

Matthew 21-05-23b

Thank you, Dan and Anna and Lori for that great reminder. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.

That's how to be an overcomer and how to overcome the influence that we talked about in our first session this morning, as far as the place we've assigned to God in our thinking. As we pick up our study now in Matthew chapter 16, verse 24, Jesus, having made that point through the rebuke of the disciple Peter, and we all have a great affinity and sympathy for Peter. We talked on the break about the fact that at least he spoke up.

He was listening to the Lord enough to process the information. The rest of the disciples, it just seems to have gone right past them or they didn't care enough about it to talk about it or ask a question about it or anything. And Peter at least spoke up.

So better to perhaps be guilty of a sin of commission than one of omission and having some initiative instead of being passive. There are some who would favor that approach. I think it's, I don't think you're saved by it being a sin of commission.

I think the idea is don't sin, not, well, but it was a good sin. It was a better sin than that sin over there. We want to get our minds onto the things of God and keep them there.

So Jesus says to his disciples in verse 24, if anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Now you can see that this is a perfect expression of the truths we have just been reviewing earlier this morning. If we try to fur line our lives, line them with the soft plush inner lining, if we try to make our life the most that it can be, because that's our goal, I want to be comfortable. I want to be secure.

I want to have things that I want. I want to enjoy various facets of life. Then we're trying to save our life.

We're trying to deliver it. We're trying to optimize it. You could put the word optimize.

The one who tries to optimize his life for its own sake. This is self gratification. This is self on the throne.

This is the great unholy Trinity of me, myself, and I. And Jesus says, if you want to come after him, if you want to follow after him, and what is the result of following someone? The Marine Corps is big on don't be a follower, be a leader if you're set up to be a leader, but what is the result of following? Well, wherever the leader goes, that's where you end up, right? If someone goes into the fire and you follow them into fire, you're in the fire as well. So when Jesus says, if anyone desires to come after me, to follow him is to arrive at

his destination. What is the destination of the Lord Jesus? If you've been listening to what he says, it is ultimately glory, the future, the presence of the father, the kingdom of the father, but to follow that path is to take the full journey, right? And the path isn't a nice, soft elevator ride to glory.

The path runs through the valley of the shadow. So if anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself. Denying self is to put our minds on the things of God.

We say, well, this sounds like a tragically painful way to go. But if you look at the record of the four gospels and the life of the Lord Jesus with the disciples on this earth, how would you characterize the life that the Lord Jesus led? Was it enjoyable in the sense of living in the countryside, going out on the lake, eating fresh fried fish, meeting wonderful people who love God and love the things of God, talking to people who are hungry for that word, who ask good questions, who have faith that can be recognized and rewarded. How much of the earthly life and ministry of the Lord Jesus from the time he was 30 years old and upward, just look at that, that's what we have a record of.

I suspect his home life in Galilee and in Nazareth was also very enjoyable and very fruitful, wonderful preparation for his time of ministry and service. But how many times was the Lord Jesus hailed into prison and beaten black and blue and tortured and put into miserable circumstances during his earthly ministry? Just once, ask yourself about the Apostle Paul. Would you want to be the Apostle Paul? Was his experience overall worthwhile or not? He got arrested multiple times.

He got the 40 stripes save one on three different occasions. He was kept in dungeons. He was stoned and left for dead in Lystra.

But would you be willing to exchange places with the Apostle Paul who had the privilege of communion with God in such a direct fashion that he was aware of heavenly truths that a man is not allowed to talk about? He was taught by the Lord Jesus just like the other disciples and was able to pass along that information to others to have his son in the faith, Timothy and Titus and Luke and other companions that he traveled with that supported him, people who welcomed him along the way. You read the roster of his friends and coworkers in the gospel in the last chapter of Romans. Do you think Paul had a happy life? Do you think if Paul had it to do all over again, he would still do it? There were some hardships and there were some tough times, but those are really a fractional minority of the total time and the blessing and the opportunity and the reward for service and fellowship, right? So the question is, because here's what's on the line.

We've all seen together Jesus emphasize that we should live a life where our minds are on the things of God and not on self-gratification and the things of men. We know this to be true. So now we're at a decision point.

Well, am I going to do this? Am I going to seriously pursue implementing what Jesus is

talking about in this next verse? Am I going to deny myself? You can put it in the first person. If Jesus is talking to me here, fill in your name here. Jesus said to fill in your name.

Jesus said to Samuel, Samuel, if you Samuel desire to come after me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. Well, I'm at a decision point. Am I going to, am I willing? I think, well, this cross is a pretty sobering thing.

This is before Jesus was crucified. So what is the connotation when he says take up the cross? What do the disciples think of when Jesus says, if anyone's going to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross. What does it mean to take up your cross? Jesus was not the first or the last person to be marched through the streets, carrying the implement of his own execution.

This was commonplace. It wasn't unusual. It wasn't out of the ordinary.

Everybody knew what was coming when they saw Jesus at the early part of the journey, carrying this cross through the streets. And ultimately he has lost so much blood and is so beat up that he cannot complete that journey. And Simon of Cyrene is going to carry the cross the rest of the way to Golgotha, right? But somebody carries the cross because the Romans are sending a message.

Why didn't they just put lumber in a wagon and take it to the place of execution, construct the crosses, nail the people to them and put them in a hole? Why this parade? Why did people take up their cross, forced to march through the streets, carrying it on their whipped shoulders by the Romans? What was the goal of that? Intimidation, public intimidation, public humiliation, public shaming. And the threat that if you do not comport yourself, if you do not conform, if you don't do everything that Rome wants you to do, you're going to be this guy in the near future. And it'll be you dragging this cross through the streets to the place of your execution.

So do what we say, right? Do what we say, or this is your consequence. What does Jesus say? You've got to be willing to suffer that public shaming, that public humiliation, that rejection, that spitting, that catcalling, that insulting, that cancel culture that says, I don't know him. I always thought he was a rascal.

I always thought he was a bad guy. Jesus says, you've got to look that in the eye and say, I am willing to let the world reject me and shame me. Taking up the cross is the parade of shame perpetrated by the enemy.

We talked in the first session about you cannot escape the evil of the enemy. What does God do with the evil in this world? He works it together for good. The betrayal of Jesus by Judas is shameful and evil, but God works it together for the fulfillment of his plan.

A lot of the things that happen to us are shameful and evil, but if we have our minds on

the things of God, God will work them together for our good and his glory. His good will be manifest in us and through us, just as it was with the Lord Jesus. But this is not just an invitation to suffering.

This is a recognition that if you keep your mind on the things of God, the public is going to end up berating you and rejecting you and shaming you and insulting you and saying all kinds of bad things about you. There will also be those in the crowd who know the person and know that it was an unjust charge, that it was based on the lies of false witnesses, that the conviction is unfair and incorrect and will be weeping as they see their family member going by. You think about recent times where, you know, an oppressing army and oppressing force and oppressing country invades and takes any of those who are found in the resistance and parades them through the streets and publicly executes them.

And there are many people who are weeping in the crowd. It doesn't, the weeping doesn't stop the execution. It doesn't stop the parade of shame, but you've got two different reactions.

You've got people saying, well, see, this is why you got to go along to get along. Look at him. He was stupid.

He continued to stand on principle instead of being pragmatic and practical and realizing, hey, these are the new bosses, so let's go along with them. We have this very same decision to make today now, don't we? There are people taking charge of society, culture, government, and everything else and saying, you better go along to get along or we're going to shame you, humiliate you, and we're going to make you pay and you're going to suffer. We'll make you lose your job.

We'll write letters. We'll shame you and make an example out of you and intimidate and humiliate others to get our way and maintain our power. That's exactly what is going on today.

This is exactly what Jesus is talking about right here, right now. If you want to follow the Lord Jesus and arrive at the Philippians 2 conclusion, remember that? Humble himself, took on the form of a servant, came in the likeness of men, being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient even unto death, the shameful death of the cross. For this reason, God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow.

The humiliation and the shame and the suffering are temporary. Even in the earthly life of the Lord Jesus, this is a fraction of the time he spent on this earth. This is one day out of 33 years, right? But for that one day, there is an eternity of glory.

As Paul puts it in Romans, our momentary light affliction is working for us an eternal

weight of glory. So when Jesus says, let him deny himself and take up his cross, let you, Sam, deny yourself and take up your cross. This is not going to be a life of grinding suffering and endless pain and, well, you'll earn your place with the Lord Jesus by the sweat of your brow and by the blood coming out of the many wounds that are inflicted on you.

It is a momentary light affliction. This is not hard. And another place in scripture says, you know, you people that are hesitating, you have not suffered.

You've not come to the point of blood. Nobody's bleeding here. You have not resisted to the point of blood.

So what does it mean? Deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Keep your mind on the things of God. Now, this is a challenge.

It's hard to do in this environment. And how do we do it? We look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, the joy that was set before him, how did he do it? How did he keep his mind on the things of God? He didn't look at the immediate short term and say, well, this cup is too bitter for me to drink. I'm just not going to drink it.

He recognized the cup, but he looked beyond the cup for the joy that was set before him. He endured the cross and he despised the shame. What does it mean to despise the shame? The cross parade through the streets of town prior to execution.

If you despise a thing, it means you don't assign it any weight. It's difficult, but you can actually train yourself to disregard the opinions of people you don't respect. We don't like to be ill thought of by anybody.

We don't like to be criticized by anybody or have our motives misconstrued and impugned by anybody. Even people who don't know anything and don't stand for anything and don't believe in anything, it hurts to have anyone's bad opinion. We, if we keep our minds on the things of God, we will say, consider the source.

I am not going to assign weight to someone who obviously has poor judgment. Why should I assign weight to their opinion when I know their judgment is faulty? I have to train myself to disregard the opinions of people who don't think right, but emotionally, and it is an emotion, it hurts our feelings to be ill thought of, even when it's unjust. Jesus learned obedience by the things that he suffered.

And one of the things that he learned was to despise the shame, to disregard the shame. The shame, the ill treatment, the lies, the false charges come from people who don't know anything and aren't headed anywhere and aren't going to be anywhere in glory. How could Jesus undergo that? He knew his father had this as a part of his will and his plan and his purpose.

The joy that was set before him, the joy is the approval of his father. This is my beloved son in whom I am well-pleased. That's coming up, first of the next chapter in the transfiguration, right? This is my beloved son in whom I am well-pleased.

That's the joy. You want to be a friend of the world and an enemy of God, or do you want to be friend of God and have the world hold you as an enemy? Well, the world is not going to last very long. Momentary light affliction, eternal weight of glory.

Think about that heavy and light. Light affliction, heavy glory. Minuscule affliction, substantial glory.

Momentary affliction, eternal glory. Our momentary light affliction is working for us. If we look at it that way, we can bear it.

We can carry our cross. Do you want to arrive where the Lord Jesus is? I sure do. Do you want to dwell in the interior confines? And it's really not confining of the new Jerusalem.

Do you want to dwell in that city? Have a river view? Wouldn't it be great to have a balcony on your future home that looks out over the river of life and the trees blooming with the fruit of the tree of life each in its season? How many people love a balcony view with water? I was just tuning a piano for some people who have a very humble, it's kind of a, it's not even a barn though, it's more of a barn. It reminds me of where I lived for a time because we had a big family in a small place. And I loved it.

I loved being in the barn, but it was, better homes and gardens isn't going to come out there and take pictures and say, look what you can do here. You know, it's functional, but it's not necessarily pretty. Well, these folks live in a converted shed with a concrete floor, not rugs or anything, just concrete floor.

But they both had lost their spouses. And as older people had married, knew each other when they were kids and then married different people, had lives, lost their spouses, came back together in their late years. And they are having as much fun as any two people I've ever seen, living in this little primitive place, but it sits on a bluff and overlooks the lake.

And, you know, when I said, so how do you like this little patch of property here? And they looked at each other and had that twinkle in their eyes. And momentary light affliction is worth it when you have these larger and greater things in view and to appreciate. So what do you want in the future? Do you want to arrive where Jesus is in the new Jerusalem with a river view, with those you love, who will be there because they were faithful and obedient and didn't get too invested in this life? Well, for the joy that was set before him, the Lord Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame.

And where is he now? His favorite spot, right next to his father. Favorite spot. Deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

Following is a process. It's not a status. When you follow someone, it's because they're moving.

They're stepping down the road, left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot. And you've got to do left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot. There is progress.

There is movement there. This is, and I hate to say it, but it is a journey. It is a trip.

There's an origination. There is a destination and there is movement. There is progress.

It's not always the same. JKS used to sing a song. A lot of gospel singers did.

The God who is God on the mountain is also God in the valley. And there are times when you're having a mountaintop experience. Other times when you're in the valley of the shadow, but God is the same God.

The destination is the same, regardless of which part of that path we are on. And there are brief parts of the path that may involve a fair amount of discouragement and even suffering. But look at it from an eternal perspective.

It is a momentary, even if it lasts for years here, it's a momentary light affliction compared to eternal glory. Follow me. It's a process.

It is an ongoing investment of time. Why? Whoever desires to save his life. This is self-centeredness.

Four guys in combat, jump down into a recently held piece of enemy territory and they're cleaning out the last of the opposition. And one of these guys throws a grenade. Four guys there.

One guy jumps onto the grenade. Why? It's going to kill him almost certainly. Why would someone do that? It is a selfless act that is sacrificial to self and beneficial to others.

Better that one of us die than all of us die. Why? Quick thinking. Benefit of others.

Whoever desires to save his life, you could jump the other direction, jump behind something and let the other guys perish. But if you save your life, you will lose it. Can you imagine how someone would feel who did that? Who in a moment of cowardice, jumped into the safety of a cleft and let the other guys die? What's the rest of your life going to be like? What's eternity going to be like knowing that in the time of opportunity and in the time of our calling and in the time of our equipping and in the time of our knowledge and provision, we wanted to preserve ourselves.

Well, I've got a few things I need to order from Amazon. Whoever desires to save his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

And it is the very point at which we no longer value ourselves and our lives and our circumstances and our gratification most. At the point that we truly put God first and love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength, all of our mind, that's when we find our life. Our life is given to us, it overtakes us, it surrounds us, it is blessed and energized and given that divine light and that divine glory that only comes from God that we can't generate for ourselves.

What profit is to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Can you think of somebody who actually had this choice? Can you think of anyone who actually had the opportunity to gain the whole world? We're nearing the end of Jesus' ministry. What happened right at the beginning, right after the baptism when he was in the wilderness? Satan shows him all the kingdoms of the world and says, I will give this to you. All you have to do is lose your soul.

Jesus knows what he's talking about here. What does it profit? How did Jesus survive that temptation? Look, you can be king of the world. Just take your mind off the things of God and put them on the things of men.

The world is composed of men. This is not the world of angels. This is not the new Jerusalem.

This is not the kingdom of the father. This is the earth. Showed him all the kingdoms of the earth.

You want to be king on earth or do you want to be the lamb in heaven? Earth or heaven, short-term or long-term? Having your soul, losing your soul. Having your life, losing your life. Jesus, by losing his life, is going to gain his life and gain so much more in fulfilling the plan of the father.

He is our example. This is the kind of thinking we need to train ourselves in and to the extent that we've entered into it, to encourage it and grow it and extend it into every area of our life. Some of us have got kind of the main idea going in our lives.

We're mindful of God through the day, but are we a mature man? Mature in Greek is the word perfect. Are we perfect or are there some areas? Well, I'm 70%. I'm 70% invested.

I'm not all in. There's still 30% of me that's got this self-gratification thing going. All in.

Jesus was all in. If he hadn't been, we wouldn't be saved and he wouldn't be alive. God would not have resurrected him except that he was all in.

He lost his life, gave his life, and in laying his life down, he is able to take it up again because God the father gave it to him as a reward for his perfect obedience. That's our goal. Gain the whole world, lose his own soul.

What will a man give in exchange for his soul? Take everything you ever got shipped and delivered and hand it to God and say, you can have it all back, all of my money, all of my purchases, all of my possessions. Let me put this all in a big stack. Will you just let me enter into future glory, future opportunity? Let me live in or even near the new Jerusalem.

Let me just... Here, you can have it all back. What will a man give in exchange for his soul? There is nothing tangible that we can offer. What do we have that we did not receive? There's nothing we can give.

The son of man will come in the glory of his father with his angels. In case there's any doubt that we're talking about future kingdom, future glory, Jesus spells it out. It doesn't get any clearer than this.

The son of man will come in the glory of his father with his angels. And then he will reward each according to his works. This is not salvation call.

This is faithfulness call. This is obedience call. This is living life one day at a time, one step at a time, taking up our cross, denying ourselves, keeping our mind on the things of the father.

He will reward each according to his works. Salvation is by grace through faith. But where we end up in the eternal future is what we do.

And what we do comes from what we think and what we believe and what we decide. I will show you my faith, James says, how? By my works. I will show you my faith by my works.

We will be judged on these works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the son of man coming in his kingdom. This is such a fascinating verse, isn't it? There are some standing here.

Now, who is standing here in this context? Who's standing there? If you notice the audience in verse 24, the red ink is pretty much continuous from verse 23. Get thee behind me, Satan. Your mind is not on the things of God, but the things of men.

You're a stumbling block to me. Then he says to the group, remember Peter dragged him off to the side. He turns to Peter and says, get behind me.

Then he says to the disciples. So he is talking to the 12. And he says, some of you standing here, some subset of the 12 shall not taste death.

Now, let's talk about this word taste. What does it mean to taste death? Why does he say some of you will not die? Wouldn't that just be easier and simpler? Some of you will not die until you have seen the son of man coming in his kingdom. It's not what it says.

Not taste death. These experiences are equivalent. The two ideas are put side by side.

Taste death, son of man coming. Who is the subject that is coming? It's the son of man. What is the experience of death that they will taste, that they will experience, that they will observe, that they will see? This is not their death in my view.

This is the death of the Lord Jesus. He just said, you've got to follow me by taking up your cross. I am going to Jerusalem to die.

But there are some of you standing here who before you taste that death are going to taste the son of man coming. You'll see him coming. It's a taste.

You've got to, it's like solving algebra, where you've got fractions. This fraction equals this fraction and there's one missing word. And so you cross multiply.

This, if you'll forgive the pun, this is cross observation here. It's an observation of the cross. But tasting death and tasting the kingdom, seeing death and seeing the kingdom, seeing the son of man coming in his kingdom.

The seeing and the tasting are the same thing. And the cross and the kingdom are the two things that will be seen and tasted. It's not their death.

And everybody says, oh, some of them are going to live until Jesus comes back and institutes the millennium. I don't think so. That's why the word taste is there.

Taste and see that the Lord is good. We have in another passage. We'll talk about this more next time.

But some of you standing here are going to get an object lesson. Some of you are going to see the hope that is set before me. Some of you are going to see why I am walking this path and why it is worth following me before you see the downside, the cross.

Before you taste the death of the cross, my death on the cross, you're going to see my future hope and glory, but only some of them. Think about that. We'll talk about it next time, which I think will be in two weeks.

But think about it in the meantime, the tasting and the seeing, the death and the coming, all of this, the tasting and seeing are on the part of the disciples. The death and the coming are the Lord Jesus himself. Some of you will see it and some of you won't.

All of them are going to taste the death, but not all of them are going to understand the hope that motivates the Lord Jesus to endure the cross and despise the shame. Why is that? It's a fruitful question to ask ourselves, and it's not hard to imagine which group we want to be in. You want to be those who have a foretaste of glory divine or not? Not everybody gets it.

Why is that? Well, we'll see it next time we meet. In the meantime, we're going to have a couple of really good studies while we're otherwise occupied. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for how powerfully the words of the Lord Jesus resonate across the centuries and touch our souls and motivate and encourage us. We pray that in the hands of the Holy Spirit, this living truth will flame and be like a fire and a hammer that breaks the rocks in pieces to transform us, to renew our minds, and help us to understand your good and acceptable and perfect will.

We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.