

SERMON NOTES
Matthew 16:13-28
“The Way of the Cross”

Intro:

- Some time ago Beth and I bought plane tickets for a trip
- *It seemed like a good price for the tickets*
- After purchasing the tickets, I proceeded to the online seat assignment page
- *Many airlines offer seat upgrades for certain seats for which you pay extra*
- But in this case, every seat on the plane had a price tag – some higher than others
- *The plane ticket we just purchased did NOT actually include a seat on the plane – that was extra*
- Apparently the plane ticket only gives you access to board the plane but not actually a place to sit
- That is an example of a hidden cost

- We need to be careful as Christians when we present the Gospel that we do not hide the costs of following Jesus
- *We emphasize the free gift of salvation and eternal life in Jesus Christ – and all you need to do to receive that free gift is to say a prayer of faith to accept Jesus Christ as Savior*
- Forgiveness of sins and everlasting life in heaven – all at no cost – Jesus paid it all
- *Just pray a prayer to accept Christ as your Savior – and then go back to living your life as you were*

- Many people have accepted that deal – but they are no longer following Jesus because they did not count the cost of discipleship – *or they were never told upfront about those costs*
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer called that “cheap grace”
- *“Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross”*

- Cheap grace – grace without discipleship – a doctrine of grace without actually following and obeying Christ – *lacks transforming power and leads to an impotent and worldly Christianity in which the lives of those inside the church are indistinguishable from the lives of those outside the faith*

- What is Costly Grace?
- Costly grace calls us to lay down our lives in surrender to Christ – and in return gives us the only true life there is – the life of being united to the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ
- The Christian life begins with – springs from – and is sustained by Grace – God’s unmerited favor shown us in Jesus Christ – *but experiencing this grace cannot be divorced from following Jesus in single-minded obedience to his call and commands*
- The grace that has the power to transform lives is a costly grace that is inseparably attached to following Jesus in the Way of the Cross
- Costly grace – saving grace – speaks of sin, righteousness and judgment – and then offers salvation, forgiveness, cleansing, transformation and new life on the biblical condition of repentance, faith and submission to the Lordship of Christ
- *Jesus did NOT hide the costs of following Him and entering the kingdom of heaven*
- When Jesus called people to follow Him – He gave them the costs as well as the benefits – upfront – *as we will see in Jesus’ encounter with Peter and the disciples in Matthew 16*

I. WHO IS JESUS?

Matthew 16:13-16 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

- *Caesarea Philippi was about a 25-mile hike north of the Sea of Galilee in a beautiful area near Mt Hermon with the headwaters of the Jordan River flowing through it*

SHOW PICTURE OF CAESAREA PHILIPPI

- *But it was also a center of pagan worship – in ancient times, Baal –and at the time of Jesus – worship center of the god Pan*
- And it was believed by many of the people of that day that the gates of Hades were located right beneath where you are looking
- *Thus giving a hidden depth of meaning to Jesus’ words in Matthew 16 “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it”*
- Jesus chose Caesarea Philippi as the place where he began to teach his disciples that he was the Messiah who would suffer and die in order to save us from our sins

STOP SHOWING PICTURE

- *Come, Follow Me – Jesus says*
- Who is Jesus that we should follow Him? Is he worthy of your total commitment?
- *No question has been more widely discussed and researched and debated than this question: Who is Jesus of Nazareth?*

1) The Crowd’s opinion

- At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus conducted an unscientific public opinion poll
- *“Who do the people say that I – the Son of Man – am?”*
- The disciples gave him the results of the latest Gallup Poll:
- *Some say John the Baptist – others say Elijah – and still others: one of the prophets*
- One of the prophets – most common answer then and now
- *Islam and many other religions honor Jesus as one of the prophets*
- Most people today would readily admit that Jesus belongs in the Religious Hall of Fame – *right next to Moses and Buddha and Mohammed and Krishna and Confucius and Gandhi and the Dalai Lama*
- The problem comes when Christians claim any kind of unique status for Jesus that would elevate him above the other prophets

2) Peter’s confession

- Jesus does not allow a purely academic discussion of the question
- *Jesus puts the question to the disciples in a most personal form: “But what about you? Who do you say that I am?”*

- That is life's most important question
- *Your answer to that question will determine your relationship with God / your values and priorities / your lifestyle choices / your purpose in life / and your eternal destiny after death*
- It is THE question on the Final Exam that God Himself will ask you on the Day of Judgment: *Who do you say Jesus is?*
- Peter spoke for the 12 disciples when he answered Jesus' question by saying: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"*
- Christ is NOT Jesus' last name
- Christ is the Greek form of the Hebrew "Messiah" – meaning the Anointed One
- *The Christ is the One God has chosen to be the Savior / Deliverer / and Ruler of mankind*
- There are many prophets – but only one Christ
- There is only One King who sits and reigns at the right hand of God in heaven and is coming again to reign over all the earth: *His name is Jesus*
- There are many prophets – but only One Son of the living God

Psalm 2:6-8 "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession."

- *Jesus of Nazareth is both the Messiah and the Son of God*
- There is only One Name of One Savior by which we must be saved: that name is Jesus – *Salvation is found in no one else*
- But the most important question is not who do the crowds say Jesus is – or even who do the disciples say Jesus is – what really matters is: *Who does God say Jesus is?*

3) God's Voice: *This is My Son*

- *After 6 days, as Jesus was praying on a mountain – the appearance of Jesus' face changed – shining like the sun -- and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning*

- And then two spiritual giants of the OT – Moses and Elijah – appeared in glorious splendor – talking with Jesus
- *Peter, James and John were startled to see the glory of Jesus -- and to see Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus*
- Not knowing what he was saying – Peter offered to build three booths for these Religious Hall-of-Famers: one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah
- *But as great as Moses and Elijah were as men of God – they did not belong in the same league as Jesus*
- To make that perfectly clear, God Himself spoke from heaven:

Mark 9:7-8 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

- *And then Moses and Elijah disappeared, and only Jesus was left*
- Put any other two great prophets or teachers or religious leaders or human rulers on that mountain, and the result would have been the same: *Jesus would be left standing alone – utterly unique – the one and only Son of God*
- *“This is my Son, listen to him.”*
- *This is my Son!* – and when the disciples looked around – Moses and Elijah were gone – *and there was no one except Jesus*
- Who is God’s one and only Son – No one except Jesus
- *Who is the only Way to God and to heaven – no one except Jesus*
- Who is worthy of your total commitment, uncompromising allegiance, unquestioning obedience, and exclusive devotion – no one except Jesus
- Jesus promised his disciples (Matt. 16:28) that some of them would see him in the glory of his coming kingdom
- *And indeed, Peter, James and John did see Jesus in the glory of his coming kingdom on the Mount of Transfiguration*

II. THE CHURCH ON THE ROCK

Matthew 16:16-19 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 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.”

- *What is the rock on which Jesus would build His church?*

- It is Peter – who was given the name “the rock” by Jesus himself

John 1:42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).

- Peter’s birth name was Simon Bar-Jonah / Simon son of John
- *At the beginning of their relationship, Jesus gave him the name Cephas – which means “rock” in Aramaic – and is translated “Petros” in Greek – Peter in English*
- Cephas – Petros – Peter = rock (named by Jesus)

- *It is true that the Greek in Matthew 16 distinguishes between Peter (Petros) and the rock (Petra) – but that is not a significant difference and easily explained by the fact that Peter is a man but the Greek word “rock” is feminine gender*
- But in Aramaic – the language Jesus spoke to Peter – the words – Peter and rock -- are the same (Cephas)
- “You are Cephas, and on this Cephas I will build my church”
- *The Rock on which Jesus promised to build his church is Cephas – Peter – namely, the Peter who just confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God*
- The rock is Peter in virtue of his confession, we might say
- *And indeed, Peter played a foundational role in the founding of the Christian Church on the Day of Pentecost – just as Jesus said he would*
- Affirming this foundational role of Peter need not be problematic for Protestants – for there is nothing in this text or any other Scripture indicating that Peter is the first Pope or that his apostolic authority is passed on to bishops of Rome throughout history
- *We can acknowledge that Peter – his preaching – his leadership – is the rock on which Jesus established His church – while still dissenting from Roman Catholic teaching on papal succession and authority*

- Similarly with Jesus giving to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven
- *What does that mean?*
- What do keys do? They open doors
- *In what sense did Peter open the doors to the kingdom of heaven?*
- NOT in this sense:

SHOW PICTURE OF PETER

- No, Peter is not stationed outside the pearly gates as the gatekeeper determining who enters heaven

STOP SHOWING PICTURE

- What, then?
- *On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached the Gospel and opened the door into the kingdom of heaven for Jews*
- And then it was Peter who went to the Roman Centurion Cornelius' house and preached the Gospel there – *opening the door to the kingdom of heaven for Gentiles*
- From a biblical perspective – that covers all of humanity – Jews and Gentiles
- Peter used the keys by opening the door into the kingdom by preaching the Gospel
- So what did Peter preach that opens the door into the kingdom of heaven for those who believe his message?
- *What must we do to enter the kingdom of heaven?*

Story of lift ticket at Kitzbuhel ski resort

- You don't want to arrive at the entrance to the kingdom of heaven only to discover that you didn't understand what was required to enter
- *So what is required?*

Acts 2:36-38 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be

baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

- What is required of us in response to God providing salvation for us through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ?
- “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
- *To repent is to turn from our sins and our self-directed life and our own efforts to make ourselves acceptable to God*
- To be baptized is to Confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord -- publicly acknowledging that we believe Jesus is God’s Son and our Savior -- *that we are trusting his sin-bearing death on the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins* -- and we are giving our full allegiance to Him as Lord
- *To receive the Holy Spirit is to have the Spirit of God living within us and to receive God’s confirmation that we are now His children and the recipients of eternal life*
- This is how we are saved – *but that is only the beginning of our living as follower of Jesus Christ*

III. WHERE IS JESUS HEADING?

- *Come, Follow Me*
- Follow you where? Where are you going?

Matthew 16:21 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.

- *Peter understood that Jesus was the Messiah – but he did not understand what kind of Messiah Jesus would be*
- This is why Jesus charged the disciples not to spread the word yet
- *And this is why Jesus began to teach his disciples the nature of his mission*
- 1st century Jews believed that the Messiah would be a kingly warrior – as triumphant as David and as wise as Solomon

- *The Messiah would overthrow all evil powers and deliver the Jewish people from their oppression by the Romans*
- It was absolutely unthinkable that the Messiah would suffer, be rejected by His own people, and become a victim of violence by the Roman oppressors
- *So Peter took Jesus aside in order to set Jesus straight*

Matthew 16:22-23 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." 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."

- Hmm... Maybe not Peter's best move ever
- *Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about being killed – and Jesus in turn rebuked Peter – strongly -- for being an unwitting mouthpiece for Satanic temptation to become a cross-less Christ*
- *Jesus would need to correct his disciples' understanding again and again to teach them how he would fulfill his role as Messiah:*

Jesus would accomplish His mission through suffering rather than through force

- *Jesus would accomplish His mission from a Roman Cross rather than from a war-horse or an earthly throne in Jerusalem*
- Jesus came to sacrifice his life as the Lamb of God to save us from our sins and from God's judgment by bearing our sin & guilt & shame on the Cross, and then giving us His righteousness with which to stand before a holy God
- *The shadow of the Cross hung over Jesus throughout much of his ministry*
- Here at Caesarea Philippi Jesus began to teach his disciples that he would be a suffering Messiah rather than a political or military Messiah
- *And then he began to teach them what it would mean for them to become disciples of such a Messiah*

IV. WHAT WILL IT COST TO FOLLOW JESUS?

- *Come, follow Me*
- Where?

- *To a Cross in Jerusalem*
- Whoever said it would be safe or comfortable or secure to follow Someone who is heading toward crucifixion?

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

- *What are the costs of following Jesus?*

1) Deny yourself and take up your cross

- The full meaning of “*deny yourself*” goes beyond just denying yourself chocolate during Lent
- *It even goes beyond renouncing certain sins in your life*
- The word “deny” here is the same word used of Peter’s denial of Jesus in the high priest’s courtyard
- *Peter denied three times that he even knew Jesus – in so doing Peter was renouncing his relationship with Jesus*
- *To deny self is to renounce living for Self – to dethrone Self*
- In order to be free to say YES to Jesus and his loving control, you must first say NO to the Lordship of Self
- To deny self is to stop calling “mine” what rightfully belongs to Jesus Christ by virtue of his buying us at the price of his own blood shed on the Cross
- My body is mine / my money is mine / my time is my own – NO – no longer
- *To deny self is to surrender control of our lives to the Lord Christ and to live our lives as though our bodies / hearts / possessions / and time all belonged to him*
- To deny self involves a radical re-orientation from a self-centered to a Christ-centered life
- Jesus linked “deny yourself” with “take up your cross” – and therefore the full meaning of “deny yourself” includes “die to self”
- The Cross is not a piece of jewelry – it was an execution stake

- *To take up your cross is to take hold of the very thing that will put you to death*
- *Deny yourself and take up your cross means: Prepare to die*
- *It means: You must die in order to live.*
- *As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "It is the dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death – we give over our lives to death. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."*
- *To take up your cross is to make a choice to follow Jesus and obey Him whatever the cost*
- *The Way of the Cross is a life of voluntary sacrifice governed by love – it involves letting go of something that is rightfully yours for the sake of others*
- *The Way of the Cross is the way of dying to a Self-ruled life in order to live the abundant life under Christ's rule*
- *We accept this call to follow Jesus to the Cross at our baptism – which signifies both a death and a new life -- both a burial of the old life under sin and a resurrection unto a new life under Christ's rule*
- *This denying self and taking up your cross may involve persecution but it may also mean something much less dramatic*
- *It may mean simply choosing to do the right thing – to be a man or woman of integrity – to choose right over wrong – again and again – day after day*
- *It may mean simply following through on commitments – serving faithfully week in and week out – even when you're tired – even when it's inconvenient – even when others are inconsistent or undependable*
- *Or it may mean getting serious about becoming a disciple who makes other disciples – and taking steps of action – even when it is uncomfortable – even when it seems intimidating or scary*
- *It may be as simple as choosing obedience to God's will over doing your own will*
- *And this life of obedience begins with baptism – even when it is hard or uncomfortable or even scary to give a testimony of faith in public*
- *We publicly identify ourselves with Jesus by being baptized in his name*

- We have a baptism and membership class coming up April 3 – sign up with Pastor Steffan or the church office

2) Attach yourself to Jesus

- *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and – What? – and follow me*
- This is the beginning and the essence of discipleship – *following Christ // attaching yourself to Christ // obeying Christ // giving full allegiance to Christ // remaining connected to the Person of Jesus Christ day by day and moment by moment*
- *True life is found in abiding in and living connected to Person of Jesus Christ*
- To follow Christ is not a matter of adding belief in Jesus Christ as Savior to our life and then continuing with life as always only now adding some church attendance and Bible study to it
- *To follow Christ is to embark upon a whole new life – new direction // new purpose // new priorities // new values // new habits // new practices // new worldview // new attitudes // new mindset // new behaviors*
- To experience the new – we must leave behind the old
- It is Jesus Himself – the risen and living Lord – who stands before you and calls you to follow Him
- It is quite simple: *Yes, Jesus, I will follow you – or No, Jesus, I will not*
- True life is found in answering the call of Jesus to follow Him
- *To become attached to Jesus – we must detach from the old attachments and loyalties and priorities*

3) Abandon the attachments of this world

Matthew 16:25-26 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 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 cannot live attached to Jesus and attached to the world at the same time*

- You must make a choice
- *When you pick up a cross, you must be prepared to lay down your life*
- The call of Jesus challenges us:
- Let others pursue material wealth and financial security – *you, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me – die to self so that you can have Life in Me*
- Let others seek recognition and status and power and popularity -- *you, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me – die to self so that you can have Life in Me*
- Let others focus on the pleasures of the moment rather than the lasting joys of the kingdom of heaven – *you, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me – die to self so that you can have Life in Me*
- Let others invest their best energies and spend all their money on the latest stuff and this world's bling – *you, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me – die to self so that you can have Life in Me*
- Let others give their lives to partying and sex and alcohol and Money and sports and entertainment and career advancement – *you, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me – die to self so that you can have Life in Me*
- Let others have religion as their hobby, and material success as their passion, and pleasure as their calling, and money as their god – *you, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me – die to self so that you can have Life in Me*
- Augustine: *“Sin arises when things that are a minor good are pursued as though they were goals in life. If money or affection or power are sought in disproportionate, obsessive ways, then sin occurs. And that sin is magnified when, for these lesser goals, we fail to pursue the highest good and the finest goals.”*
- Some of you may not be guilty of sexual immorality or drunkenness or violent crime
- *You may not be in the grip of any major sin*
- But you have been pursuing a minor good as though it were your goal in life
- *As Pastor Daniel said last week – discipleship is not merely about choosing right over wrong – discipleship is about choosing the pursuit of*

the Lord over lesser things that hinder or distract you from greater devotion to Christ

- And if for the sake of this lesser goal, you have failed to pursue the highest good in life – namely the Kingdom of God and the Cause of Christ – *that is sin*
 - And if you continue to sin in that way – pursuing a lesser good instead of the highest goal – in other words, pursuing anything other than Jesus Christ and His purpose for your life – you will end up wasting your life
 - *Those are hard words – but that is exactly what Jesus is saying here*
 - Either you commit your life to Him – or else you waste your life and forfeit your soul
-
- *Following Jesus in the Way of the Cross – denying Self and taking up your cross -- is the only Way to fullness of life*

V. WHAT WILL YOU GAIN BY LOSING ALL?

- When you give up something of lesser value in order to gain something far greater and far more valuable – *can you really call that a sacrifice?*
- *When you give up worldly success or material possessions or immoral relationships or athletic aspirations or false comforts or the short-term pleasures of sin in exchange for gaining Jesus Christ – can you really call that a sacrifice?*
- *What will you gain in exchange for surrendering your life to Jesus?*

JESUS

- *The greatest treasure gained by denying self, taking up your cross and following Jesus – is Jesus Himself*
- He is our Life // He is our Hope // He is our Peace // He is our Joy // He is our Wisdom // He is our Righteousness // He is our Comfort // He is our Rock // He is our Security // He is our Strong Deliverer // He is our Reason for Living // *He is the Living Water // He is the Bread of Life // He is the Light of the World // He is the Resurrection and the Life // He is the Shepherd and Physician of our Souls // He is the Truth // He is the Lover of our Souls above all other lovers*

- No one ever has or ever will love you as Jesus loves you – *There is no one else like Jesus*
- He is the Treasure that is worth losing everything else in life for – *He is the Treasure that is worth denying self and taking up your cross for* – He is the Treasure that is worth losing your life for
- LIFE
- Jesus says to us: 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.
- The Gospel of Jesus Christ is really a set of exchanges:
- Jesus says to us: *Give me your sin in exchange for My Righteousness*
- *Give me your guilt in exchange for My favor with the Father*
- *Give me your weakness in exchange for My strength and Power*
- Give me your flawed righteousness in exchange for my Perfect Righteousness
- *Give me your old life in exchange for a new life*
- *Give me your mortal life in a dying body in exchange for My eternal life in a resurrection body*
- So you have a choice to make: *Whose life do you want?*
- *Do you want to keep your own life – or do you want to exchange your life for the Resurrection Life of Jesus?*
- Resurrection life can be experienced only by the way of the Cross
- Jesus says: *If you live for yourself, you will lose True Life – if you give up your life for Me – you will find true life – True Life is found only in Me*
- You must make a choice – if you want true life – and eternal life – *then you must surrender your life to Jesus in order to gain Jesus and His Life*
- The path to an abundant life now and eternal life in the kingdom of heaven is by Way of the Cross – *denying self, taking up your cross, and following Jesus*

Prayer