

## To be or *almost* to be, that is the question.

### Matthew 16:21-28

#### Introduction

Matthew 16 points us to what it means to really follow Jesus and the very real challenge we face is for us to be found to be genuine followers of Jesus.

It's all too easy to be an almost follower, to say the right things, to go to church, to attend midweek meetings. To just allow enough religion into our lives to bring a modicum of comfort - yet underneath it all to be denying the high call of God on our life.

#### The realities of following Jesus

##### **Read verses 21-23**

For Peter, the reality of following Jesus had started to sink in. Peter needed to realise that there would be a cost to follow after Jesus, because Jesus was not heading in the direction Peter and the other disciples had thought.

***When have you found yourself rationalising away something that you know God as asked you to do (or stop doing)?***

***How can we avoid a worldly answer to a Godly prompting?***

***What steps can we take to discern God's voice, His prompting and guiding?*** (It's all too easy to want to protect those around us and act out of misplaced love. To interfere when God wants to do serious business in the life of someone you love.)

#### The commands in following Jesus

##### **Read verses 24-26**

We now come to some of the most important verses on the subject of following Jesus.

Looking at the text we see two clear commands: The **first** command is that we need to deny ourselves. The **second** command is that we take up our cross. Then in verses 25-26 we have three compelling reasons to carry out his command.

Jesus does not simply say to you and me - just deny yourself, just take up your cross, then follow me - just do it, just do it - like some kind of supernatural Nike advert. **NO**, Jesus gives us these commands and then gives you and me compelling reasons to obey, to carry out his commands. Jesus wants us to understand His *reasons* for us to do what he says.

***What incentives do we have to follow Jesus and why should we pay close attention to them?***

***What does Jesus mean when He commands us to take up our cross?*** (The cross is a symbol of opposition, shame, suffering and even death).

***What does denying ourselves and taking up our cross look like?***

***How can 2 Corinthians 5:17 help us in carrying out Jesus' commands?***

***How can you put Jesus on the throne of your life?*** (Perhaps start by thinking of the everyday, small things)

The rewards in following Jesus

**Read verse 27**

The troubles of this life - though they can seem like eternal ones at times, are very temporary. There is a glorious eternity awaiting those of us who trust in and follow Jesus fully to the end.

***How can looking ahead to the reward Jesus has for his followers help in living for Him now?***

Our greatest challenge at LBC is not whether we acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, but whether we are prepared to *truly* follow him.

***What might get in the way of us truly following after Jesus as we see here in Matthew 16?***

***Does the thought of Jesus coming back excite you? (if not, why not? Be honest and talk to God about it.)***

Bonus bit

**Read verse 28**

There are a number of 'interpretations' of this potentially tricky verse, but it (like all of scripture) *should* be read in the proper context of the text before and after it. Doing so is of vital importance, both greatly helping us and shining a light onto its meaning and application.

When Jesus was speaking to his disciples, he knew some would not heed his words and would not taste death till he comes again (The second coming of Jesus). In other words, there would be those who would not choose to *die to self* in this life - who would refuse to deny themselves and refuse to take up their cross and live fully for Jesus - turning their backs on his commands. As such, they would taste (the second) death (see Revelation 2:11 or 20:14 for an explanation of the second death) which is eternal separation from God. **Verse 28 is perhaps the most stark warning of all to the eternal danger facing the *almost follower* of Jesus.**

***Why do we often avoid the warnings we find in the Bible?***

***How can we heed Jesus' warning found here in Matthew 16:28?***

To be or *almost to be* - that is the question.

How will **you** answer in the year ahead?