

IF ANYONE WOULD COME AFTER ME

Matthew 16:24-28

Key Verse: 16:24

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"

As we studied in the last passage, Peter made a confession of faith, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus was indeed happy that Peter grew until he could see in Jesus that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter, meaning, "rock." Jesus promised that on the basis of his confession he would establish the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus thought it was the right time to predict his death and resurrection to his disciples. Then they revealed the real thought in their hearts. For example, Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, "Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you" (22). It is very interesting that Simon Peter made a confession of faith, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." But when Jesus talked about his real purpose of coming to this world, to save sinners from their sins through his sufferings, crucifixion and resurrection, Peter didn't like it because of his hidden human dreams, and he rebuked Jesus. So in today's passage, Jesus gives his disciples basic principles in order to follow him. May God bless us to accept these teachings of Jesus, which are the absolutes of God. May God grant you courageous faith to accept Jesus' teaching in this passage.

First, he must deny himself (24). Jesus' words to his disciples, "he must deny himself," were not acceptable to them, and of course, not even to us. These days many think that if one denies himself, he cannot exist. But without denying oneself nobody can be Jesus' disciple or one of Jesus' people. Why is it so? Let's think about it [step](#) by step.

In the first place, God made man as the steward of his world. The word "steward" is very difficult to explain in this individualistic society. But when we think about Joseph in Genesis, it is easy to understand the word "steward." Joseph was the youngest son of Jacob. He was born of Rachel, whom Jacob most loved all his life. Jacob served Laban for seven years to make Rachel his wife. But Laban cheated him. Laban sent his first daughter Leah to Jacob's honeymoon chamber the first night. After that Jacob made a new contract with Laban to work another seven years for Rachel. In order to get his first love, Rachel, Jacob served 14 years. But he confessed that it was like a few days because of his love for her. From Rachel Joseph was born. So Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons. Due to his brothers' jealousy, Joseph was sold to a Midianite caravan going to Egypt. Eventually he worked at General Potiphar's house. Joseph was so honest and faithful that General Potiphar entrusted to his hand everything he had. Genesis 39:6 says, "So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate." Another life of Joseph in Egypt was the life of a prisoner. Joseph was put in prison because Potiphar's wife lied. She wanted to seduce Joseph, but she told her husband that Joseph tried to rape her. So Joseph was put in prison. But he did not become fatalistic because of his situation. He worked hard. Then the prison warden entrusted to Joseph stewardship of the whole prison. He worked

hard as a prison steward. Later, by God's grace he interpreted the Egyptian King's dream, which the king himself did not understand. So Joseph became the Premier of the Egyptian Empire. During seven years of abundant harvest he stored grain for another seven years of famine. Through this event Joseph bought everything, including people's lives, and gave them all to King Pharaoh. In this way he became the example of a good steward.

In Genesis we learn that men are made as stewards of God's world. Genesis 1:28 says, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" This clearly tells us that God made man as a steward of God's world. Plainly speaking, man is free to work for the glory of God, and man is absolutely himself; he is an independent being.

Genesis 2:16,17 says, "And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'" This teaches us that God gave man absolute freedom to choose, according to his own will. Therefore man has an absolute existence. God has given this inalienable freedom of choice only to man. Therefore man must know that he lives in this world as one who has this absolute freedom of choice. On the basis of this truth, man should be noble. Man is supposed to be in charge of caring for God's world and his people. Men who care for God's world and his people transcend their own egoism.

But these days man has become ignorant. These days men want to live for their own glory and honor, and seek their own pleasure like the people of the Babel Tower. Time passed by. People abandoned God, even though they knew God. Still, they could not deny God. Romans 1:20 says, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." To abandon God means to suppress the truth. Simply speaking, it is like a child covering his eyes with his fingers and saying, "There is no sky." Romans 1:21 says, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." When a man abandons God, his scope of life is confined to an apartment room with a telephone, plus one television. This is exactly an illustration of how men's minds are darkened. Those whose minds are darkened cannot see God, and they cannot see the kingdom of God or enter the kingdom of God.

Therefore we must deny ourselves if we are to know the Christ, the Son of the living God. But these days many people abandon God and live according to their sinful feelings. They say, "Nobody can hinder my freedom." One young girl tasted heavenly joy through one-to-one Bible study. She was very confident that she would not commit sin anymore because she studied the Bible several times. So she decided not to drink or have an immoral relationship, even though she was going to a party. But she made a big mistake. She used her freedom of wrong choice, drank a double portion and enjoyed her physical desire at random. Here we learn that when we want to deny ourselves, we must use our freedom of choice prayerfully. These days due to a wrong concept of freedom, many enjoy their human freedom at random. During the last days of the Roman Empire people were immoral,

from top to bottom. Finally, aristocratic people wanted only Christian women as their daughters-in-law. Without denying one's sinful desire, we cannot follow Christ, the Son of the living God.

To deny oneself means to deny one's own idea and accept God's word as the absolute truth. Most modern people say they are Christians. Many people claim to know Matthew 6:33. It says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." They believe that if they seek God first and love God first, God will bless them abundantly. But in their practical life they trust their own wisdom; they try to make money and no more. They believe that if they love God, they and their children will be blessed. But in their practical lives they follow the way of the world. They are very poor toward God but rich toward themselves and their children. They are not those who deny themselves. They are old wineskin Christians who are totally useless. They are comparable to the Pharisees and Sadducees who were cursed by Jesus.

But there are also many beautiful stories of those who denied themselves and faithfully followed Jesus. There was one young man. When he was 19 years old, he fell in love with a pretty girl. He grieved over himself. He really wanted to be a great scholar and then a great man. But his romantic feeling overwhelmed him. He could not breathe properly when he thought about the girl. So he had to decide to yield to romance with her or to keep on studying and become a great man. He decided to be a good student and great man. He had to deny his romantic feeling. But it was not easy for him at all. So he went to an old book shop and read one book a day in a standing position. Each time, at the beginning of book reading, for about thirty minutes he could not see the letters of the first page. He only suffered from breathing difficulties and heart pain. But he kept on trying to read the book. And then after thirty minutes he broke out in a cold sweat. Then he could see the letters and begin to read. To deny his romantic feeling, he tried reading a book all day in a standing position, experiencing continuous breathing difficulty, heart pain and breaking out in a cold sweat. He did this for ten days. But it did not help him at all to overcome his romantic feeling. He kept on doing it for 29 days. Then God helped him to overcome romantic feeling. Since then he has never been bothered by any woman and he has never bothered any woman. When he denied his romantic feeling, he was qualified to follow Jesus. There are many things to deny. But past and present, to deny the sinful desire for woman is most essential.

To deny oneself is endless. Of second importance in self-denial is honesty. There was a tall and strong American young man. He was once a country postmaster in charge of one post office. At that time communication and transportation were very slow. So he could not send stamp money regularly to the main office. He had to accumulate it for quite a long time. Most postmasters of the times used the money before they could send it, and it didn't matter much. But this young man did not use even one cent. He sent all of the money as soon as transportation was available. Later the main office treasurer found that this young man's stamp money was three times more than other postmasters. So he was known to be an honest man. This honesty became the seed of being a great man. Later he became the leader of the United States of America. Sinful people live in this world cheating and being cheated. That seems to be their lives. But in order to be qualified to be followers of Jesus, we must

deny our sinful desire to be dishonest.

First and last of all Jesus is the best example of self-denial. He denied the glory and power of the kingdom of God and came down to this world and was born and laid in the manger of a stable. This denial of himself was full of grace and truth, and at the same time, it was the foundation of saving men from their sins. After his glorious resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ denied his lordship; it was in order to cook breakfast for his hungry disciples on the seashore. When he denied himself as King of kings, Lord of lords and the glorious Risen Christ, he cooked breakfast and fed his disciples. Their spiritual eyes were opened. Then they became very courageous Christian soldiers who did not know defeat, but only victory, one victory after another.

As the followers of Christ the Lord, how have you tried to deny yourself? You must write it down specifically, in detail. If you have not denied yourself at all, you must know that even though you are a Christian you are not following Jesus. Moreover, you are remaining in sin, cheating yourself.

Second, take up your cross daily (24). God made man with a specific mission to do while living in this world. So Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must take up his cross daily and follow me." "Cross" does not necessarily mean the wooden cross Jesus carried to Golgotha; "cross" is a specific mission. King David seems to be the best example of one who took up his cross daily and followed God. David was the youngest of the eight sons of Jesse. He had a daily cross. It was to feed his father's flock of sheep in the wilderness. Many of his elder brothers were drafted by King Saul to fight against the Philistines. So this youngest son took care of his father's flock of sheep. He never had an off day—he was there on rainy days, scorching days, and dusty, windy days. Whenever a lion attacked his father's sheep, he held its mane and neck, tore its mouth and killed it. When a mountain bear attacked his father's sheep, he struck it with his shepherd's staff. Shepherding his father's flock of sheep was his daily cross. He never neglected it. He gave his life to carry out his mission to shepherd his father's sheep. Soon his name became famous and spread widely. He became King Saul's musician and bodyguard. But King Saul was afraid of him. So he cast him out and soon chased him to catch him and kill him. One time David was very helpless and lonely at the cave of Adullam. He must have been crying for the first time in his life because of his unbearable distress. But what a surprise! Around 400 helpless people came to him for help, when he was helpless. He did not turn them down. He took care of them like his own sons and daughters. Later they became mighty generals in establishing the kingdom of David.

We thought about the story of David, who was too great for us to think about in taking up his cross and following God. Nevertheless we must know each person has his or her own cross to take up daily and follow Jesus. A letter came from a German woman. She studied poorly in high school. So she was not qualified to enter a university. She was categorized to enter a kind of technical college. She blames German Nazism, her parents and all her church members. But the real reason for this was that she did not take up her cross daily and follow him. In other words, she did not do her homework every day and hand it in to her teachers.

There is a woman doctor. Her husband is also a doctor. She didn't have to work as a doctor because her husband's business is prospering. So the woman doctor goes swimming and feeds sheep at the center. She doesn't have to cook because she hires women who cook and clean. So others envy her, saying that she is the happiest woman, and like a princess. But she says she is not really happy. She thinks her husband does not have vision to go to America as a medical missionary. He wants to make his clinic bigger and bigger and make more money, and he is happy only to take care of surrounding people. She has another problem. Her husband has a widowed mother. Whenever they have some problems, her husband always sides with his widowed mother.

Her real problem is that she does not take up her cross and follow Jesus. She is bright. She could easily become an American medical doctor. But her cross is to respect her husband, who has neither burning vision, nor a personal calling from God. The Bible says, "Wives, submit to your husbands" (Eph 5:22). So she must submit to her husband, denying herself and love her sorrowful mother-in-law, embracing her as her own mother. Before God, this might be a better life for her than coming to America as a medical missionary. Her cross is to respect her husband daily and embrace her widowed mother-in-law daily. This seems to be a small cross.

To UBF people, one-to-one Bible study, discipleship training and sending self-supporting missionaries to foreign countries are crosses. We are living in a generation of mass production. We are also living in a pleasure-seeking generation. If we study the Bible with a sheep one-to-one just one time and then forget about it, it is not a heavy cross; it is a joyful cross. But to teach students who have grown up reading textbooks which are all written on the basis of pragmatism, relativism and individualism is not easy. To fish those who want to study the Bible on the campus is not easy. Once Dr. Joseph Chung and Dr. John Lee were arrested and put in jail overnight for fishing on the campus at Loyola. Most sheep are happy to study the Bible, and they firmly decide to keep up one-to-one Bible study. But after watching the Bulls game on television, they become Bulls fans, completely forgetting about one-to-one Bible study with their shepherd. This happens to every shepherd almost every day.

But we are not dismayed because one-to-one Bible study is difficult and discipleship training is more difficult. For this we have a clear prayer topic: May God make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This sounds crazy; even a Bible teacher can think one-to-one Bible teaching is a crazy thing. But we must come back to our prayer topic. And we must come to God who gave this great mission to each of us in this generation. David served God's will in his own generation and died. His cross was to unite the nation of Israel by conquering all the neighboring countries. Our mission is to teach the Bible one-to-one to American students and make this country not a kingdom of Israel, but America, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Our mission is indeed great, greater than that of King David.

History is a good subject to study. If there were no history, our one-to-one Bible study and our prayer topic-may God make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation-is an absolutely crazy thing. But in light of history our one-to-one Bible study and prayer that God may make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation is indeed significant, and

history is going on through one-to-one Bible study and our prayer topic. Paul went to Rome. Peter went to Rome. They were very old. Paul was confined under house arrest. At best he could teach the Bible one-to-one to his prison guards and to old Jewish people who made appointments for one-to-one Bible study. Some came and some didn't come. But history proves that Peter and Paul conquered the Roman Empire.

Third, follow me. Here the words "follow me" do not mean "follow me to Dominicks," or go sightseeing at the Grand Canyon or Smokey Mountains. To follow me exactly means to learn of me. To follow me does not mean to go somewhere to have fun. To follow me means to learn Jesus' lifestyle.

What is Jesus' lifestyle? Jesus came to this world to obey God's world salvation purpose and plan. For this he healed the sick and preached the gospel. Now he is going to Jerusalem to suffer much, die and rise again on the third day so that he may open the way to God's house, the kingdom of God. Jesus was a most despised Jew. Jesus' ministry was not at all bigger than Dr. Billy Graham's worldwide evangelistic campaign. Jesus' ministry seems to have been mass evangelism. But it was based on one-to-one ministry. He healed the sick one by one. He taught the Bible to his disciples except during the time thronging people surrounded him. Most of all Jesus loved God and obeyed God unto death, death on a cross. Hebrews 5:8,9 says that even though he was the Son of God, through much suffering he learned obedience.

Fourth, he comes in his Father's glory and rewards us (25-30). We are too clever in saving our skin. So we don't want to lose anything. We are tightly earthbound and visibly worldly-minded. But Jesus says in verses 25-28 as follows: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 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 he has done. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Let's look at verse 25 one more time. It says, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." This verse is a general statement about man's life. It is paradoxical truth that one who wants to save himself with his own effort will lose his life, but whoever loses his life for the glory of God will find it.

Why is it so? Look at verse 26. It says, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world," including the former Soviet Union, "yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" In world history the powerful generals include Julius Caesar and Genghis Khan. Julius Caesar conquered the whole world of his time. One time he was in a battleship. He said, "Advance sail, the whole entire army in this battleship." But during the time of sailing the battleship, a storm arose and he first became dizzy. Next he got a splitting headache. Then he fainted because of the terrifying storm which tossed his fighting ship up and down in the stormy sea like a little toy boat in a swimming pool. From that time on he began to think about his own life very seriously. But he could not keep his life safe. He was stabbed to death by his most loyal general Brutus and was thrown down on the street. Julius Caesar

conquered the whole world. But when his life was forfeited nothing was worthwhile and nothing was useful to him. He needed his life to come back to life. But it was absolutely impossible. Genghis Khan once ruled Russia, part of China and minor Asian countries. They say that he drank too much after each victory and died of liver failure. Then, the once world power nation Mongolia again became as poor as before. Genghis Khan wanted world conquest. Actually he succeeded. But he could not save himself. He died in his selfish ambition.

But those who live for the glory of God will live forever and receive everlasting reward, eternal life. Verse 27 says, "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 he has done." This is the true way of saving one's life. Not only do we save our lives at the last days, but also we can save our lives even though we live in this hard world. Most people living in this hard world experience too much suffering and the power of death moment by moment. They are alive, but in reality they are walking dead. But those who cry many tears to live for the glory of God will taste eternal life before their death. Those who firmly decided to live for the glory of God experience the kingdom of God during their lifetimes in this world. For anybody, it is indeed everlasting victory to live for the glory of God.

Through today's passage we learned that in order to deeply understand Jesus' death and resurrection we must deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow him. This is not only the way to follow our Lord Jesus Christ; it is the way to receive eternal life and the most precious reward, the kingdom of God.