

A Challenge to Believers

*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. *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.”

Tuesday evening I tuned into the state of the Union address. I was working so was only catching bits and pieces, but it made me think of one thing that is of significance in this passage before us.

In our grand experiment of democracy and freedom, I suppose that those of us who are the most conservative are perhaps the most guilty of a love of autonomy.

The idea of self government goes beyond the Federal and the states, right on down to the individuals. You don't tell me what to do, and I won't tell you what to do.

I want the government to leave me alone. I want the state to leave me alone. And so on. I want to be autonomous. A little Island of self government. I'll decide what, and how much.

I don't want car insurance that puts a tattletale in the car that tells the insurance company when I'm speeding. I don't want the extra \$250 bucks if I go and have the company doctor do a blood work up and tell me I'm eating too much. Whatever else is invasive into my private autonomy, I don't want it. Just leave me alone. Don't make recommendations, please.

Yes, it's that bad. Turns out I was dealt a pretty good hand. Not much to look at, but, I'm pretty competent. At a lot of things. I don't need anybody. Mostly. Except Pam and my kids. Leave me alone. I don't need your safety classes. Get out of My personal space.

Invictus by William Ernest Henley

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

Welcome to America, right. Sure, I'm overstating a bit to make my case, but we're guilty. America is built on this stuff. Gritty autonomy!

We live in a land, or used to, that instills in it's citizens the value of autonomy. We live for one person. ME. Sure, we have our families, and most of us have to show up at our jobs to get a paycheck, but honestly, we Americans, we're islands. Untouchable. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for old number 1.

And then, Jesus comes along and blows that to bits.

23But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

Ask yourself why this church was set up with no membership? Why??

Well, it's because we're Americans and we don't need no stinking church getting into our business and telling us what we can and can't do. Right?

I'll come to church if I feel like coming to church. I'll help in a ministry if I feel like helping in a ministry. I'm not going to submit to any authority unless I feel like it.

We fight against submitting to authority with every fiber of our beings. Welcome to Adam's race. Again; Jesus, *23But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”*

Jesus seems to be sort of cranky about the master of my soul thing.

That's our introduction to our passage this morning. A little bit harsh? It turns out, Jesus doesn't need any one who is master of their fate and captain of their soul. There's no room for those folks in His kingdom.

He's pretty adamant about it. My little introduction is actually sort of bright and sunny compared to what Jesus is going to say.

Let me give you some background information first that is going to make what Jesus says seem perfectly logical. No big interpretations necessary.

Jesus is picturing a world, a government, where He is King and we are His servants. And not just servants, we are servants who worship Him for being the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, of everything.

Don't like that picture? Don't forget that we are His servants because He

loved us so much that He purchased us, ransomed us out of Satan's authority and death's sentence against us. Purchased us, in love, to be His own. We have been bought with a price.

Now then, in view of what He has just said to Peter, about being in the clutch of man's interests instead of God's, He says;

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.

Peter gets it right. *Thou art the Christ. The Son of the Living God!*

Then he gets it wrong. Nobody's going to Jerusalem. Nobody's going to die.

Then he gets put in his place. *Get behind Me Satan. You're a stumbling block to me. For you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but on mans.*

Then he gets his marching orders from the King. *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.*

Is this for real? Does this apply to christians? Really? Does God expect American christians to set their pursuit of life, liberty and happiness aside and humbly follow Jesus? Maybe to death. No guarantees. Death or at least the possibility of it, is in these verses.

Many years ago, I was forced to do a stint in the military. Naval Air Reserve. There was boot camp. And the seargent there explained to us that we left the Bill of Rights at the camp gate. We no longer had any rights. We belonged to him. We would sleep when he said sleep and get up when he said get up. March when he said march. Eat when he said eat. Clean when he said clean.

When you join the military service, you don't tell the seargent, you guys go ahead over that next hill, I think I'm going to sip lemonade and rest a while in the shade.

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

My dad used to say, there's a pair of scissors over on the bench. You can cut that verse out of your Bible if you don't like it. His point was well taken. You can picture a Bible with pages that look like someone cut out a paper doll accordion. A lot of air with a few pieces of white paper holding the pages shape.

That's what religious liberalism did! Anglicans from all over the world met this week in Canterbury to decide once and for all if the African and global southern members of that group will somehow keep calling themselves Anglicans.

Their problem is they don't accept all the tampering of the mother ship on homosexuality and other issues that emasculate the original orthodoxy of that denomination. It's splitting them apart. The European churches did the thing with the scissors.

I think we do that. We get to something like this and we say, well it can't mean *that*, it must mean something else, so I'll set it aside for later. We'll figure out what this really means some other time. And off we go, completely unaffected by the Word of God. Like the guy in James who looks in the mirror and walks away, unaffected.

So, again, is this for real? Is this requirement for modern American autonomous christians? Quit beating around the bush pastor, and tell us.

I'm not going to do that. I've got a different approach. Turn back to Matthew 13 and look again at the parable of the soils.

3And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, “Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5“Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6“But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

7“Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8“And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9“He who has ears, let him hear.”

Which soil represents the real believers? The fruit bearing soil. Of the other 3 soils, what causes no fruit? Shallow soil caused a root system that couldn't withstand heat. No fruit. Weedy soil caused plants that were competing with pressures that caused in the end, no fruit.

The cares of this world = no fruit. The troubles and pressures of this world = no fruit. The offense of the gospel = no fruit. The love of this world, in the case of the seed eaten by birds because the soil was hard, the love of this world = no fruit.

Do you see where I'm going? In view of this parable, is what Jesus requires of people in order to follow Him, is it for us? Does vs. 24 apply to us?

Only if you want to bear fruit for the glory of the King.

24Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

Man, this is difficult. We are wired to live for self. This is SO counterintuitive to us! He's asking us to set aside the most basic American tenet there is. Life. Liberty. Happiness, or at least the pursuit of it, wherever it is. Those are our deepest American values

25“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

This is like working for Sandia Labs, and being part of a military attachment. So you go off for 3 months to do the military thing, but Sandia says, if you give us that paycheck from the military, we'll give you your normal paycheck you would get as if you'd been at work.

It's a poor illustration. You can't keep both paychecks. You give up the

Service one because the Sandia one is bigger.

We Americans. We've got a pretty good deal. Freedom. Autonomy. Possibilities. Maybe we'll hit the lottery. Anything's possible. And Jesus comes along and says, you can keep that life if you want to. Live every day for yourself. Ignore God's interests and pursue your own selfish ones.

But you can't have both. You can't live for your own selfish interests and also follow me.

You can't march in Satan's army and mine. At the same time. You have to choose one. Live for you? or live for me? What's it gonna be?

25 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Wait a minute here. With the Sandia offer, I know the numbers ahead of time. I know what the military pay is and I know what the Sandia pay is. It's a no brainer. Take the bigger paycheck, right.

But here, this is a lot more nebulous. I'm an American. I've got a lot going for me. Lots of possibilities. What exactly is Jesus offering?

Give up my American life with all it's possibilities? For what? Jesus isn't very definitive here. Lose MY life for His sake? That sounds expensive.

His promise is if you'll go out on blind faith, if you'll trust Him to give you a "life" as a servant in His Kingdom, ultimately, what you'll get is infinitely of more value than what you now possess.

25 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

It's a riddle. It's a man going down a familiar highway, and he comes to a Y in the road and one way is broad and easy and well known to him, and the other has a sign that says "heavenly" but it's a narrow rocky

steep road, and you can only see a short distance up that road and then it turns and you can't see any further, where it goes. The only thing you've got to go by, is that sign.

That sign and a book. This book. And the man who put that sign up wrote this book.

You've got your 1.6 billion dollar lotto ticket in your pocket, but there's no lotto payout on that narrow road.

Still, there's the promises in this book. Promises of an eternal spiritual fortune worth infinitely more than the lotto ticket.

What do you do. Give up this life and all it's possibilities and go on a different road that only has promises in a book? And it's a costly road. A difficult road. You could be steps away from cashing in that lotto ticket, right? You have to give up all those possibilities to go on the "heavenly" road.

You look on the sign that says "heavenly" and there's some small print; *25 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*

For 2 generations now, the evangelical church has been teaching, "You don't have to give up anything!"

Have you heard that? 2 generations of seminary leaders have said, this is bunk. Anybody who says what Jesus clearly says here, is adding works to salvation.

What in the world? What do you do with everything Jesus said then?

Jesus came preaching; what? *The Kingdom of God is at hand.* It's here. Therefore, repent.

The authority to reign of God is at hand. It's here. Change course. Repent means take a different road. Different direction.

The authority to reign of God, as opposed to the authority to reign of the ruler of this world, Satan, is here! It's available.

The possibility of following the King of Righteousness as opposed to following the king of perdition, is here. Choose.

The choice is yours. Two armies. Two kings. You're a slave to the king of perdition, but if you choose the King of righteousness, and peace, He'll purchase you. Free you from being a slave to that other king. Redeem you from that wicked king's army.

And then what?? Well according to generations of seminary leaders in American evangelicalism, you can just keep right on marching in Satan's army if you like. No requirement to come out of that and join with the other King, who bought you with His blood.

Really? Really? *25“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*

I don't think so. I think the folks who go half way, and then buy in to the American autonomy thing, not gonna go all the way, not right now, gonna at least see if that lottery ticket is any good, I think those folks are the 3 soils in the parable that don't bring forth any fruit. And then they're gone.

They "save their life" in this world, and they lose real life.

Jesus is going to argue this idea.

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?

OK, we'll expand the Y in the road thing. The guy with the lottery ticket. He decides to go a bit farther up the broad easy road, the well worn, known road. See if that ticket will hit.

Bam! It does. 1.6 billion dollars! The government even lets him keep 240 million of it! That's a lot of money!!

He goes straight to Sunset Boulevard in Beverly Hills and buys the Playboy mansion. Hugh Hefner, move over. This guy's got it all. All the money. All the women. He's a rock star! The whole world looks on in envy.

Good thing he didn't go up that "heavenly" road at the Y. He'd miss all this, right? *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?"*

Mr. Hefner is still alive. But what's next for old Hugh? He'll be 90 in a couple more months. He proved, you can sin and get away with it. All that money. All those women. That address in Beverly Hills. He has it all! OR did. At 90, I've got to believe in the law of diminishing returns.

This is the man Jesus is talking about. You choose the lotto ticket, you win. Good for you. Your life is 5 minutes long. Then what?

The world has successfully put the idea of eternity, on "ignore". They've invented evolution to get rid of any God figure. No God. No standards. No judgement. No eternity. NOW is all you've got baby.

What if there was a way to quantify 2 lives, and at the end, ask the 2 men if they would like to trade places. We'll pick good old Hugh for one of them, and Adoniram Judson for the other.

You've heard of Hugh. Sadly, Judson may be a new name to you. He went from America to Burma in the 1820's and established christianity there that still exists today.

Hugh won the lottery in this world. More women than Soloman. More money too, perhaps. He had it all. Squandered in pleasure every day, as the Brinks trucks take his sin money to the bank. He's the world's hero.

Then there's Judson. We can only skim the details of his life. Easy to sort of quantify Hefner's shallow life in a sentence or two. Not so easy Judson.

He's not much to look at, compared to Hugh, although one of those greek fishermen's hats might close the gap a little.

He did have 3 wives though. He wore out 2 of them on the mission field, and finally the 3rd one, 29 years his junior, outlived him. One of his wives was buried at sea. On the way back home to try to wait out the malaria in a safe place, she died. 7 of his 13 children died. Malaria. Dysentery.

Such unimaginable suffering. He was the first American missionary to Burma. Here's my question. If you stood the 2 men in one place and asked them if they would like to trade places. Would Judson take the lottery ticket. In this life only?

Even in this life, Judson wouldn't have considered that trade for a second. And then there's the eternity thing, afterwards.

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?”

We can only guess about Judson and Hefner. But Jesus tells a similar story in Luke 16. The Rich Man and Lazarus

19“Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 20“And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22“Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23“In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 24“And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’ 25“But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26‘And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those

who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.’ 27“And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house— 28for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ 29“But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ 30“But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ 31“But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Verse 26 becomes a rhetorical question. 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?*

The answer is obvious. The question contains the answer. But, as they say on television, there's more;

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.

Hefner will get a reward for introducing a new generation of pornography. Before Hef, pornography was only spoken of and seen in the shadows. He elevated it to something . . . OK. Porno is classy stuff. Playboy magazine brought pornography "out of the closet" so to speak.

Hefner was a milestone man in history. Millions of people have been affected in my lifetime, because of him. Millions. The backbone of this nation was affected by Hefner. He showed us that you could sin and get away with it. He made sin, classy.

In my lifetime which is roughly the same as Playboy Magazine's existence, our nation has spiraled down down down in our morals. Hefner gets at least some of the credit. He made pornography classy.

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.

Judson, on the other hand, lived a life that Christians should call heroic. We should be reading the little Moody Colportage book about Judson to our children, and grandchildren. He lived larger than life. He was a lion of a man. The Baptist Church in Burma is alive and strong today 175 years later.

He was younger than I am now, when he died. But in heaven, millions, quite literally, millions of people will say, we wouldn't be here, except for this one man.

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.

The question came up in the ladies Bible study about judgement for Christians. How does that work. I thought Jesus paid for all that. Why does He continue to say, What you do now, matters for eternity?

Jesus says He'll repay every man according to what he did. What's that going to look like? Obviously we're not Adoniram Judsons. In fact we look dangerously closer to the soils that don't produce any fruit.

We have to go to Paul for this. He talks about rewards. Same language as Jesus uses here. Repayment. A famous passage from 1 Cor. 3. I'll read all the way from vs. 5 to vs. 15 to get the full context of Paul's discussion. He defines the reward Jesus talks about. For Christians. For non believers, the reward is hell.

5What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

10According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise

master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. 11For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Spiritual fruit, are those acts that God accomplished through you, by His Holy Spirit, that last for eternity.

Everything else is burned up. Model A's and antique cameras, burned up. No value.

Some of us will go through that fire clinging to our foundation stone, the Lord Jesus, and not much else.

Now, I'm going to preach to all of us, myself for sure. While we have breath, in this life, invest in the next life. Leave the things of this world behind, and follow Jesus to wherever He would take you.

Give what remains of this life, to Him. Ask Him to use you in some way, any way, to bring about fruit that will last for eternity.

Well, we've got one verse left. And I only want to touch on it this week. We'll begin with it next week and cover it fully then.

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."

Have you seen the latest commercials for DirectTV. The settlers. A guy walking behind a hand plow pulled by mules. It's a play on words. They're the settlers. Like the pioneers who settled the west.

Except now they're the settlers who settle for something less.

Verse 28 is all about seeing Jesus and experiencing His Kingdom.

The church in America knows nothing of that. Seeing Jesus. Experiencing His Kingdom. Those are ideas that are incomprehensible to us. Un-reachable. Out there in the stratosphere for somebody else, not us.

I believe the church in America has settled for a low common denominator. A low bar. We're settlers.

Giving up our lives to follow Jesus is too much for us. I think it's right here in these verses we looked at this morning that we stall. We settle for less. We bump along, lukewarm. This will have to do.

To go further, to get radical about our faith and give it all to Jesus. Too expensive. Too costly. This will have to do.

Look around you. This is all other churches have. Why should we be any different. This is good enough.

Well, is it?