

Wanted: Crossbearers

Matt 16:24-17:1

24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

Intro: The first role of successful merchandising is to give consumers what they want. If they want bigger burgers, make their burgers bigger. Designer bottle water in six fruit flavors? Done. You got it! Minivans with DVD players & TV's, headphone hookups and 10 personal cupholders? You want 10, make it 20. The rage of the age is KEEP THE CUSTOMER SATISFIED. You've got to modify your product and your message to meet their needs if you want to build a market and get ahead of the competition.

Today this same consumer mindset has invaded Christianity. The church service is too long, you say? We'll shorten it (one pastor guarantees his sermons will never last more than seven minutes!). Dress code too formal? Wear your sweatsuit. Too boring? Wait till you hear our rockin' church band!

And if the message is too confrontational, or too judgemental, or too exclusive, scary, unbelievable, hard to understand, or too much anything else for your taste, churches everywhere are eager to adjust that message to make you feel more comfortable. This new version of Christianity makes you a partner on the team, a design consultant on church life, and does away with old-fashioned authority, accountability, and moral absolutes.

One in our area sent out a mailer card recently, promising an "informal, relaxed, casual atmosphere," "great music from our church band", and that those who will come will "believe it or not, even have fun." I say that's great if you're a coffeehouse!

And living for Jesus Christ is indeed and life of a joy beyond the world's comprehension. But anyone who claims to be calling people to the gospel of Jesus Christ with those as the priorities of their experience is calling them to a lie! Because living for Jesus Christ is more than just another "good time." It's a lie to the world to say that they will never have to fight or battle or that they will always hear a good song from the band, and that the Pastor of that particular church is always going to preach to them just what they are wanting to hear.

TASTES GREAT...LESS FILLING

This modern day outlook on church growth today is flawed. It's Christianity for consumers: or CHRISTIANITY LITE, the redirection, watering down, and misinterpretation of the biblical gospel in attempt to make it more softer and popular.

It tastes great going down and it settles light. It seems to salve your feelings and scratch your itch; it's custom tailored to your preferences. But that lightness will never fill you up with the true saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's hollow and worthless. In fact it's worse than worthless, because people who hear the message of CHRISTIANITY LITE think that they're hearing the gospel- they think that they are being rescued from judgment-when, in fact, they're being tragically misled.

THE FALSE GOSPEL OF SELF-ESTEEM

The true gospel is a call to self denial. It is no a call to self fulfillment. This message of self-denial puts you in opposition to the modern age CHRISTIANITY LITE movement, where saints and popular TV preachers view Jesus as some kind of spiritual Genie. You rub the lamp, and He jumps out, and says you have whatever you want; you give Him your list and He delivers. Some within the framework of this new movement will tell you that your salvation through Christ is a guarantee of health, wealth, prosperity, and happiness.

It's interesting how this kind of thinking is invading the church pulpits of America. Jesus wants you to be a better salesman, Jesus wants you to be a better housekeeper, Jesus wants you to hit more homeruns than anyone else in baseball.

All Jesus really ever wanted is to make you feel better about yourself.

Religious personality Robert Schuller wrote a book not to long ago called *Self Esteem: The New Reformation*. In it Schuller writes that the first thing we have to do is put an end to classical God-centered theology and replace it with man-centered theology.

To define man centered theology, he wrote further, "This master plan of God is designed around the deepest needs of human beings-Self dignity, self-respect, self worth, self-esteem." In this new reformation of self-esteem the motivation is to pull God down from his elevated place, so that you lift yourself up. I ask you church....How twisted is that? How contrary to the truth is that? Christianity left in the hands of these sham seeker sensitive personalities, has become a "GET WHAT YOU WANT", rather than a "I SURRENDER ALL FOR CHRIST" movement.

Church please remember that Paul warned us that this day would come.

2 Tim 3:1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves,

5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

THE "REAL" GOSPEL

The real gospel according to the words of Jesus are certainly different than the CHRISTIANITY LITE approach that I have been preaching about. Let me read to you what Jesus said it was going to take to serve him again....

Matt 16:24-25

24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

It's not about exalting me it's about *slaying me*. It's the death of self. You win by losing, and you live by dying. Dying to self. And that brother and sisters is the heart message of the gospel. That is the essence of discipleship. Simply put: **CROSSBEARERS**.

Notice that this scripture mentions nothing about improving your self-esteem, being rich and successful, feeling good about yourself, or having all your needs met when you want them.

So who's right? Is CHRISTIANITY LITE right with all its self-esteem theology, or is it the message of self denial? It can't be both folks. It's just a matter of opinion, or it's just Bro. Wimberley's opinion, or even the most popular approach to rejecting the truth today...."You believe what you believe, and I'll believe what I believe and will both be OKAY in the end."

Church the genuine message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not a matter of opinion. It is a matter of truth. What you want, or what I want, or anybody else wants, makes no difference whatsoever. **IT'S ALL ABOUT WHAT JESUS WANTS!! AND HIS WORDS ARE UNCHANGING!! MATTHEW 16: 24-25 is WHAT HE WANTS.....WANTED: CROSSBEARERS.**

It's pretty simple. Anyone who wants to come after Jesus into the kingdom of God-anyone who wants to be a Christian-has to face three commands:

1) Deny himself or herself. 2) Take up your cross daily, 3) Follow Jesus.

These words are not consumer friendly or seeker sensitive. CHRISTIANITY LITE is not found here. But these are the same principles that Jesus taught consistently and repeatedly throughout His ministry, over and over again.

COUNTING THE COST

The original Greek word for *deny* means, "to refuse to associate with." The thought is that if you want to be a Christian, and receive forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, you must refuse to associate any longer with the person you are!! In essence, you are sick of your sinful self and want nothing to do with your anymore. And it may mean not just you, but people that you have relationships with.

In Matthew 10:32, Jesus talked about confessing Him as Lord and Savior...

Matt 10:32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

It's not a friendly invitation; it's a warning: If you come to Christ, it may make your family worse, not better. It may send a rift into your family, the likes of which you have never experienced before. If you give your life to Jesus Christ and receive the power of His spirit, there will be a gulf between you and people who don't give their lives to Him.

Verse 37 adds... **Matt 10:37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.**

If your not willing to pay the price of a permanent split in your family unless your loved ones come to Christ....If your not willing to pay the price of greater trauma, greater conflict, greater suffering in your family...then your not worthy to be Jesus' disciple.

Verse 38 adds... **Matt 10:38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.**

Wait a minute. In Jesus time, people associated a cross with one thing alone: a cross was an instrument of death. He was saying that if you're not willing to have conflict with the world to the degree that it could cost you your life, then you're not worthy of Him.

Verse 39 adds further... **Matt 10:39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.**

It's all about losing yourself to gain a better life in Jesus Christ. It's not a man-centered theology, it's a Christ-centered theology that says, "I give everything to Christ, no matter what it costs me, even if it costs me my life."

WANNABE DISCIPLES WHO DIDN'T WANT TO BE CROSSBEARERS

This self-denial, "CROSSBEARING" message, was preached by our Lord in many different ways. He said it in the familiar story of the rich young ruler. In Mark 10:17....

Mark 10:17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.

19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.

20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.

21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

The young synagogue leader ran up to Jesus, knelt before Him, and asked what it took to inherit eternal life...What a setup for personal evangelism. Jesus could have said..."Pray this prayer" "Repeat after me" or "Make a decision to accept me!". Jesus didn't do that. Instead he confronted the young man with the reality of sin to reveal whether or not he was convicted and repentant over his iniquities. Jesus then offered several of the Ten Commandments as examples of the law that the young man had broken. Yet rejecting any thought of sinfulness and repentance, the young man immediately bragged about having obeyed the Ten Commandments all his life. This we know to be a lie.....All have sinned and come short of

the glory of God! But he thought he was a perfect candidate for eternal life!! But the response he got was not what he expected!!! Jesus exposed him as a lover of money, and the price for eternal life was to surrender is all to the Lord, and give up what he loved the most!!

The young man did none of that...He didn't admit his sin or deny himself...Instead the scripture says...**22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.**

He decided he would rather hold onto his possessions and not repent, and deny himself of his love for money, than have Jesus....God did not shut the door.....The young man did.

Church if we are not willing to, if it comes down to it, separate from family, separate from the material things we possess, then Jesus really isn't that valuable to us.

It's an all or nothing proposition.

There is yet another example in Luke 9:57, where Jesus was walking down the road with some of his followers, and one of them promised, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus didn't say, "Hey, that's great man, Were all going down to the Del Lago resort for golf, swimming, and caviar." What he said was this...

Luke 9:58 And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

Jesus was telling this man.....I don't own a home, a bed, or a pillow, if you follow me...it will cost you whatever you have. Don't expect comfort on easy street. In fact it might even cost you your life, as it did so many martyrs before us....

John 12:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

In other words, Jesus says, "if your going to be fruitful in following me, it's going to cost you your life. Your going to have to die."

25 He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

The path that Jesus was going down was the path to persecution and death. So you want to follow Jesus, do you? It will cost you everything.

The Lord might not take your life. He might not take all your money. He might not take your family or your spouse, or your job. But you need and must be willing to give it all up, it that's what he asks.

THE NARROW WAY

In Matthew 7:13 during the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus admonished His followers...

Matt 7:13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

The connotation of "narrow" here is *constricted*. It's a very, very tight squeeze. We can't carry self baggage through this gate. We come through it with nothing.

A wide religious gate also exists, and I am saddened to think so many preachers, as so many churches, are leading people through it. They're saying, "You don't have to do all that hard stuff to get into heaven" People are breezing through those wide, comfortable, inviting CHRISTIANITY LITE gates with all their baggage, their self needs, their self esteem, and their desire for fulfillment and self satisfaction. And what makes me weep, is that they are fooled into thinking that they are going to go to heaven that way.

That gospel is a false gospel. That easy access gate doesn't go to heaven friend. It says' "heaven" but it ends up in HELL.

Remember.... **narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.**

It's a hard thing to find this narrow gate in some churches today. Why is that you say? Why is the narrow gate so hard to get through? Because churches have left from preaching the true gospel, and when people do hear the real gospel, it's even harder to submit to it. Why? Because man worships himself. He is his own god. To say that he has to deny himself and slay his desires is simply too much to swallow. Preach a gospel that doesn't include denying yourself, bearing a cross and following Jesus no matter what the cost, and people will flock to this church....because that is what they want.

CONCLUSION – BAIT & SWITCH

In closing tonight, now comes the issue that's behind all the Christian pop, self congratulation and "fun" that the seeker-sensitive churches promise: They say....."People aren't going to buy a message if its that hard. If it doesn't meet their needs, they won't be interested. If they want six fruity flavors and you only got two, you've lost them. They need a Christian experience that tastes great, and if it happens to be less filling in the short run, well, we'll explain all the hard stuff later.

There's a name for that in the marketing world...it's called Bait & Switch. You advertise an item for a rock bottom price, but when the consumer gets to the store, that particular model is unavailable. Then you get...."There's a more expensive one here however, that's almost just like it." Or, "I know it's not what we promised you, but what we promised never really existed...the whole ad was a sham."

Now what happens to that soul when they take that "bait." They are conned.....They think, "This Christian thing is not hard at all." Meet nice people, hear and inspiring message, and some cool music, get to heaven." I dig it. But at some point the truth comes out. The hard words of Jesus come out, and then there mad because they were sold a lie....

Tonight I do not sell you a lie.....I present to you the message that will forever change your life. It is not a self-exalting message it is a self-denying message. It is a message that will divide the real from the sham. The true from the false. The soldiers from the garment scavengers..... Do you want to follow Christ? Do you want to inherit eternal life?? He it is again....

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.
25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.
26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?