

Matthew 5:38-42

Dying to Self

Think about eternity, a forever with God that all those who love him get to share with him. We get to share a forever because he has brought eternity to us through the ministry of the Son. If we are honest, on some days it's hard to remember eternity. When bills are due, when money is tight, when you are hungry, when someone that you love is suffering from sickness and you are standing by their bed to say goodbye, when someone cuts you off in traffic, when you are sitting in a classroom and the teacher or professor assures you with scientific proofs that there is no such thing as eternity, as you turn on the TV and binge-watch the latest season in anticipation for the next season. We have many reasons in our daily lives to forget eternity, to live in the dark as if there were no light.

But, in the midst of the bleakness, eternal light has begun to shine. That eternal light shines on us causing us to believe and then through us calling others to believe. If we follow Jesus, we follow forever and we who know forever call others to embrace a forever by calling them to trust in Jesus. We encourage other who don't know forever to embrace forever by living today in the light of forever. Living in this moment for every moment. Living today in light of the eternity we will share with God.

Don't you want to experience forever today? Don't you want to live in light of eternity? What if the biggest obstacle for you experiencing all that God desires you do be was - you? Today in our text we are confronted with the truth of God's mission, a mission to rid us of self. Let's read the text.

READ TEXT

The closer we look at Jesus, the more beautiful we see him. The closer we look at Jesus, the more we see the difficulty of the calling of this life. Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? The word disciple means learner. A true disciple will take seriously and think seriously through what Jesus says. If we think about a disciple, we think about one who makes it their ambition to know him; one who spends effort to take every thought captive to place it under the obedience of Christ. Does this describe you? In our text today, Jesus gives us a test to see.

The last parts of chapter 5 are some of the highest peaks of the Sermon on the Mount. These 2 sayings in 38-42 and 43-48 are some of the most loved and resented, the most difficult to understand and most easily misunderstood. How can we make sense of what Jesus is saying? We go back to the context. We don't want to isolate these verses from the whole, we want to understand them in light of what has been said before and what is said after.

What is the context? These statements don't come to us by themselves, they flow from the Beatitudes. (The whole sermon flows from the Beatitudes). What are the

Beatitudes? The Beatitudes present this new humanity, this new world order that Christ is bringing and accomplishing as he inaugurates in preparation to consummate His kingdom. These are descriptors of the life that Jesus has come bringing to a world stained with sin. No wonder when we first read them they look so different. I heard a pastor say, in seminary I struggled through the doctrine of salvation, now I find myself struggling to live the Beatitudes.

Before we get into this passage, I want to tell you what these verses are not teaching. First, these verses are not teaching pacifism. Pure pacifism turns a blind eye to justice and does not uphold righteousness. It is a shame that some take this liberating passage and use it for legalism. Second, these verses are far removed from any idea of being a weakling. These verses are not calling us to be holy doormats for the world to wipe their feet on. Third, these verses are given to followers of Christ as individuals. Remember the context, Jesus is interested in telling us about the new world that is breaking through with his coming. I want to be as clear as I can here without getting too involved, so listen close. We who are formed by the Sermon on the Mount (individually) go and live this new life in every place on earth. We live this life as doctors, farmers, soldiers, policemen, politicians, mothers, fathers, grandfathers, students, and so forth. We live in the world as those who are in the world but not of the world. We live in this world in joy filled hope of the world that is coming. And until this world comes, we are preparing the world for Jesus by being a disciple and making disciples (Micah 6:8).

We have to understand this before we can understand what our Lord is saying. Christ came as one man to be everyman. In Adam all die, in Christ all are made alive. He came to remake individuals before he remakes the world. And before he remakes the world fully and completely by his second coming, he has told us to make something. What are we to go and make? Disciples of all nations! (This is the basis for Scripture saying things like, *You are not your own, you have been bought with a price...* [1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Romans 8:9].)

What is Jesus saying? These verses are little sketches to help us understand his mission. Jesus mission is a mission of deliverance - he has come to save us. The Christian message is that we need saving from all sorts of things but the main thing that we need saving from is ourselves. We were made in the image of God, made to have fellowship with God, but we chose to turn our hearts away from God. Here is the sobering part of the message. What if the one hindrance to advancement in your life was yourself? Self is the antithesis of godliness. Self always means defiance to God. Self is the root cause of all unhappiness in life. What do we call a person who is full of self? We say they are full of themselves or selfish. Neither of those terms are positive.

Think of a verse of Scripture with me. Psalm 37:4-5. *Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.* That verse is the Christian message in pill form. The Christian gospel is about Christ coming to ourselves who were lost without a true heading in a dangerous sea. Christ has come into our storm to be our lighthouse, to direct our way. Christ has come to us and taken the wheel to turn us from disaster to

safe to shore. The Christian message is *he who finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it* (Matthew 10:39).

A condition of separation has greeted everyone on the earth, as our lungs took our first breath, we breathed in not the breath of life but a breath of separation. We were born separated from God. How did this separation occur? One word: Self. The beginning of the story of the world is the beginning of our story: choosing our own desires over what

God said. And the story of that one day is repeated every day. Instead of desiring what God said and all things being in a beautiful divine harmony, we set our desires in opposition to what God said and as a result a separation between what he said and what we desire occurs. But thanks be to God that Christ has come to mend the separation, to make our desires Jesus, only Jesus. Think back to Psalm 37 for a moment. The desires of our heart are the LORD, our ways are his ways. Why? All because of Christ. Galatians 2:20 says, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And 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.*

A follow of Christ who has died and is dying to self has only one interest, one aim, one concern - living for Jesus and pointing everyone to the satisfaction of souls. I can't think of any greater challenge to dying to self than these four illustrations that Christ gives. Look at them. Can you think of a greater test? What's the point of Jesus saying this to us? Jesus says this so that we will be rid of ourselves.

Don't misunderstand. This does not mean that we won't fight for truth and justice but what it does mean is that we will fight for truth and justice and not fighting for vengeance because we have been personally wronged. We are not seeking vengeance we are seeking justice (Romans 12:19). This whole life is a life that says, I must decrease he must increase.

Let me use myself as an illustration. Maybe you hearing how this text speaks to me can help you hear how it speaks to you. I cannot think of a nobler task than preaching. Someone said, "Why stoop to be a king when God has called you to be a preacher?" But what motivates me as a preacher? Is it self-interest, self-concern, to somehow elevate myself? Am I seeking my advancement of God's glory? God knows my heart anyway. I can come up with something flowery to tell you, but God knows what is true. Since God knows my heart I have to say, here's my heart Lord. Here are my desires, help me to know and desire what is true. Help me to pursue your glory above all else. Consume me with a pure and holy passion, give me one glorious ambition, to know and follow wholeheartedly after you.

Now that we know that Christ has come to rid us of ourselves, now that we know our lives are meant to have new affections and to direct the affections of others towards the glory of God. How can we know that we are dying to self? 4 Ways:

1. Are You Willing to Suffer Physical Pain for the Sake of Truth?

Remember who is receiving this blow to the cheek. We are those who have been born again, who are being formed into the likeness of Christ, we are those who are preparing for forever today. You won't be able to turn the other cheek unless you are finished with yourself.

Some of you have heard of George Müller. Others of you who have not heard of him should read him. Müller, the great Englishman of faith at the turn of the 20th century who raised millions of dollars for his orphanage all through prayer said, "There was a day when I died, utterly died, died to George Müller and his opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame of even my brethren and friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God."

Why would martyrs such as Polycarp and Perpetua go willingly to death for the cause of Christ? They had already died to self. Jesus says, if one hits you on the left, give them the right. In other words, don't seek vengeance, have an attitude of selflessness. In the first century when someone slapped someone on the cheek it was demeaning and insulting. By offering the other cheek you are saying alright hit me again if you like but this time as an equal not as someone who is inferior.

We could spend all our time here but remember that the principle that the Lord is calling us to is to be rid of our self. Let's keep climbing. Number 2:

2. Are You Willing to Suffer Material Loss for the Sake of Truth?

In those days, most people only wore those two garments. Offering your other garments would of course leave you naked. The point that Jesus is telling is go ahead and show them how ridiculous their quest for vengeance is, go ahead and offer them all that you have. Let them know that your pursuits will not be contained to this world. Show them there is something greater to desire than vengeance. Show them there is a new way to live.

Number 3:

3. Are You Living Your Faith Before the World?

How could someone force you to go one mile? Remember, the Jews were under Roman occupation. A Roman soldier could force anyone that he wanted to carry whatever he wanted them to for at least one mile. Jesus says even for these men who you despise, show them there is a better way, go two miles instead of one. I love this attitude of Paul. Paul was imprisoned in Rome, under house arrest and he rejoices. He closes his letter to the Philippians by saying some of Caesar's household say hello.

Meaning that he had taken the time while under arrest not to complain but to see it as an opportunity to witness.

We are called to live this way before the world that is watching. We are called to live in light of eternity today. What a different world it would be if we would remember this life. Someone once said, "For they who hope for heavenly things easily spurn earthly things. Yet I doubt that those who strongly embrace worldly things believe firmly in heavenly promises." (Anonymous)

Finally:

4. Are You Considering Others More Valuable Than Yourself?

This verse is not calling us to help the drunk stay drunk, or calling us to help the professional beggar stay a professional beggar. What this verse is calling us to is to see others as more valuable than ourselves. If took just as much of the precious blood of Jesus to save you as it did me. Just as much of the precious blood of Jesus to save the beggar on the street as the Queen of England in Buckingham Palace. Some say God save the Queen and he has but the same blood that saved me and you! The principle that Jesus is teaching here and in every one of these illustrations - dying to self. Telling us that there is a better pursuit, a better way, the way of being separate from the world and giving yourself to God.

Impossible? Remember the Sermon on the Mount is a picture of this life that Christ has come to bring; a picture of the life of Christ, and we are being conformed into his image.

1 Peter 2:21-25

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (ESV)

I want to close today with a video that illustrates this attitude of dying to self in an extreme way. In 2015 the world was shocked as ISIS released a video of 21 Christians in orange jump suits being executed on a Mediterranean beach. These Christians were part of the Coptic Church known in the region as the People of the Cross. The Orthodox Coptic Church released the name of 20 men originally and then they released a last name. It was later learned that the 21st man was not a Christian when he was escorted to the beach in his orange jump suit. But when the terrorist came to him and asked him if he rejected Jesus he responded, "Their God is my God."

In the months following, this message was released to ISIS. Here is that message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSv4vBcFyvo>

“Who Would Dare to Love ISIS”