

CS – Choose this Day

10/15/23

Matthew 16:13-27

Sunday AM

Video – Inattention Blindness Exercise

Have you ever heard of *inattention blindness*? It's when you can't see the forest for the trees b/c you're so focused on the details that you can't see everything else that's going on. It's the inability to see/perceive information in plain sight b/c your attention/focus prevents you from seeing all the details.

IAB occurs b/c there's far too much info entering into the brain thru the eyes for the brain to fully process it – as a result, the brain has to function like a spotlight zooming in on a particular aspect of the scene while ignoring or not paying attention to the other aspects – and *what we don't pay attention to we don't see*.

I think this happens at times when we read the Bible – *we miss some of the details that others might see, and catch some details that others might miss*. This is one of the reasons we need to **read, study, and discuss** the Scriptures w/ other people – to help us to see as much as possible so that we can grow in our faith.

This is part of the beauty of why we're doing what we are doing as a church in this **Come and See** journey. As we read the Scripture and study the same passages devotionally, we gather each week to pool/share what God has pointed out to us to spur one another along.

**NOW** – if you remember, last week we entered into the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Jesus' earthly ministry and we got to see firsthand the disciples finally believing that Jesus was the Messiah. Today, we're going to fast-forward some 3-6 months later to the far north of Israel to the area known as Caesarea Philippi at the base of Mt. Hermon.

**Caesarea Philippi** was the mountain resort built by *Herod the Great* to honor Caesar where the Romans built a number of pagan altars to worship their gods. The big hole in the side of the mountain (picture) was considered to be the gate to the underworld and was known as the **Gates of Hell**. Apparently, the people would take their sacrifices and throw them into the cave and believed that if the sacrifice was not returned, then the gods had accepted the sacrifice.

So, when Jesus and the (12) arrived and had this exchange, it was NOT by accident – and its relevance to our lives today is equally valuable.

*When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Jesus said, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then He ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah. From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day be raised to life. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. "Never, Lord! This shall never happen to You!" Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their*

*soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory w/ His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what they have done. Matthew 16:13-27*

As we delve into this text, there's a lot going on in this story that can cause us to miss the bigger picture and the lesson Jesus wants us to catch and apply to our lives – and it begins w/ an incredibly critical question: Who do the people say that I am? More importantly, who do you say that I am?

Here they are, sitting steps away from *idol* row where every god known to the Romans is being worshipped – and Jesus asked them this poignant question. A question all of us need to ask – *who is Jesus to us?*

### **Who or what really is God?**

This is a critical question b/c whoever Jesus is to us will determine His place in our lives. B/c if He's God, then He has all rights/authority over us, but if He's something less than God, then we'll never consult or be concerned w/ His will b/c someone or something else will sit/rule on the throne of our lives.

Of course, Peter pipes up on behalf of the (12) and says that Jesus is the Christ and Messiah. And in response, Jesus lays down the gauntlet for every believer.

*Whoever wants to be My disciple must **deny** themselves, **take up** their cross, and **follow** Me.*

Luke 9:23 contains an interesting sequence of tenses in the Greek. All (3) verbs *deny, take, follow* – are imperatives – meaning they're emphatic commands – they must be done and w/out them, you can't be a disciple of Jesus!

Yet the call to *deny* and *take up* are orist tense verbs while *follow* is present tense. Meaning that fellowship w/ Christ requires a definitive point-in-time decision to *deny* and *take up* that never wains while the commitment to follow is a minute-by-minute choice.

**IOW** – we don't just decide to follow Christ and then put it on *auto-pilot* – we're required to choose daily in the present tense by *seeking, expecting, trusting, and obeying* the leading of God in our lives.

**WTM** – let's take a closer look at Jesus' invitation.

I      A Call to **PUT** Off

*If anyone would come after me, he must **deny** himself*

**deny** – a volitional act of surrender. *It's to set aside or forfeit your desires/ambitions for a cause greater than yourself.* It's to **DISOWN** your rights to yourself.

This doesn't mean we're to think harshly of ourselves, but rather, it's a decision to think correctly of ourselves before God. It's stepping down off the throne of our lives to allow Jesus to be enthroned in our lives

*Self-denial is never just a series of isolated acts of mortification or asceticism... To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only who goes before us and no more the road which is too hard for us. Bonhoeffer*

I think Jesus was saying that to follow Him requires a conscious decision to disown every right to ourselves and to place our entire dependence/confidence in Christ instead of trusting in our own ability/ingenuity.

**It's a decision to surrender** – where we give up our plans for His plan and our kingdom for His kingdom. It's deciding to relinquish anything that might inhibit us from trusting/following Him including a personal ambition, a misplaced attitude, a denominational allegiance, or some religious attachment. It's a volitional decision to trust the Lord in every area of our lives, never leaning on our abilities/ingenuity, but in all our ways giving Him His rightful seat on the throne of our lives b/c we desire His will over our will.

## II A Call to **PICK** Up

...**take up** *their cross daily*...

**take up** – is a daily call to pick up and drag a beam of pain to a shameful death.

**What a proposition!** Jesus calls us to take up our cross daily. The meaning is so simple it's often been missed b/c a person carrying a cross had only one destination – death. It's always a one-way trip.

To take up your cross doesn't mean we carry a cross in our pocket or wear one around our neck. Nor is it to carry around a large wooden cross as some have done.

Yet it is a definitive call to lay down our lives for His glory. I want you to notice what we're to pick up. It's **NOT** His cross, but **OUR** cross! Why? B/c we're not capable of carrying His cross. Yet daily, as we die to ourselves and bear our faith before others – any cross we're called to carry, depending on how we carry it, is to point others to the cross Jesus carried for us.

I'm reminded of the man at the end of his rope who prayed, "Lord, I can't go on. This cross is too heavy to bear." God said, "If you can't bear it, give it to me and pick out a new one." Filled w/ relief, the man thanked God and entered a room where he saw crosses of various sizes; after searching, he spotted a tiny cross on a table. He said, "God, I'd like this one." God said, "But that's the cross you just gave me."

**All of us will have crosses to carry. It doesn't matter the size of your cross but how you carry it.**

Your cross is anything you must bear to bring glory to God. It's any blessing/difficulty God asks you to carry to reveal to others the cross Jesus carried for all. But to bear it successfully requires that every day, when we awake, we accept that this day, we're not going to pursue a day of comfort/convenience, but we're going to lay down our lives to point others to Jesus.

## III A Call to **PURSUE** After

...and **follow** Me.

**follow** – is an invitation to walk in the footsteps of Jesus – **it's to live the way Jesus lived.**

**Follow** carries the idea of a continual pattern of trust/obedience. IOW – a true Jesus-follower willingly obeys God – *if you love me you'll keep my commands.*

***It's cutting the ties of the past to pursue a preferred future w/ God.*** I think of 1 Kings 19 when God told Elijah to call Elisha to be his replacement. Elijah found Elisha at work on the family farm, plowing w/ (24) oxen and supervising (11) men. Elijah walked up to him, threw his cape over him, and said, "Come, follow me." Elisha agreed. But before he followed, he did something very important. He slaughtered his oxen and used the wooden yoke as fuel for a barbeque. **SEE** – ***Elisha was cutting ties w/ his past so he wouldn't be tempted to go back to that life.*** It was his way of showing he was totally committed to following God.

Could it be that what's keeping you from following Jesus is your unwillingness to give up your past or possibly even your preferred future? See, to truly follow Jesus requires letting go of your will for His will and seeking His kingdom/righteousness above all.

This is why Jesus went on to say that – *whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me will find it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?*

As I close, let me ask a relevant question about following Jesus... Where are you? I can tell you that you are in one of (4) positions on the following scale.

- 1 **Uninterested** – not a believer nor interested in God
- 2 **Seeker** – interested in God but not yet a believer
- 3 **Believer** – trusted Jesus but still living for self
- 4 **Disciplemaker** – trusted Jesus and living the G.C.

*Have you seen the movie – Chariots of Fire?* It's about Eric Liddell who won a gold medal in the 400 meters race in the 1924 Olympics in Paris but b/c of his faith, refused to run on a Sunday. It's an inspiring movie. The problem is, the movie ends much too soon b/c the best part of Liddell's life occurred after his Olympic medal. **SEE** – Eric accepted God's call to serve as a missionary in China during the 1930s – and during the Japanese invasion, Liddell was arrested w/ other Chinese Christians and placed in a prison camp. Still, even in the camp, He ministered/discipled countless Chinese men to faith in Christ. Then, a few months before China was liberated, at the age of 43, Eric Liddell was placed before a firing squad and executed alongside several Chinese men – where he'd step into the arms of Jesus. **SEE** – b/c Eric had surrendered his life to Jesus, he ran another kind of race, for another kind of prize, and he received another kind of medal – that was far more priceless than gold.

*Choose this day who you will serve... but as for me and my house – we will serve the Lord*