

The Commitment – Matthew 16:24-26

Introduction: Last week, we began our series by listening to Jesus' simple yet life-altering invitation: *"Follow Me."* We saw Him step toward ordinary people, those plain ole fishermen, with extraordinary authority and grace. In that moment, He initiated the call, invited them into a relationship, and gave them a purpose that reshaped not only their identities, but their entire lives. We learned that discipleship has very little to do with our résumé but absolutely has everything to do with our pursuit of Him. It begins with surrender, continues with formation, and moves us outward and into missions.

But as we follow Jesus through the Gospel of Matthew, we discover something important: recognizing and answering the call to follow is just the beginning. It's an extremely important part of the process, but it's just the starting point for who we become in Christ. Jesus doesn't just invite us to walk behind Him; He invites us to be transformed by Him. And it's that transformation process that leads to deeper commitment. In chapter 4, Jesus calls disciples to follow. But by the time we arrive at chapter 16, He reveals what following Him truly requires. The One who called is now explaining the cost of that call.

This week, we step into one of the most defining teachings on discipleship in all of Scripture. In Matthew 16:21–28, Jesus lays out three essential components of genuine commitment for every disciple. Let's Read these verses together. **Read Matthew 16:21-28.**

- I. Self-denial — letting go of the self-centered life we naturally cling to.
- II. Taking up one's cross — embracing the death of the old life and the willingness to follow Christ wherever He leads.
- III. Living for His Kingdom — reorienting our priorities, values, and purpose around what is eternal rather than what is temporal.

If last week showed us the invitation of discipleship, this week shows us the expectation of discipleship. Last week revealed the grace behind the call, this week revealed the commitment required of the call. Jesus is not looking for casual followers. He is looking for deeply committed followers that He is forming into cross-bearing disciples whose lives are constantly being shaped by His kingdom.

So today, we move from hearing Jesus' invitation to understanding His terms. We move from stepping into a relationship to growing up into discipleship. We move from following Jesus with our feet to following Jesus with our whole lives. This is where discipleship becomes costly – and where it becomes beautiful.

Self-Denial

Jesus begins His call to discipleship with the words, *"If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself."* Self-denial is not self-hatred; it is intentionally refusing to let the old self rule the

new self. In our decisions, our desires, and our direction in life. Self-denial means loosening our grip on the priorities, comforts, and identities that once defined who we are and allowing Christ to reshape all those things from the inside out. Paul echoes this truth in **Galatians 5:16-24**. I love the words of verse 24 here because it is reminding believers that *“those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”* Self-denial is the daily choice to say “no” to the self-centered life so we can say “yes” to the Christ-centered one.

Taking Up One’s Cross

When Jesus tells His disciples to *“take up their cross,”* He is not speaking of minor inconveniences or personal burdens. He is calling them to embrace a life shaped by His own path; a willingness to die to the old life, to endure hardship for His sake, and to follow Him wherever He leads. The cross is not an accessory; it is an instrument of death that became a symbol of new life. This theme is reinforced in **Luke 14:27**, where Jesus says, *“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”* Taking up the cross means willingly embracing a life of self-denial, obedience, and sacrificial devotion to Christ, even when it costs you everything.

Living For His Kingdom

Jesus concludes His teaching by contrasting the temporary gains of this world with the eternal value of His kingdom. *“What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”* Discipleship requires a reorientation of life; a shifting of our ambitions, priorities, and pursuits away from earthly gain and toward the eternal purposes of Christ. Living for His kingdom means evaluating everything through the lens of eternity. Even the best things this world can offer are temporary. Jesus reinforces this kingdom-first mindset in **Matthew 6:25-34**. As disciples, we are to *“seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”* When His kingdom becomes our priority, His values shape our choices, His mission shapes our purpose, and His glory shapes our lives.

Conclusion: As we consider the things we’ve looked at today, we are confronted with a decision every disciple must make. The call to follow Him is simple and it’s beautiful, but it also comes with a cost. Jesus does not hide that cost from us. Instead, He reveals it so we can embrace it. So we can understand it. So we can appreciate its value. So here is the challenge, I believe from today’s message: **Where is Jesus calling you to deny yourself? What cross is He asking you to take up? What part of your life needs to be reoriented around His kingdom rather than your own?** These are not theoretical questions; they are very real and serve as invitations for transformation. The same Savior, the same Jesus who called fishermen from their nets now calls you from whatever it is that competes for your loyalty. And the same Savior, the same Jesus who walked His own road to the cross is willing to walk with you as you carry yours.

But hear this clearly: Jesus’ call is not merely a burden but is an invitation into new life. He says, *“Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”* The life you long for; peace, purpose, joy,

identity, all of it is found on the other side of surrender. Today, I want to invite you to take a step. A real step. I want to invite you to commit to Jesus. Maybe it's releasing a habit, confessing a sin, loosening your grip on comfort, or choosing obedience in a place you've resisted. Maybe it's simply saying, Lord, I want Your kingdom and not my own to shape my life. Only you know what step you need to take. Whatever that step is, take it. Jesus is calling. The question is not whether He is speaking but whether you will respond. And remember my favorite word from last week. Immediately!

During this time of invitation, I invite you to pray a simple but courageous prayer of committal. As the song plays and the Holy spirit moves in your heart, simply pray something like this:

“Lord Jesus, I will follow You, whatever the cost, wherever You lead, whatever You ask.”

But don't say it if it's not real. Only say it, if you truly mean it. This simple prayer of committal is the doorway into true discipleship. It is the beginning of transformation. And it leads to the path to His kingdom. May we be a people who not only hear His call, but who answer it with surrendered, cross-bearing, kingdom-seeking lives.