

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship

March 22, 2020

“Covenantal Commitment”

9:15 ~ Sermon Online

NEWS

See the Sermon Notes

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Visit the website ~ www.myaletheia.com ~ Hear a sermon at

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MATTHEW 16:24-28 ~ ²⁴NASB 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. ²⁵For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶For 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? ²⁷For 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. ²⁸Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

We talked about the stark difference between the Christianity Jesus _____ and the Christianity we _____.

Naturally, we can rationalize that... Or at least ignore it. Matthew 5:5, 5:22, 5:29, 5:39, 6:15, Luke 14:26

In order to be a Follower of Jesus you absolutely must _____ yourself entirely to Him - you must give Jesus your full _____.

To “Deny yourself, and to take up your cross and follow Him,” means that you are 100% in - no matter what.

The _____ of the human heart is well documented in the Bible... James 1:6-8, Matthew 5:37, James 5:12

It is nothing more than “Hedo-Narcissistic Egoism.”

Narcissism from Νάρκισσος (Näṛ-kēs-sōs) - it is self-adulation.

Egoism from the Greek ἔγω (ě-gō) - it is being self-absorbed.

Hedonism is from the Greek ἡδονή (hā-dō-nā) - it is self-indulgent.

II Timothy 3:1b-5a

Jesus is telling us today, that such a state will not work. Anyone who loves their life, their world, their people, their pursuits, their reputation, their whatever, more than Jesus, is not _____ of Jesus (Matthew 10:26-39).

The idea is like the noble knight of the romanticized Age of Chivalry.

Notice that the call here from Jesus has no terminus. It is simply “Deny yourself.”

Søren Kierkegaard: “A man is required to make the greatest possible sacrifice to dedicate his whole life as sacrifice—and wherefore? There is indeed no wherefore. ‘Then it is madness,’ says the understanding. There is no wherefore... because there is an infinite wherefore.”

John Calvin: “Self-denying full devotion to the Lord and His cause is the chief sum of the Christian life. It consists first of all of seeing that human reason is no longer the person’s master.” “Self-denial stands in radical opposition to every shrewd Christian adjustment to the circumstances.”

"We have met the _____ and he is us." Pogo.

Whenever any of us undergoes tribulation, the chances that we will be offended, rises exponentially with the duration of the tribulation.

We are so focused on grace that we basically think that we can do _____, and get away with it... Is that what the Bible teaches?

We judge _____ in others at the point of our strength, while simultaneously expecting to be judged at our point of strength, rather than our point of weakness.

Jesus understands that it's a lot and so He gave us some _____. You could be Warren Buffet or Mark Zuckerberg, but what could you buy, 100 years from now?

Our problem is largely a perspective problem.

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

Psalm 62:12, “Recompense” is מָלֵשׁ (shä-lëm), something given back.

Proverbs 24:12, “Render” is בְּרִישׁ (shüv), meaning to return.

The New Testament, mostly ἀποδίδωμι (ä-pō-dē-dō-mē), contextually to render from one to another.

II Corinthians 5:10, “Recompensed” is κομίζω (kō-mē-dzō), to receive back.

I Corinthians 3:14, “Reward” is μισθός (mēs-thös), rightful wages paid for work done.

In every case the Bible consistently shows that every person will one day be judged by God and afterward will be paid the wages they earned - whether good, or bad.

Here’s the difference. Romans 3:23, All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Verse 28 Jesus’ Kingdom is the Kingdom of Heaven. That Kingdom is characterized by a reign, not by a realm. It isn’t about an existing space, but a quality - the quality where God is completely unopposed.

described, live, commitment, allegiance, Fickleness, worthy, enemy, anything, weakness, motivation

Check all that apply – detach and place in the offering or the prayer box

I want to talk with the pastor about _____

I want prayer for _____

I want to volunteer to _____

I want more information about _____

Other _____

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

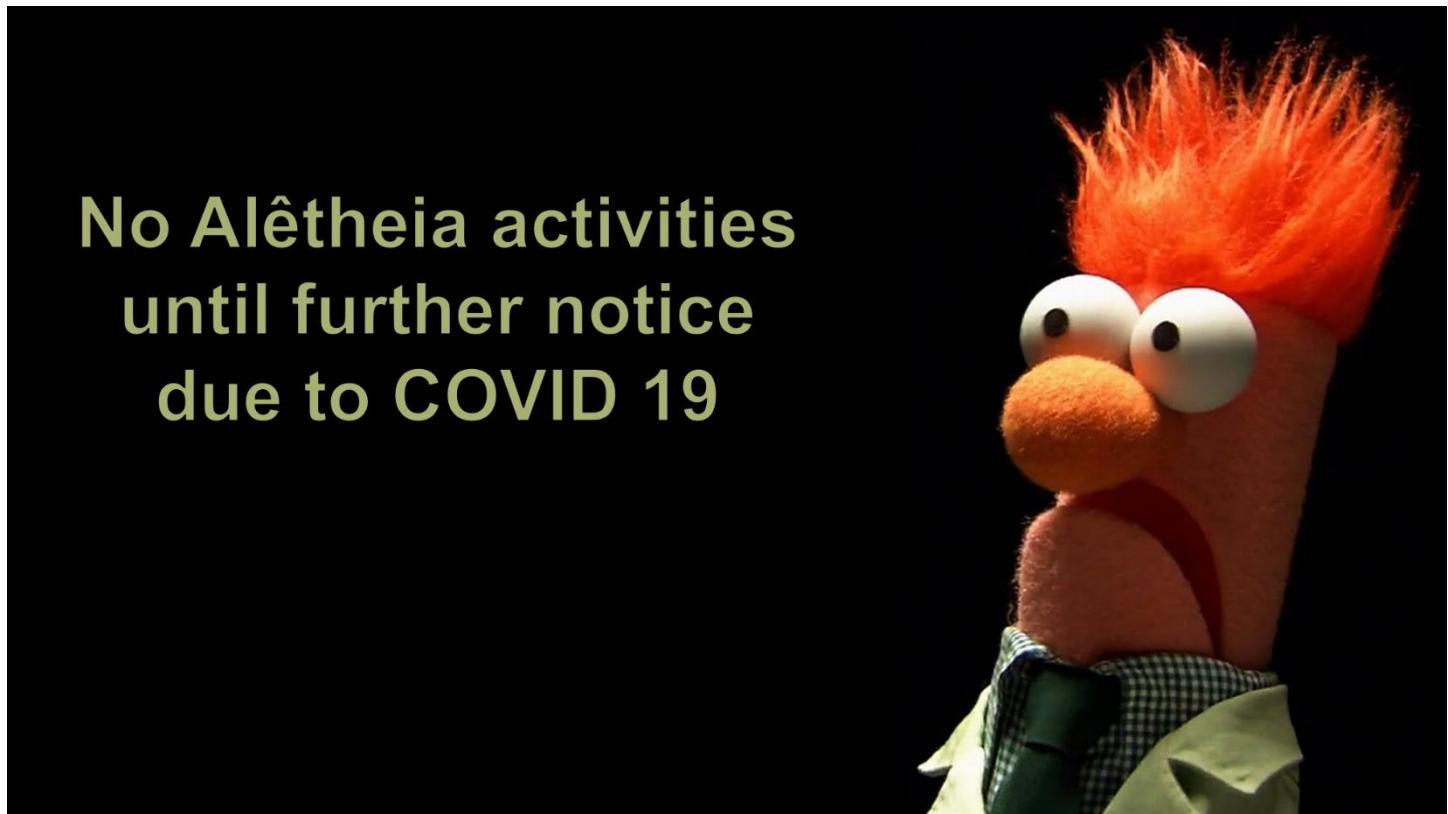
Alêtheia ~ Matthew 16e ~ 032220

Welcome Friends

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
MATTHEW
A CLASH OF KINGDOMS

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship

As I'm sure everyone already knows, ALL ALÊTHEIA ACTIVITIES, to include Wednesday classes, Sunday school, and Sunday services, are SUSPENDED INDEFINITELY due to this COVID 19 outbreak.



No Alêtheia activities until further notice due to COVID 19

We will regularly update you through email, the website, our Facebook Page, and for the privileged few (in other words, the technophobes who refuse to join the 21st Century). For anyone wishing to be contacted by phone we're happy to do that. Of course, you do need to let us know if you're in that category.

My email said that the Elders and the Staff and the Building Committee members would still gather... I even started setting up small groups to meet in homes, but with the possibilities the digital age affords us and with the spread of this illness to our valley, we will only meet electronically until we see the backside of this curve.

We're actively working on better ways to meet electronically. We will have lots of new ideas, including an interactive video group chat for Sunday school and perhaps online classes... We'll keep you informed.

As I said in the email, communication is essential. Unity is more vital now, than ever before. It will be incredibly easy for people to become disconnected. We must actively fight against that. Pray daily for your fellow Alêtheians - by name - Stacey can get you a list of names to help. Call each other, email, text, chat, whatever it takes to stay connected to each other.

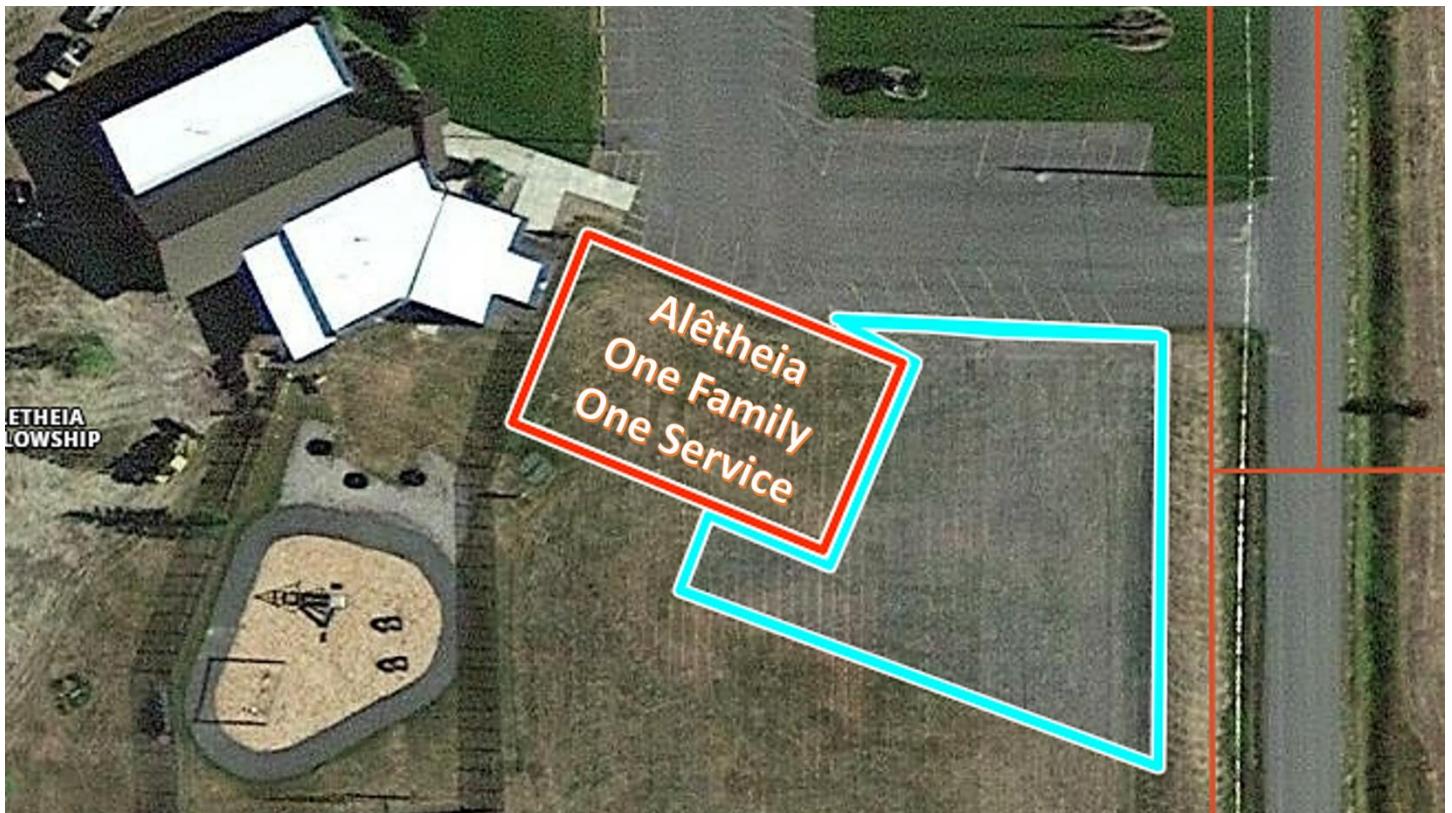
Remember the "Urgency Response Team." Join it and help, as soon as you need help let us know so we can respond. Stacey is coordinating all of that.

To help keep us connected and growing in our faith, the sermons will be videotaped and put on our website... I guess duh at this point. (www.myaletheia.com) We'll have it up every Sunday morning at 9:15 am and they will remain available for at least a month afterwards.

Now, are we going to be afraid? Christians must not fear, because we have nothing to fear. There is literally

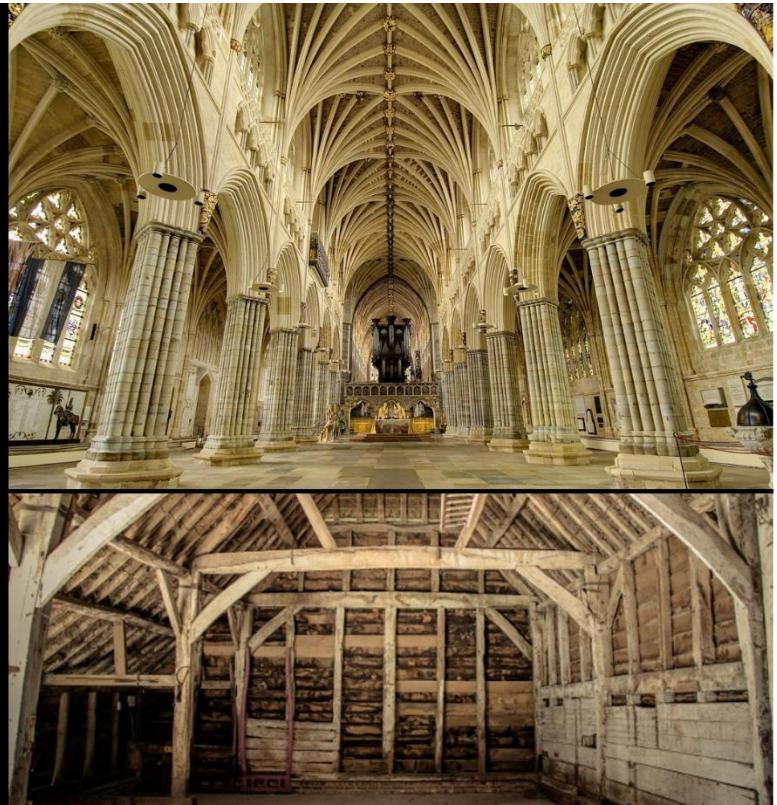
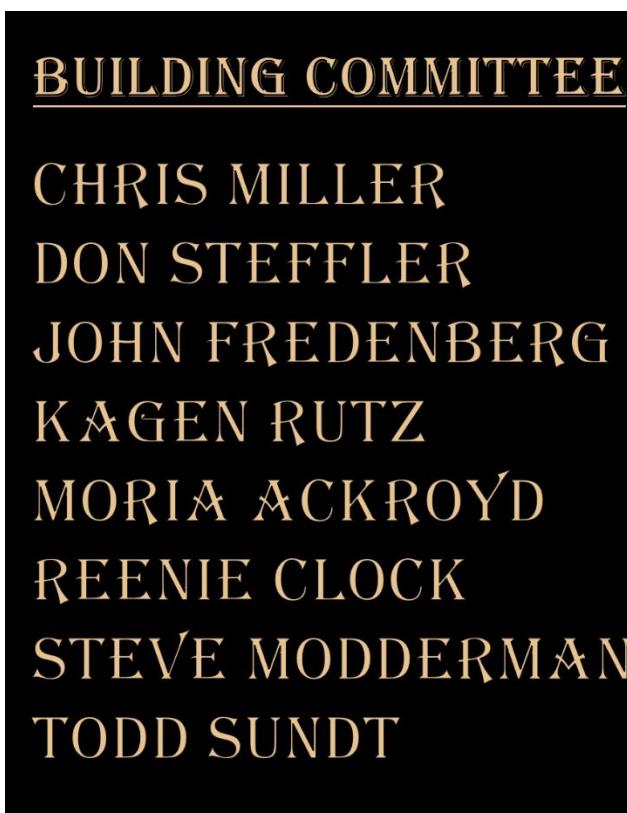
nothing to fear for those who are perfected in God's love. That, by definition means Christians.

As I said before, we should take reasonable precautions, and we are, but we should never buy into the panic that fear creates. We are His... Let's show those without Christ what peace in the storm looks like.



In spite of the challenges we face, the Elders have decided to trust God through the uncertainty of this situation by going forward with our commitment to build. We believe there will be an even greater need for the space in the future. We don't know what that will

entail exactly, but we want to position Alêtheia to better minister to people on Christ's behalf, come what may.



What people think we're going to build, and what we're actually going to build.

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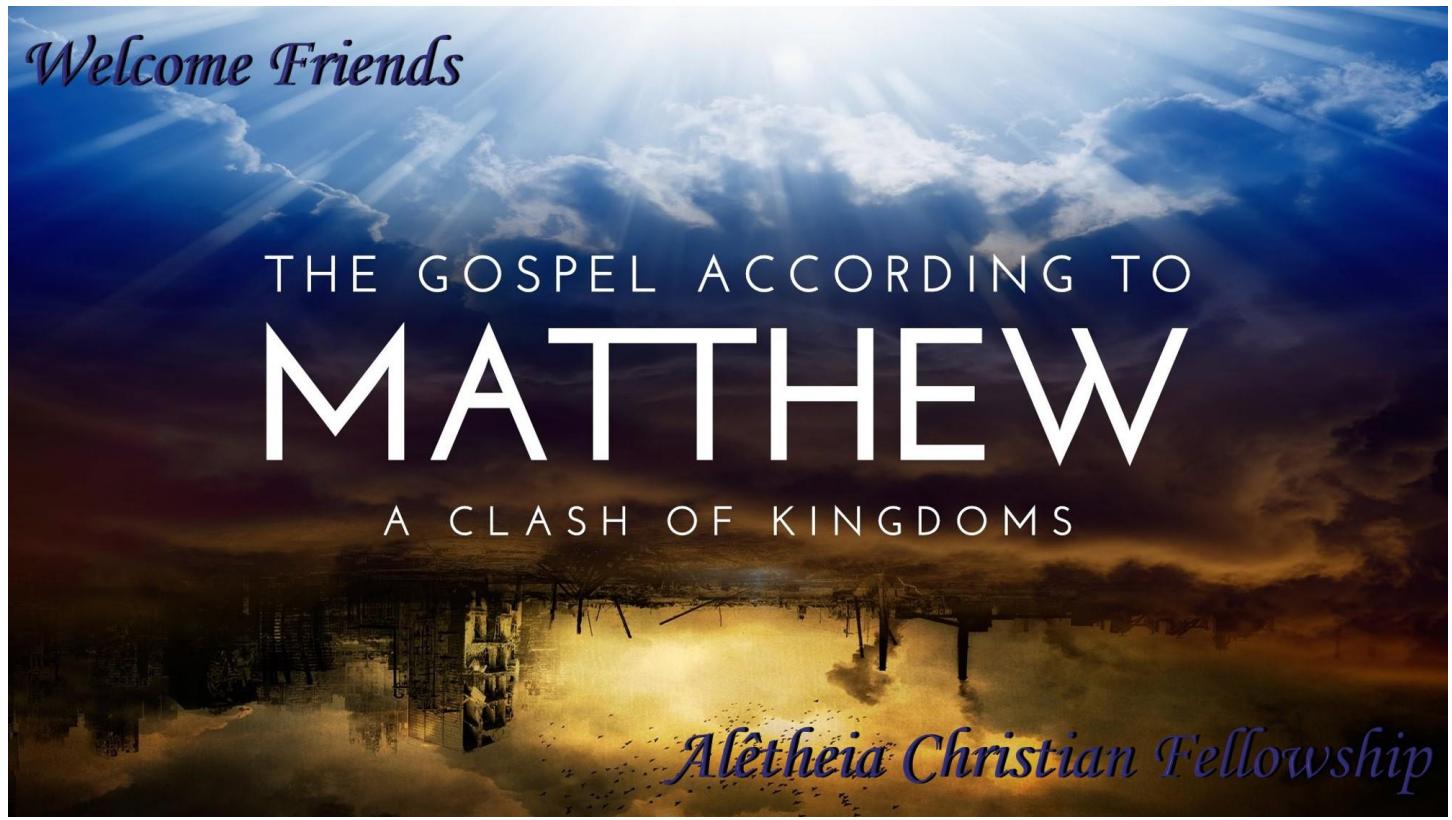
Stacey's Email: stacey.sundt@myaletheia.com

I have never asked for money, and I'm not asking now, nor will I ever ask (it's a favor God granted me when we started the church). A couple of my pastor friends told me last week that with such an attitude, I was not doing my job. Perhaps. What I will tells you is that the Biblical Tithe of 10% was for the Jews under the Law. What the New Testament tells Spirit-filled Christians is to simply be generous. My question, do you think generosity means giving less than 10%? I think I'm supposed to teach God's Word and encourage you to obey it in following Jesus. Further, it is my job to be forthright with you about all the things affecting the church, including our finances. Finally, it is my job to

allow each person to make up their own mind about what they will do. It's between you and God.

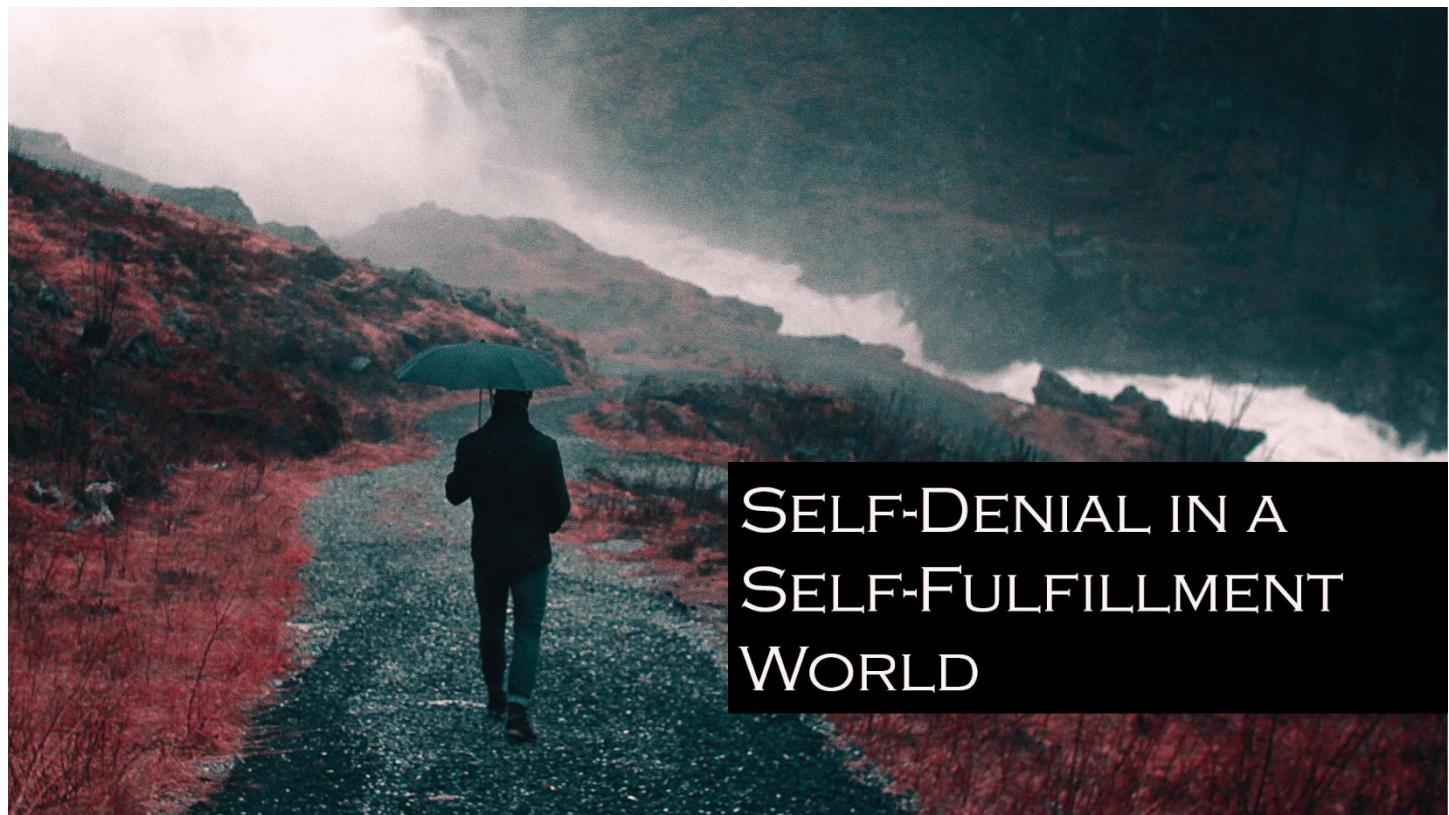
When I was a young Staff Sergeant, I would occasionally be faced with a moral, or ethical dilemma. An old Marine mentor of mine would just look me in the eye and say, "Let your conscience be your guide."

If you choose to give, the information to do so is in the email I sent and it will be in the outline, on the website and in the sermon notes... Or you can ask Stacey.



We've been in Matthew chapter 16 for a while now. Two weeks ago, we ended with verses 24 and 25. I'd

like to read them again for context and flow as we continue to the end of chapter 16.



SELF-DENIAL IN A SELF-FULFILLMENT WORLD

Matthew 16:21-28 ~ 24NASB 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. 25“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 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? 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. 28“Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here

who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

As we learned last time, Jesus basically said to His Disciples, not only was Peter wrong about what God has in store for Me, you are all wrong about what He has in store for you and all of those who will come after you.

We then talked about the stark difference between the Christianity Jesus described and the Christianity we live.

Naturally, we can rationalize that difference and we do - essentially every day. Jesus said that the, “Meek will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5) “Anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell” (Mt 5:22). “If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away” (Matthew 5:29). “Do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also” (Matthew 5:39). “If you don’t forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:15). “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). “If anyone wishes

to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 25“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” If we have a hard time rationalizing that away; we can at least ignore it... Right? I mean it isn’t like it was Jesus commanding these things...

As we discussed before, the words and concepts are crystal clear - there is no legitimate way to understand Jesus’ words in our passage, any other way, than the plain, obvious meaning.

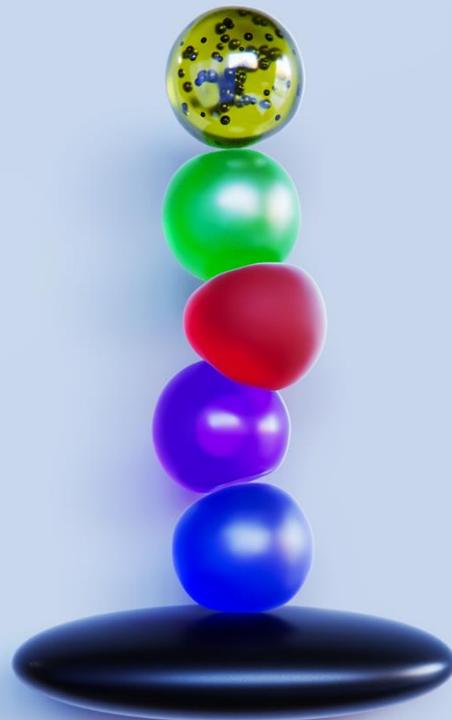
In order to be a Follower of Jesus, a Disciple of Christ, a Child of the Living God, a Born-again Believer, A Spirit-filled Saint, A Christian bound for Glory, you absolutely must, commit yourself entirely to Him - you must give Jesus your full allegiance.



To “Deny yourself, and to take up your cross and follow Him,” means that you are 100% in - entirely onboard - completely loyal - no matter what. It is not like being an Eagles fan, where you are a rabidly devoted fanatic one minute and utterly ashamed the next - to the point that they actually pelted Santa with snowballs.

It can never be what most human relationships are like... I'll love you; I'll be your friend; I'll stand shoulder to shoulder with you; I'll have your back... As long as you don't get too crusty. As long as someone better doesn't come along.

The fickleness of the human heart is well documented in the Bible... Never in a positive light.



It is detestable to God that we are “Double-minded,” “Unstable,” “Wavering, like a wind tossed wave” (James 1:6-8). That our yes, doesn’t always mean yes and our no doesn’t always mean no (Matthew 5:37, James 5:12).



We think our heart is fickle because it's just they way we are, but this indecisive, on again, off again, inconstant, vacillating, fickleness, is not anything more than the result of pure unadulterated "Hedo-Narcissistic Egoism." If you haven't heard of it before, it's because it was a concept I came up with and wrote about in my graduate thesis. Evidently it wasn't picked up by mainstream Seminarians.

Narcissism from Νάρκισσος (Näṛ-kēs-sōs), who was a Christian dude mentioned in Romans 16:11. Actually, he was unfortunately named after the Greek mythological dude who fell in love with his own reflection. It is a love of self, so strong, that nothing

else compares – narcissists will sacrifice anything and anyone without remorse – without conscience, if they think it will serve their ends, advance their agenda or protect their status. Another word for it is self-love. In that guise, secular psychology actually promotes it as vital to mental health - it is self-adulation.

Egoism from the Greek ἐγώ (ě-gō). You've heard it before; it occurs more than 2,500 times just in the New Testament. It's the pronoun "I." The great "Me." It is an intense self-centeredness. It's all about me. I am the center of the universe. Other ways to say it is, self-focused, self-obsessed, or self-absorbed.

Hedonism is from the Greek ἡδονή (hā-dō-nā), meaning pleasure, gratification, or delight, used a few times in the Bible such as James 4:3, 3NIVWhen you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your PLEASURES." Hedonism is the doctrine that pleasure, or happiness, is the chief good in life. In America we made it part of the basis for our rebellion against our true king. Our Declaration of Independence, the document that formally threw down the gauntlet for the Revolutionary War, guaranteed that every American

had the God-given right to pursue their own happiness – the God-given right to be hedonistic.

For more than 240 years we have been telling ourselves that we have the fundamental right to actively chase down and grasp whatever it is that makes us happy... Illicit sex, wanton greed, no-fault divorce, abortion on demand, instant relief from any pain, difficulty, or stress. Another word for it is self-indulgent.

The Bible says, 1bNIRV&NLT There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will love only themselves. They will love money. They will brag and be proud. They will scoff at God and tear others down. They will disobey and disrespect their parents. They will be ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. 3 They won't love others. They will be unforgiving. They will gossip and tell lies about others. They will not exercise self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. 4 They will betray their friends, act without thinking, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. 5 They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly (II Timothy 3:1b-5a).

While I can confidently say that no one here fits that description, I can just as confidently say, that to one degree, or another, everyone here fits that description.

As 21st century humans we are so focused on ourselves and our interests, so accustomed to complaining, striving, fighting, manipulating to get our way, all of us believing, deep down inside, that we deserve to be happy, that our own personal happiness is so important that we sacrifice relationships, we sacrifice our personal integrity, we sacrifice justice and mercy, honesty and goodness in an effort to make our lives better.

If we can acknowledge that, we realize that the only reason we are fickle is because we are concerned about ourselves more than about the object of our devotion. In other words, we are more devoted to self than to Christ.

Jesus is telling us today, that such a state will not work. Anyone who loves their life, their world, their parents, their spouse, their children, their work, their pursuits, their reputation, their own selves, more than Jesus, is not worthy of Jesus (Matthew 10:26-39).

We're talking about an unabashed, unwavering devotion to Him, no matter what.

We sing about it all the time. Come whatever may - "In the desert place." "In the wilderness." "On the road marked with suffering," "When there's pain in the offering." What? "Blessed be Your name." "When sorrows like sea billows roll," "Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come," What? "It is well with my soul." Why? Well, because He "Hath shed His own blood for my soul." That's why, "It is well with my soul," and "Blessed be Your name."



The idea is like the noble knight of the romanticized

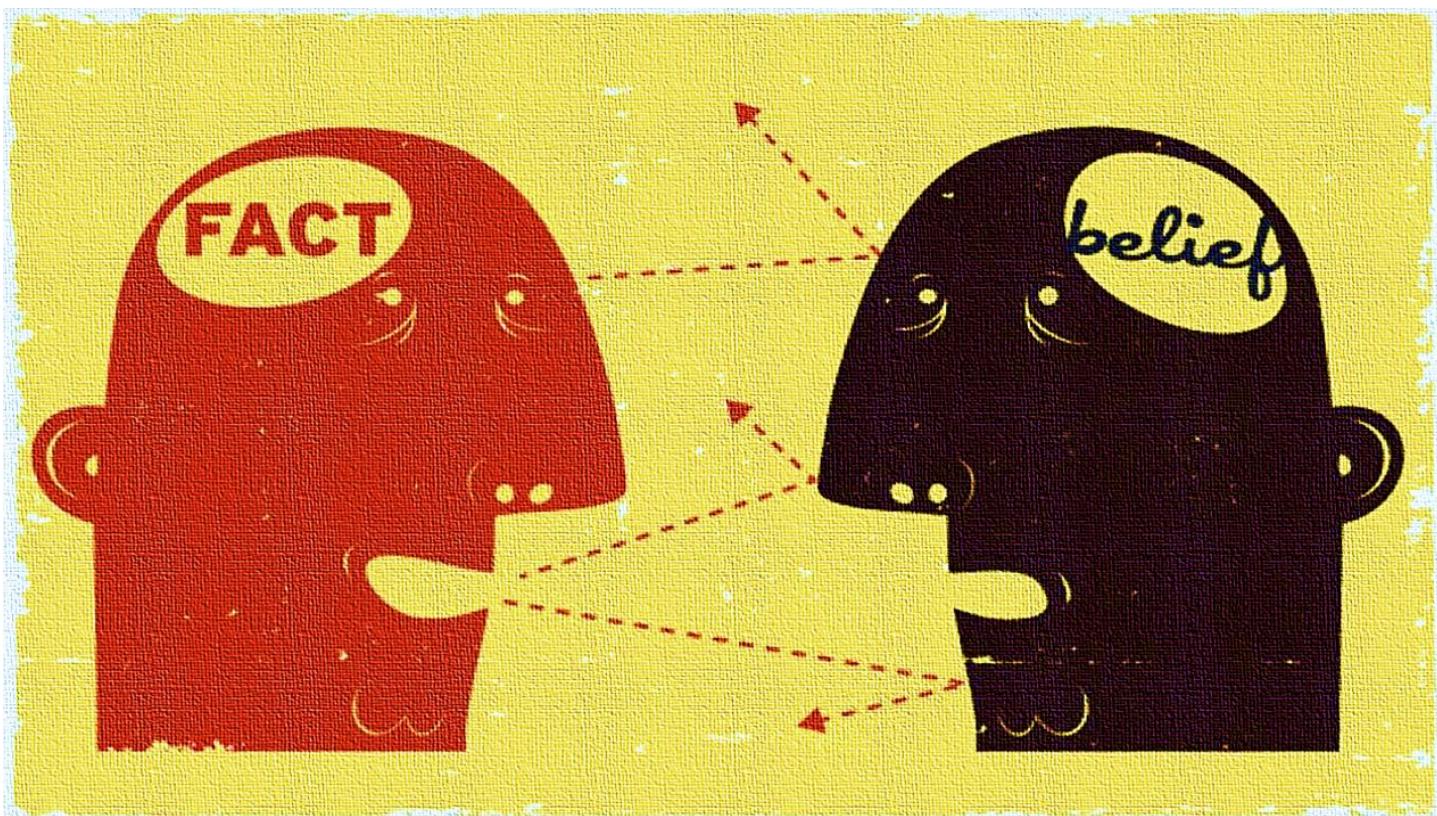
Age of Chivalry. This idealized knight would swear fealty to their Liege Lord, King or Pope, to forfeit everything they were in his service.

It was an oath and a bond, a covenant that was so sacred and unbreakable that even the hint of disloyalty would be instantly dealt with in the harshest manner and the Knight himself would rather die a thousand deaths rather than to be thought so dishonorable.

Perhaps the ultimate was the Japanese Samurai who would immediately take their own life at even the suggestion that they failed in their devotion to duty, or sullied their word, or reputation.

Notice that the call here from Jesus has no terminus. It isn't "Deny yourself" for some period of time, or for some objective purpose, or to accomplish an end goal... What I'm saying is, it isn't deny yourself of chocolate so that there will be more chocolate in heaven. It is simply "Deny yourself."

Last week Rich talked about how love and faith are meaningless without an object... Love God, Have faith in Jesus. The "Deny yourself" bit has no object.



Søren Kierkegaard put it this way, “En mand er påkrævet.” He was Danish... Okay, so translated he wrote, “A man is required to make the greatest possible sacrifice to dedicate his whole life as sacrifice—and wherefore? There is indeed no wherefore. ‘Then it is madness,’ says the understanding. There is no wherefore... because there is an infinite wherefore.” Kierkegaard went on to say, that the only way to work this out is through faith, not rationality.

We humans think facts can't reason with belief... It's really the other way around. Belief cannot convince our rational mind that the facts, as we conceive them, are wrong.

Calvin came to much the same conclusion. He said self-denying full devotion to the Lord and His cause is the “Chief sum of the Christian life.” He went on to say that, “It consists first of all of seeing that human reason is no longer “the person’s master” and no longer “Has dominance over morals.” Calvin’s point was that “Self-denial” stands in radical opposition to every shrewd Christian adjustment to the circumstances. The greatest enemy to the “Deny yourself, and daily pick up your cross and follow Me,” is our own rational thinking. “Self-denial” stands in radical opposition to every shrewd Christian adjustment to the circumstances.

Let’s put it the other way around. Our own rational, but self-serving mind, constantly seeks to adjust life in our favor which is the radical opposite of self-denial.

As soon as any deprivation, or trouble of any kind, afflicts us, we begin to think of ways to improve our lot and when those ways are opposed to God’s ways, we rationalize those ways.

This is how devout Christians end up having affairs, getting divorced, giving less to the church, jumping from church to church, justifying an abortion or an

addiction, or any number of other things that we do in an effort to enhance our life at the expense of God's reputation.

"We have met the enemy and he is us." Pogo.



Again, Kierkegaard explained that this whole thing flies in the face of reason. To put it Biblically, Jesus said repeatedly, 6NASB "And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me" (Matthew 11:6) and things like it - it is the whole reason behind the "Stone of stumbling and the rock of offence" (Romans 9:33).

Whenever any of us undergoes tribulation, the chances that we will be offended, rises exponentially with the duration of the tribulation. How many times have we heard Christians complain bitterly about their lot? In order to be victorious and actually Follow Christ we must believe, and our belief must be bigger.

Trust God through faith that whatever happens, He has everything in complete control, and it will all turn out for the greatest possible good to the greatest possible extent. You believe that, or you don't. If you do believe it - then how much?

Let's get just a little more practical about it... As soon as we start talking about self-sacrifice, we start looking for loopholes.

I entreat us all to do what the Apostle Paul repeatedly instructed. "Test yourself," "Examine yourself," "Gird" and "Guard yourself." Look at your rationalizations and ask yourself whether it's better to do as you please by rationalizing, or to suffer by fully obeying God?

Let's reread Jesus' words on the matter... "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

Do you suppose that He was merely being poetic? Perhaps a bit philosophical, theoretical or hypothetical? What do you think? Maybe Jesus just wanted to goose the guys, shock them, shake them up a little - maybe it was all for dramatic effect. What do you think?

We are so focused on grace that we basically think that we can do anything, and get away with it, that it will all be fine in the end. Some will say, oh no Scott, I think our behavior and choices matter... Sure you do, until the heat is turned up to high for some extended period of time.

Look, you're a married Christian with a satisfying love life. Of course, it's easy to condemn extramarital sex, homosexuality and adultery... That's not your problem - that's not where you're tempted. What if you had no spouse? What if you were single for years? What if you had a tremendous sex drive.



We judge weakness in others at the point of our strength, while simultaneously expecting to be judged at our point of strength, rather than our point of weakness. As I've said many times. When it comes to others, we want justice, but when it comes to us, we want mercy.



Go ahead and play fast and loose with God. Go ahead and live your life for yourself even though as a Christian you covenanted with Almighty God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to live your life for Him, but go ahead, break your covenant and live for yourself and I guess hope for the best...



But what I know, is Jesus plainly said it will not work out the way you think. You can live for you, or you can live for Jesus, but, according to His Holy Word, you cannot do both.



Jesus understands that it's a lot and so He gave us some motivation. He didn't have to - He's the boss - He could just say do and leave it at that, but He loves us and wants us to see the unimaginable value in living for Him.

You could be Warren Buffet, or Mike Bloomberg. Warren will be 90 soon and Mike is nearly 80... Realistically how is their vast wealth and all the power, fame, possessions and comfort, it can buy going to help them 10-20 years? Even if you were Mark Zuckerberg who is only 35 years old... How is his 66 Billion dollars going to help him when, in what will seem like the blink of an eye, he's 95? Is it even

remotely possible that one of the many billionaires on the planet, will get to the Great White Throne Judgement, and be able to bribe Almighty God? Hey, God, how about a little under the table here. God, of course will say, I don't think so buckaroo banzai. The Billionaire will say, Lord, I don't think You understand the amount we're talking about here. What are the chances God will say, "Oh, wow, that really is a lot of money?"

What good is it if you took the offer Satan tempted Jesus with? "All the kingdoms of the world and their glory" (Matthew 4:8). What good.

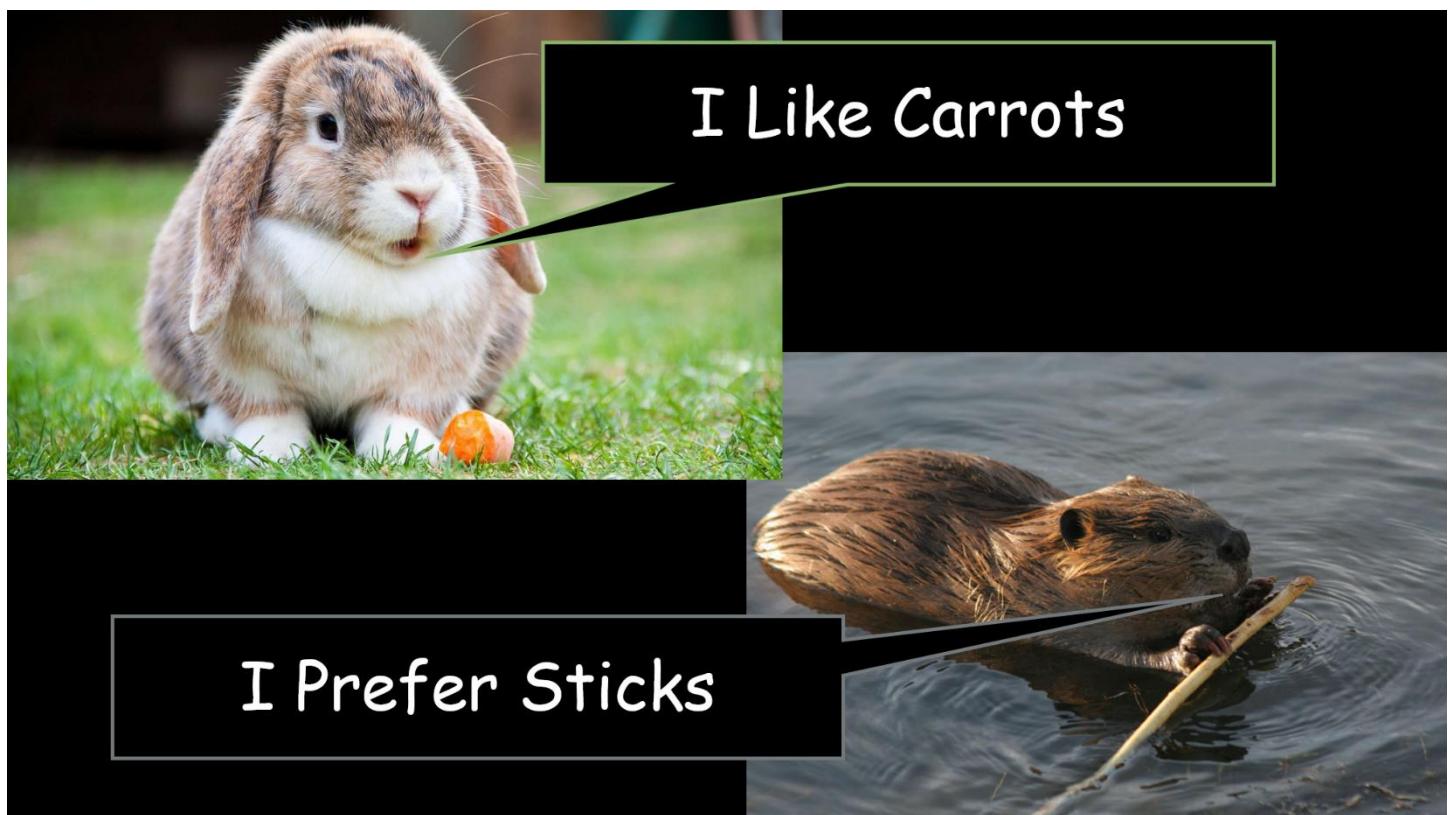


Our problem is largely a perspective problem. Years ago, I gave John a white rope and had him uncoil it through the sanctuary and out the back door. I asked everyone to imagine that it just kept going on and on forever without end. Then I showed that the tip of the rope was colored black - about an inch of black on the end. I said the black represented our physical lifespan and the unending white our future life. I said for most of us we are well over halfway through our present life and yet that's all we worry about - this half inch or so of a rope that has no end... We're worried about that minuscule, insignificant, barely noticeable bit and relatively unconcerned about the rest of the rope.

That's Jesus' point. How dumb to be worried about this at the expense of that... It makes no sense. Why do we do it? It's what we know, because it's what we experience. The rest is only experienced through faith.

What do you believe and how much do you believe it? Whom do you trust and how much do you trust Him? Fret about this and lose that, or just trust God and walk through this life with the integrity to fulfill your covenant to Him.

How? Pray? Why? The only way faith is built is through knowing God - Prayer is the very best way to accomplish that end. Of course, grow in Biblical knowledge. Of course, grow by putting faith into action. Of course, grow by actually obeying what God's already revealed. Pray through it all and you will know Him and His character and then you will know His Will and have His power to live in it.



The motivation continues and it is both positive and negative. Stick and carrot. The carrot is that Jesus is coming back. He's coming back with the full glory of God and surrounded by an angelic army. His return will be "Soon and very soon." He will have His reward with Him and will generously repay every sacrifice so handsomely it will be impossible to calculate.

What's the stick? The negative part? It is implied. Jesus will repay every person according to what they have... Believed? He will repay everyone for... Who they knew? For the church... They attended? For the size of their... Bank account? No, He will repay

everyone for what they did... He will repay them
“According to their deeds.”



The concept is explicitly stated twice in the Old Testament. Psalm 62:12, 12NASB And lovingkindness is Yours, O Lord, For You RECOMPENSE a man according to his work.” “Recompense” is שָׁלֵם (shä-läm), related to שָׁלֹם (shä-lōm). The main meaning is that of soundness, wholeness, and completeness and so it means to be healthy, safe and secure, and therefore, peace. As a thing given, it is a recompense, a reward, a repayment. Something given back, directly related to some kind of commendable effort, performance, or activity.

The other explicit parallel is Proverbs 24:12,
12bNASB Does He not consider it who weighs the
hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul?
And will He not RENDER to man according to his
work?" "Render" is שׁוב (shüv), meaning to turn back, or
return. Someone loans you an item and later you give it
back, שׁוב, to them.

In the New Testament we have 9 additional explicit
parallels. From Romans 2:6 through Revelation 22:12
and there are a few different Greek words used, mostly
ἀποδίδωμι (ä-pō-dē-dō-mē). The first part ἀπό (ä-pō),
is a preposition indicating movement away from and
the second part is δίδωμι (dē-dō-mē) means to give.
Together it is to "Hand over," to bestow, reward,
recompense, to render from one to another... Whether
good or bad - it is to repay in kind.

Another term is found in II Corinthians 5:10,
10NASB For we must all appear before the judgment
seat of Christ, so that each one may be
RECOMPENSED for his deeds in the body, according
to what he has done, whether good or bad.

“Recompensed” is κομίζω (kō-mē-dzō), meaning to receive back. You buy someone lunch and later they reciprocate and buy you lunch - The meaning is to be repaid in accordance with what you’ve previously paid.



The other word is μισθός (mēs-thōs), meaning a person’s wages - their compensation for work done. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 3:14, 14NASB If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a REWARD. “Reward” simply means his rightful wages paid for the work done.

In every case, both Old and New Testament, the Bible consistently shows that every person will one day be judged by God and afterward will be paid the wages they earned - whether good, or bad.

Sounds a bit legalistic. It is the Law of God. Like so many other human religions there is a sense that your entire life will be weighed - the good on one side, the bad on the other. If the scale tips the wrong way...

Here's the difference. After three chapters the Apostle Paul summed it up in the familiar verse, Romans 3:23, 23NASBAll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

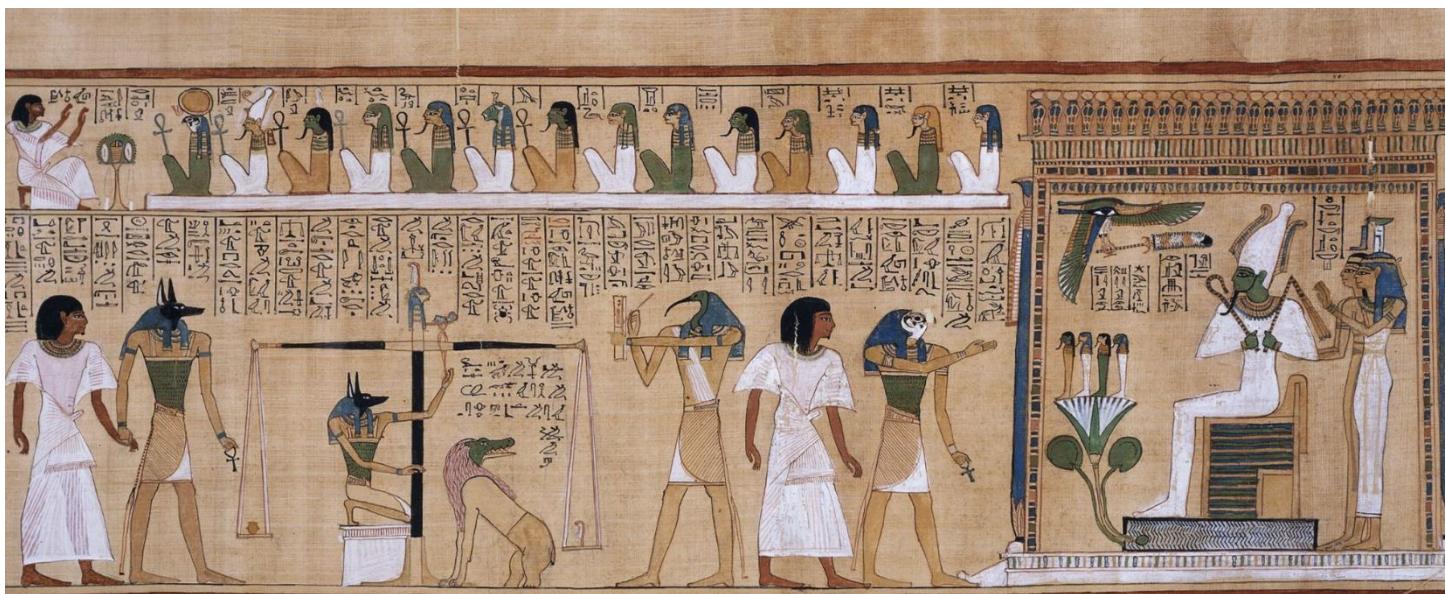
The Bible declares that God is perfect and that human beings are anything but. Further, it declares that only God can bridge the gap. It's utterly impossible for anyone of us to barge in to the Kingdom of God, to demand an audience with Him to travel to where He is and that is why the Bible declares that “Salvation belongs to the Lord” (Psalm 3:8).

God instituted the Law for the Jews to fully demonstrate man's utter inability to save himself. The Law showed our imperfection and the Sacrificial

System showed that someone had to pay with their life's blood.

Jesus was declared the “Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). Revelation 20:11-15, 11MSG I saw a Great White Throne and the One Enthroned. Nothing could stand before or against the Presence, nothing in Heaven, nothing on earth. 12And then I saw all the dead, great and small, standing there—before the Throne! And books were opened. Then another book was opened: the Book of Life. The dead were judged by what was written in the books, by the way they had lived. 13Sea released its dead, Death and Hell turned in their dead. Each man and woman was judged by the way he or she had lived. 14Then Death and Hell were hurled into Lake Fire. This is the second death—Lake Fire. 15Anyone whose name was not found inscribed in the Book of Life was hurled into Lake Fire.

People are judged on the only thing that is judgeable - their life's activity. The “Books” contain everything you've ever thought, said or did, without exception... Not a single minute detail is missed.



Egyptian Book of the Dead in three panels: A man is led by Anubis; his heart is weighed, and found acceptable, Horus presents the man to Osiris while Thoth records the judgement.

You are weighed, just as the Ancient Egyptians and the current Muslims and many others believe, but unlike those other religions, you are always, in every case, forever, found wanting. Everyone is found to “Fall short.” Every person so judged... Is condemned to the “Lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).



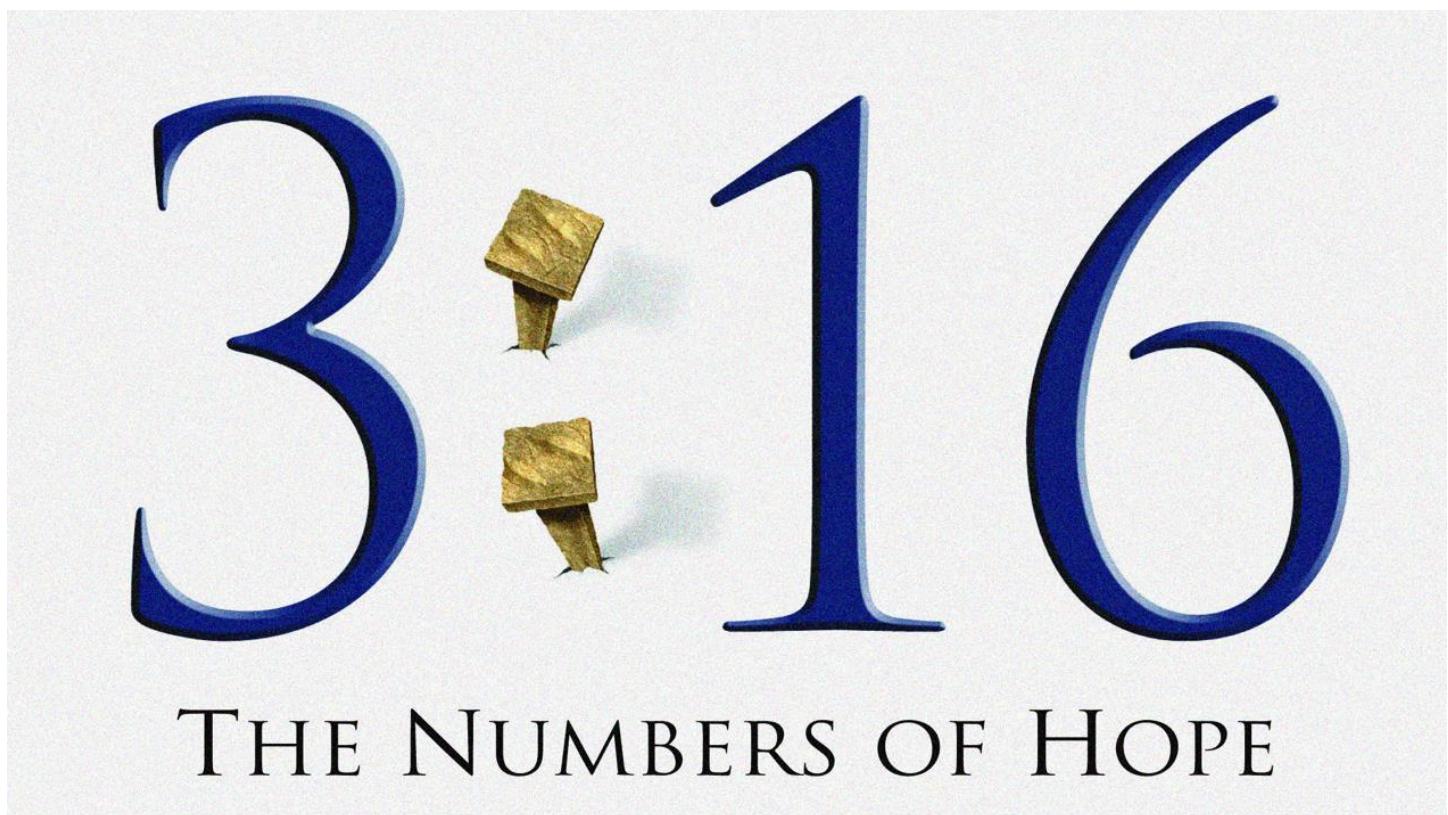
Notice though, that regardless of what is written in those “Books,” there is another “Book.” The full title of that Book is found in the next chapter. It is specifically the “Lamb’s Book of Life.”

Jesus clearly stated this concept in John 3:18, 18NASB“He who believes in Him (that’s the Lamb of God, Jesus the Messiah, the One and Only Begotten Son) “He who believes in Him is not judged (Why pray tell? Because His belief in the Christ has inscribed his name in the Lamb’s Book of Life); he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

That's fantastic news for those who believe, but the most dire and ominous news for those who do not.

If you're not a Christian, which is what we call those who believe in Christ, then you will be hurled headlong into the Lake of Fire.

Seems harsh and yet, the offer of salvation through Christ is universally available. Not one person is excluded from the possibility of believing in Christ.



Two verses earlier Jesus proclaimed John 3:16,

16NASB“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

“Whoever” is an all-inclusive term. So, is the Bible saying that any person who simply believes in Jesus is eternally saved? Yes! That’s precisely it.

Here’s the small print. We have a different idea about what the word “Believe” means. Biblically, this belief means that you genuinely, from the very core of your being believe it to be true. To a Believer, Christ is more real than gravity.

Every person believes in gravity enough that they will not leap from a great height unless they have a parachute or want to die. Our actions prove that we believe in gravity and it is the same with Christ.

The Christian believes in Christ so much that the fact of their belief is fully evident in their every word and action. If that describes you - congratulations!

On the other hand, if there is no physical evidence of belief, it is not sufficient belief - it isn’t salvific.

Because of that the Bible can declare “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). What was Jesus’ brother really saying there? He said in the very same way that a person without a spirit is just a dead body. Faith without physical evidence showing that it is true belief is likewise just a dead body.

For you, Christian person, it isn’t about legalism - it can never be about doing things in order to be accepted by God - that’s what the whole Jewish Law thing proved was unworkable - for you it must be believing so strongly that God has already accepted you in Christ that your life aligns with that belief and so your thoughts, words and deeds, likewise naturally, inevitably, forever, follow suit.

They do deny themselves; they do pick up their cross; and they do follow Jesus.



Verse 28 causes tremendous confusion. It shouldn't. Jesus' Kingdom is the Kingdom of Heaven. That Kingdom is characterized by a reign, not by a realm. It isn't about an existing space, but a quality - the quality where God is completely unopposed.

I make decisions all the time - it gets tiring if I'm honest. People generally oppose at least some of those decisions, at least initially. As a bare minimum, people will occasionally have misgivings, or partial reservations.



That is opposition to me personally. You know the saying used by the mob hit man, "It's nothing personal"? Well, it's always personal to the one in the firing line. It's okay, I get it and I am genuinely not complaining. I'm a fallible human being, among fallible human beings - we all do it.

Why though? Why do we see a decision made by a leader, or committee, or judge, or legislative body, big, or small and have objections? We see a new speed limit and disagree, we see a travel ban and object, we see new church times and have misgivings... Why? It can only be because we feel superior to the decision makers regarding intelligence, wisdom, understanding of the issue at hand and all that nuances it. We have

better common sense and should have the authority to overrule them - in short, we know better than the decision makers.

Please understand, I'm not in any way chastising or complaining, I do it all the time myself. I'm just trying to get us to fully appreciate a reality here that will help us understand our relationship to the Kingdom of Heaven.

A while back I decided to change the service times. Some folks, at the very least, had initial misgivings. None who did, spent even a small fraction of the amount of time, effort, prayer and discussion that I did and yet felt completely comfortable questioning my decision. Again, I get it and it's okay.

Here's what's not okay... When we do the same thing to God. The full Kingdom of Heaven is where the subjects trust God and never, even for an instant, have the audacity to question Him. This is the realm where His reign is completely unopposed.

We live in that realm to the degree that we fit that description. How well do you fit that description?

Jesus came into His Kingdom, while Peter and John, Matthew and James, Luke and Paul were still alive, because they fit that description.

We have an opportunity in this crisis to fit that description and in so doing show the world that God still dwells with man in the form of the Holy Spirit filling the Disciple of Jesus. The Son of Man's kingdom is here and now to the extent that we believe... to the degree that we trust.