

The Cross-Shaped Life: Dying to Live

Matthew 16:24-28

Summary

The human heart defaults to "selfie-mode," constantly placing our wants, needs, and desires in the foreground, and everyone else in the background. But living for self ultimately leads to spiritual death. Jesus calls all who would follow Him to instead embrace a cross-shaped life through three daily choices: renounce yourself, reorient your life, and remember your reward. The gospel provides the power to make these choices. The cross saves us before it shapes us, giving us the strength to turn off selfie-mode, live for the King, and experience true, abundant life.

Sermon Outline

Introduction: The 'Selfie-Mode' Default

- What happens when selfies are not just photos, but a way of life? A life where we must insert ourselves into the foreground of every situation we find ourselves in throughout the day.
 - My needs, my wants, and my desires are in the foreground, front and center, and yours and everyone else's are pushed into the background.
- The hearts of all men and women have been defaulting to selfie-mode ever since Adam and Eve walked out of the garden. We do this because we think that it will lead to joy, peace, and life, but it is not as fulfilling as it would seem, and it actually ends in death.
- If anyone desires to be His disciple and receive the benefits that this King and His Kingdom offers, there is one cost and it is high: get out of selfie-mode. Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him.

Three daily choices to embrace the cross-shaped life:

Choice 1: Renounce Yourself (Matthew 16:24a)

- Deny yourself means to renounce, repudiate, and disown yourself.
- Jesus doesn't say "let him deny himself things," He says, "Let him deny himself".
- By default, "self" is sitting in the captain's chair, directing the control center of our lives. When Jesus says "deny yourself," He is demanding that we get up out of the captain's chair.

- Jesus gets to define who I am and direct my life
 - I no longer can let my career, my relationships, my bank account, my hobbies, my children, my feelings be the basis of my identity.
 - As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "You are not your own".
 - You surrender your will and emotions to His direction, and you disown the desires of the flesh, putting them to death, as Paul says in Romans 8:13.
- Taking up your cross means you are on a one-way trip, and there is no turning back. This is a daily decision, as Luke makes explicit in Luke 9:23: "take up your cross daily".
- Daily denying and dying = I formally abandon my claim to the throne of my life.
- I surrender the control room to Jesus and say with Paul in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ".

Choice 2: Reorient Your Life (Matthew 16:24b)

- We don't only give up the captain's chair, we also say "yes" to Christ, trusting Him in the seat. In the cross-shaped life, not only are you called to renounce yourself, but also reorient your life around Jesus.
 - Galatians 2:20 says, "*the life I now live* in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me".
- You daily ask Him to lead you, meaning your finances, your time, your energy, your relationships, your free time, your future all gets reoriented around Him now.
- As we reorient our lives around Jesus, we don't simply ask "What do I want?". We ask "Lord, what do you want?".

Choice 3: Remember Your Reward (Matthew 16:25-28)

Jesus gives us three motivations for this cross-shaped life, each starting with the word "for" in the ESV.

1. Verse 25: Living for this world, trying to "save" ourselves, leads to death. The paradox of the kingdom is that in losing our lives for Jesus' sake (ie v24), we actually find true life, now and forevermore.
2. Verse 26: You can accumulate all the wealth, status, and comfort the world offers, but it is entirely worthless if you lose your soul in the process.
 - Paul writes in Philippians 3:8, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord".
 - The things of this world are rubbish compared to the reward of knowing Christ.
3. Verse 27: When you are suffering, when the path is narrow and the cross is heavy, we must remember to lift our eyes to the finish line. He will personally repay your sacrifice in this life. It will be worth it.
 - Verse 28: You can endure the cross today because the coming Kingdom is an absolute certainty.

Conclusion: The Power to Change

- If you open up the camera again, it defaults to selfie mode. That's our heart's default setting.
- To actually walk this out daily, we need more than a command. We need power.
- We find that power in the Gospel. The cross saves us before it shapes us. Jesus went to the cross to bear the penalty for all the times we demanded the captain's chair.
- The Apostle Paul makes this cause/effect connection in 2 Corinthians 5:15: "he died for all, **that** those who live might no longer live for themselves".
- Imagine a church where we are constantly looking out not for ourselves, but for those around us!
- To break that default setting, we have to wake up every morning and make these three choices by the power of the gospel:
 - Renounce yourself
 - Reorient your life
 - Remember your reward