

Matthew 16E

- What are God's interests?
 - Last week Jesus scolded Peter for not setting his mind on God's interests
 - Jesus disclosed that He must suffer and die, but Peter vehemently objected to that possibility
 - He probably assumed his objection to the plan would please and even comfort Jesus
 - So I'm sure Peter was surprised when Jesus rebuked him, calling Peter's idea the devil's work, not God's desire
 - Peter probably wondered how could a desire to protect the Messiah from suffering and death *not* be aligned with God?
 - And the answer of course is that God intended to do great good through Jesus' death
 - God was working to free humanity from sin and condemnation
 - So as horrible as Jesus' dying would be, it was the greatest good the world has ever known
 - The Father's plan to put His Son on the cross reminds us that God is in the business of turning bad circumstances to good
 - God's ways are not man's ways, but what *are* God's ways? Can we learn how to avoid Peter's mistake?
 - Can we understand God's interests well enough to avoid doing the devil's work? Jesus shows us how:

[Matt. 16:24](#) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

[Matt. 16:25](#) "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

[Matt. 16:26](#) "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

[Matt. 16:27](#) "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and **WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.**

- Before we look at Jesus' instructions, we need to get a better appreciation for the misconception that led to this moment
 - The fundamental mistake Peter made was in assuming that God's highest priority was preserving earthly life
 - That's why Peter said "God forbid" that Jesus should die
 - He couldn't believe God would desire that outcome for anyone, much less for His Son the Messiah
 - But Peter was thinking about death from a human perspective
 - Human beings are preoccupied with our own death
 - Though the exact moment of our death is a complete mystery, we all know it's coming...no one escapes it
 - So because we live in the shadow of inevitable death, saving our earthly life dominates our thinking
 - And yet ironically, the world's solution to death is largely to ignore it altogether
 - Many people live their lives pretending it won't happen, at least until it's impossible to ignore and they're forced to confront it
 - And if you bring up the topic of death, the world tries to end the conversation, just as Peter tried to stop Jesus from discussing it
 - In fact, when you think about it, it's amazing that the world isn't *more* preoccupied with death
 - Given the short time we spend on earth, you would expect the world to spend every day consumed with finding a solution
 - And some in the world do search for an answer, and their search takes them in many different directions
 - Some find a solution in religion, some seek medical miracles, some settle for better cosmetics
 - But in general, most give it little thought at all, because we can't bear the thought of it and ignorance is bliss
- Unbelievers live in fear of death, and their fear drives them to push death out of their minds, but that's not the way God thinks about death

- When the first man, Adam, sinned, he received a death sentence
 - In Chapter 2 God warned Adam that in the day he ate of the fruit, he would die, meaning his spirit would fall under condemnation
 - So the very instant Adam ate the fruit, he came under a death sentence and his spirit was corrupted
 - But Adam's physical body lived on...at least for the moment
- So when God confronted Man and Woman in the Garden, He added additional penalties, including physical death

Gen. 3:19 By the sweat of your face

**You will eat bread,
Till you return to the ground,
Because from it you were taken;
For you are dust,
And to dust you shall return."**

- God declared that Adam's body came from dust and now as a result of his sin, Adam's body would return to dust one day
 - Adam's spiritual death would now be accompanied by his physical death
 - But this wasn't a punitive measure...the Lord was also taking a step toward solving the problem Adam created
 - Because when it comes to death, God's ways are not man's ways
- From God's point of view, the death of our sinful body has two primary positive effects
 - First, the death of the physical body puts a time limit on mankind's sinful existence on earth
 - All humanity lives "on the clock" knowing life is finite
 - And the Lord has placed in everyone a conscious awareness that judgment awaits
 - So the deadline imposed by the death of our bodies forces us to consider the problem of death and to seek for a solution

- We have a powerful incentive to learn the truth about death and God and the afterlife
- And in that search perhaps we might find Him

[Acts 17:25](#) ... He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

[Acts 17:26](#) and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,

[Acts 17:27](#) that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

- The Lord gave everyone life and determined our appointed times (meaning set a limit to their days) that we might seek God
- So when it comes to death for the unbeliever, God's interests are not man's interests
 - God wants the death of our body to drive us toward Him
 - Meanwhile, the world is trying to ignore the very thing that God is using to get their attention
 - In the example of death, it's easy to see how sin drives humanity away from God even as God makes Himself known
- But when a person comes to faith in Jesus and is born again, our understanding of life and death changes dramatically
 - No longer are we afraid of death, because the penalty for our sin has been removed by Jesus
 - So now we know that even as we experience physical death, we won't experience spiritual death
 - So physical death isn't a problem for us...it's a solution because it puts an end to the sinful body
 - And that's the second reason the Lord introduced physical death after the fall – He was making a way for something better
 - The death of our physical body sets us free from this container of sin, a vessel that is irretrievably corrupt and unrepairable
 - We can all see the negative effects our body has on our walk with Jesus, and it troubles us everyday

- Paul describes the daily fight we have against our bodies in Romans 7

[Rom. 7:22](#) For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

[Rom. 7:23](#) but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

[Rom. 7:24](#) Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

[Rom. 7:25](#) Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!...

- Our body wages war against our spirit, our inner person, and that war is tiring and depressing and we yearn to be free of it
- And when we experience the physical death of our body, we will be set free from that burden once and for all
- Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ!
- In the meantime, knowing we will die one day and escape this body and this world, Paul says physical death encourages us to abide in Jesus

[2Cor. 1:9](#) indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;

[2Cor. 1:10](#) who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us,

- We're dying a little bit everyday...we're running out the clock of our lives, and yet we have no fear of that moment
 - So neither should we trust in our own strength or ability nor anything else in this world
 - Trusting in something in this world is ridiculous when we know it's not lasting
- Watching our life fading should encourage us to rely more on Jesus each day
 - Because as Paul says we know He raises people from the dead
 - In other words, we place our certainty and trust in what is waiting for us after death, not what we leave behind in death
- What would make you happier: keeping your current worn out car forever or getting a brand new one?

- Would you prefer to have a brand new perfect house or a fixer-upper?
- Believer, your body is a worn out junker and a serious fixer-upper
- And Jesus is planning to give you a brand new one in a day to come
- And to make way for that new one, He set a date that your old one gets turned in
- Jesus will raise you from the dead, which means your sinful body will be replaced by an undying glorified one
 - So in the meantime, don't show more interest in the junker body than in the new glorified body Christ has prepared
 - Place your hope in the next life, look forward to your next body, the next home, the next world...not what you have here
 - Stop trying to live as if your life here is the highest priority – and God's greatest concern
 - Living here forever wouldn't be a blessing...it would be a curse...it's a life sentence on death row
- That's God's perspective on life and death, and it's the perspective the believer must have to serve Jesus well
 - But it wasn't the perspective Peter brought to that moment, and it's often a perspective we struggle to maintain too
 - And that's what Jesus was talking about in our passage
 - In v.24 Jesus says that anyone who wishes to come after Jesus must deny himself and take up his cross
 - To go after Jesus means to be His disciple, walking in His ways, representing Him, serving Him, making your life a living sacrifice
 - He's not talking about how to be saved...that was covered earlier in the moment of Peter's confession
 - Jesus is addressing the attitude of a disciple, of a believer who serves Jesus well
 - Now that we have been saved, our service to Jesus requires personal sacrifice but not everyone is willing to give Jesus that service

- Not everyone who comes to faith in Jesus serves Him equally well – or even at all
- The fact that so much of the New Testament exhorts us to make sacrifices for JESUS tells us not everyone does it
- It's also why the Lord holds out the prospect of eternal reward for those who do serve Him...because He wants to motivate us
- And key to finding that motivation to serve Christ is thinking about life and death the way God does, Jesus says
 - And key is learning to deny ourselves, which means fighting against the desires of our sinful flesh
 - Because our body may be dying, but it's not powerless
- Medicine and science won't tell you this, but the Bible says our flesh is a powerful force with a will of its own, independent of our mind
 - Our physical body opposes God and our spirit at all times, and you can see this truth at work in your life everyday
 - Do you have a persistent sin in your life that you know is wrong and you want to stop...and yet it's still there?
 - You just keep doing it even though you tell yourself you shouldn't do it
 - So ask yourself why do you continue to do it? Why isn't your intellectual decision to stop reason enough to cease from sinning?
 - Because your flesh doesn't agree with that decision, because it's programmed from birth to oppose God at every turn
 - It's like we have two dogs fighting for control inside us
 - One dog is the new spirit we received when we were born again by our faith in Jesus Christ
 - According to Paul in Romans 6, our new spirit is perfect in its desires, and it always wants to please God by obeying Him
 - Paul says in Romans 7 that our spirit agrees with the Law of God, and left to itself, it would never lead us to sin

- But we carry our new spirit in a body of sinful flesh, the same flesh we inherited from Adam
 - Our flesh is always working to pull us off track even as our spirit is encouraging us to obey
 - They are literally at war with one another, but which one is truly “us”?
- Our new spirit and old flesh are both “us”, at least for now, and they are like two dogs fighting for control inside us
 - So which dog is going to win that battle? As the old saying goes, the one you feed gets stronger and the one you starve gets weaker
 - And in v.24 Jesus is saying you need to deny that devil dog inside you what it wants
 - Deny it by being aware of its desires, putting up barriers so it can't get what it wants, while praying to escape temptation
 - Jesu says take up your cross, which is a clear reference to crucifixion
 - In the Roman method of execution, the condemned was forced to carry the horizontal beam of his own cross
 - By analogy, Jesus asks we crucify our flesh, putting it to death, so to speak
 - His point is if we are going to serve Jesus well, we must participate *willingly* in the process of our own sanctification
 - Sanctification is a process of yielding to the Spirit while denying our flesh
 - The Lord does the real work of our sanctification, convicting us of sin and leading us into obedience by the power of His Spirit
 - And our role as disciples is to work with the Spirit by participating in the execution of our flesh's desires
 - And the Lord will not force a disciple to engage in that process...we get to decide how much we yield to the Spirit
 - So we all have a choice to make in this regard...because we're all called to serve Jesus with our lives

- Every minute of every day is a service to Jesus, whatever walk of life we pursue
- And the question is whether we're "all in" with Jesus?
- Jesus says our choice is simple: we can choose to save our earthly life or lose it
 - To save our life means to seek the life that our flesh desires, to protect its interests at every turn
 - And what kind of life does our flesh want? It wants what the world offers...wealth, fame, power, luxury, sex, entertainment
 - "Saving our life" means doing what we want here and now instead of what God is asking us to do in serving Jesus
 - But Jesus says this choice comes at a cost, because as a Christian, you can't have it all
 - Or in the words of that great philosopher, Bob Dylan, "you're gonna have to serve somebody"
 - There's always a cost for saving your earthly life, for pursuing your flesh's desires rather than Jesus' desires
 - Jesus says the cost is that you will lose your life
 - But the Bible talks about two lives for a Christian
 - There is the life we lead here now and there is the life we will lead in the Kingdom, the life that begins after our resurrection
 - This life is temporary, the next is eternal
 - In this life we encounter testing and trial, in the next life we receive reward
 - Jesus says if we live this life trying to make the most of it (trying to "save" it), then we put at risk things of the eternal life
 - And which of these two lives should be more important to us?
 - In v.26 Jesus asks what profit is it for us to gain the whole world if it results in us losing our soul?
 - And after chasing the whole world and gaining it, what good does it do when your soul is at risk?

- Jesus isn't saying that our salvation is on the line; we know that because our soul is not gained or lost on the basis of how we live our life
 - Just as no disciples of Jesus ever obtains the "whole world" likewise, no disciple ever lost his soul because he pursued the world
 - Jesus is using hyperbole, speaking in exaggerated terms to make a point
 - The point is every time we prioritize this life over the next life, there will be an opportunity cost
 - And we're making a terrible bargain, trading eternal riches for temporal gains
 - In fact, it works both ways: the more you seek for the one life, the less you will have of the other
 - That is, the more you pursue the flesh's desires in this life, the less you serve Jesus and therefore the less you receive later
 - And the more you prioritize serving Jesus now, the more sacrifices you make now but the more the Lord rewards you in the Kingdom
- And in v.27 Jesus reminds us that a moment is coming when repayment comes for everyone
 - At His Second Coming to establish the Kingdom Jesus repays all humanity according to deeds
 - For the unbelievers, their deeds are evil, and since they lack the forgiveness of Christ's atoning work, they receive judgment
 - For the believer there is also a judgment of deeds, but our judgment is solely for the purpose of assigning reward
 - And we too will be repaid for our deeds done in the body
 - In other words, gaining the whole world is only attractive until we remember the reality of death again
 - Death puts an end to everything we accomplish here, including to all that we accumulate
 - So no matter how much you accumulate, your life is not the sum of your possessions

- And when you leave it all behind anyway, what was the point? Was owning it for a few decades really that important?
- Our coming judgement is our incentive to crucify the flesh, to make the hard choices
 - To favor the right dog inside us, to follow Him as His disciple
 - If you are willing to lose this life, to crucify your flesh's desires, you will gain far more in Heaven than you stand to lose here
- As Jim Elliot observed, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose
 - Peter tried to hold onto something he could not keep
 - He tried to forbid Jesus from dying to protect something he valued in this life, something his flesh wanted
 - And in the process Peter was placing something eternal at risk, something the Father wanted
 - Jesus was meant to die on a cross, and so was Peter one day
 - And everything that happened in Peter's life between those two moments belonged to Jesus
 - And if Peter served Jesus well during that time, Peter would see a life in the Kingdom well-rewarded
 - If he got absorbed in saving this life, he would miss what Jesus had for him
 - Peter was fighting to preserve the wrong life, and we do the same thing too whenever we let our flesh's desire decide our path
 - Let the Spirit guide you, listen to His counsel through study of the word, and prioritize eternal outcomes over earthly
 - Live with eyes for eternity, and anticipate your death with hope and joy knowing it's the moment of your reward