

Good morning! Have you ever noticed that when you tell people about Jesus you almost always emphasize the good things that will happen---or more likely, the good things that have *already* happened? Sure; after all, following Jesus is good for us and we want others to experience it. Not surprisingly, entire movements have sprung up around material blessing, whether it is material wealth or physical healing. There's nothing wrong with telling people about the ways in which God has healed and prospered us, but those aren't the things Jesus emphasized, so they shouldn't be what we emphasize, either. This morning, let's listen in on a conversation Jesus had with His disciples:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it."

**Matt. 16:24-25**

When we study the Bible, we should always seek to understand the context of the passage we are reading. To do that, we must read verses before and after the passage. The context here is that Jesus had been telling His disciples that He was going to be tortured and killed and, ultimately, raised from death. Then the Bible says, "*But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. 'Heaven forbid, Lord,' he said. 'This will never happen to you!'*" Why did he say that? Because he loved Jesus and wanted to believe that He wouldn't be harmed. It is after this exchange that we read today's passage about the importance of personal sacrifice. Jesus tells us that we must learn to give up our own way and even give up our lives for His sake. Have you ever had to "give up your own way"? It's hard. Sacrificing something we like or something that interests us is counterintuitive. Surprisingly, when we do that we discover that it's the most loving way to live and it's also the happiest way to live. I have proved this in my own experience---check it against yours. When are those times you most deeply experience God's Presence in your life---when you do something for yourself or when you have served someone else? Jesus said, "*But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.*" Kingdom living then means sacrificial living, but not just any sacrifice; it is sacrifice for Jesus' sake. We serve others, not to make ourselves feel good but to serve and love Jesus. Let me encourage you to ask God today to show you ways in which you can lay down your life for Jesus' sake. Give up your life for Jesus' sake. Jesus says you *must* do it...and it's the happiest way!