same thing. No to me, yes to Him.

And this, see, goes against our nature. We don't, we don't naturally say no to ourselves. We want to say yes to ourselves. At least I want to for me. I don't know about you. But I'm a really very self-centered person and I know it. And I like pleasing myself. I like doing things to make myself feel better. In fact, all of the self-words that the world likes to talk about, they all, I mean, they resonate with me. Whether we're talking about self-love, you hear that a lot.

Even people say today, you've got to learn to love yourself before you can love others. Stupidest thing I've ever heard, but people say it. It's not true, by the way. Or self-esteem. He just really has low self-esteem. He needs to have better self-esteem.

Let's fess up on something, Christians. Most of us bought that one hook, line, and sinker. And it was false. You don't heal someone from the inside out by

increasing their self-esteem. It's just untrue. And then self-care, we're really into that one now, to the point now, all of our commercials on TV, if you've noticed, they're all about pills. Constantly. I remember a time when we used to have commercials about sugar pops or my favorite, Cocoa Krispies. Now it's pills. And they're the weirdest thing. Have you ever noticed these pill commercials? It's all about self-care. But they're the weirdest things in the world.

I mean, do you ever keep the sound up on those once in a while to hear about all the side effects? If you suddenly get the urge to start eating dog food, stop taking this and call your doctor right away. This is ridiculous, but we've elevated this whole idea of self-care to the point where 24 seven, if I got something going on, I get on my website. And I go to Dr. M.D. or whatever it's called, and I can talk to somebody anytime, anywhere. And we can, we can work this thing out and you can give me some pills. Because we're all into this thing of self-care.

Well, and then Jesus comes along, and He says, You want to follow Me? Yeah. Then I want you to deny self. Well, that's not even on my radar. This whole idea of denial of self, it's not even coming, it wouldn't even enter my mind if Jesus hadn't said it.

And so He awakens me to a different sort of a understanding of life. To deny, to say no. I'm not good at saying no to Paul. Can I just admit that to you? It feels really good to do that. This is my therapy session or session here with you guys.

I don't like saying no to Paul, but Jesus over the years has been teaching me to say no to Paul. And you know what? It's life giving. It really is. But if your life is caught up with constantly bound up in self related stuff. Your life's going nowhere.

In fact, Jesus asks in verse 26, He says, *“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”*

You find somebody out there who doesn't know the Lord and they're living the self-life. I'm living to please myself, right? And maybe I do gain the whole world, who knows? What good is it in the scope of eternity if I lose my soul? Right? Jesus is challenging us to look at these things through an eternal perspective.

And then He says this powerful statement in verse 25, *“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”* And

wow, this is just, this is one of those verses, I got to tell you. Every so often you hit some of those verses in the Bible and they're just like, they're so thick. They're so full that you know. You read it and you go, I could spend the rest of my life thinking about this and probably still not get it all. And this is one of them.

But when we come to Jesus, this is the first step. Do you guys realize that when you come to Jesus and you make Him your Savior. When you realize you're a sinner, this is the very first step of losing your life.

You can't, you can't hold on to your life, the self-life, at least in those initial steps, and still come to Jesus. In order to come to Jesus, you have to say, I'm not good enough to be saved. I can't do it. I can't be good enough, I can't earn it. I can't impress God with how good I could possibly be.

I have to get rid of that entire thought, and I have to come to Jesus and say, I don't deserve anything that You have to give me, not one single thing. But I believe that Jesus died to pay the price for my sin. And in saying that, I am denying self. Do you hear that?

And it's the first step, but it's not the last step. We go through the rest of our lives learning how to deny ourselves after that single point, right? But we understand that this process of, of throwing off the self-life that continues really for the entirety of our Christian walk, is the process by which we are set free, truly set free. And we find our life by systematically losing it. Yeah.

Every time Jesus comes along and says to me, Paul, you know that thing you got going on in your life right there or in your heart, or whatever. Yeah, Lord. You need to, you need to get rid of that. You need to deny that. You need to die to that. And when I say, yes, Lord, you're right. I need to. And I pray, and I invite Him to be the strength of my life, a little more life comes into my being. And I find a little bit more of that life that He promises me. Because finding that life means losing myself, my own life. It's finding His life.

Jesus made another interesting statement at the very end of this chapter. Verse 28 where he says, *"Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*

And that sounds very much like some of these guys are either going to live a very long life, or Jesus is going to come back in their lifetime. But that's not what He means. Jesus is saying that some of them are going to get a glimpse of the glory of His kingdom, the power, the majesty. And those few are Peter,

James, and John. And we're going to see exactly how that happens when we get into the next chapter next time.

So we're going to stop there. Let's stand together and we'll close in prayer. If you need prayer this morning, come on up front here after we're done and we'd be happy to pray with you.

Father, we thank You so much for the power and the majesty of Your Word. We thank You for the clarity and the wisdom. And we thank You, Father God, for the revelation that is ours through the Word of God, through the ministry of Your Holy Spirit making us aware of the reality and the truth of things.

And we thank You, Father God, that You have told us the path to life, and it begins with bowing the knee to Jesus Christ and saying, please, Lord, save this sinner who has no means or power to save himself.

And lead us, Lord, all of us, in the path of dying to self-daily, saying no to self that we might live for You. We thank You and we praise You for the power and majesty of Your Word.

Continue, Father, to speak to us this week from it, and guide and direct our hearts through Jesus Christ, our Savior, we pray. And all God's people said, amen.

Have a good rest of your Sunday.