INTRODUCTION: The context of this passage gives us the heart of the true gospel and sets forth the major principle of true discipleship, which is absolutely contrary to self-centeredness. Today, we hear much about what one gets who lives by the principles of God’s Word, yet Jesus had so much to say about what one gives to be a true disciples of His. The New Testament teaches that there must be a cross before the crown, suffering before glory, sacrifice before reward. The heart of Christian discipleship is giving before gaining, losing before winning, etc.

In this text, Jesus spoke of the high cost of discipleship, not only here, but in every gospel book account, and more than one time in each.

Matthew 10:39, “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”

Mike Thomas statements:

1. You must lose to win
2. You must give up to gain
3. You must die to live

Luke 14:25-27, “Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.’”

John MacArthur, “Christ’s aim was not to gather appreciative crowds, but to make true disciples. He never adapted His message to majority preferences, but always plainly declared the high cost of discipleship. Here, He made several bold demands that would discourage the half-hearted. Verse 26 seems to be a rather difficult command. The “hatred” called for here is actually a lesser love. Jesus was calling the disciples to cultivate such a devotion to Him that their attachment to everything else, including their own lives, would seem like hatred by comparison.”

Luke 16:13, "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Now, with that being said, let’s consider the text before us:

I. THE PICTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP. 24

It calls for full surrender and total commitment
To withhold our lives from Christ in an effort to save them for ourselves is to settle for a meager existence based on the life that man can manufacture. To surrender our lives to Christ is to enter into a life filled to overflowing with the amazing blessings from a God who comes to live in us and live His life through us. This is not a life free from challenges or struggles, but a life filled with the power to overcome any challenges or struggles life brings in a way that grows us, honors God, and impacts others for all eternity.

“If anyone desires to come after me” – applied to the initial surrender of the new birth, when a person comes to Christ for salvation and the old life of sin is exchanged for a new life of righteousness.

To the saved it reiterated the call to the life of daily obedience to Christ.

Never forget, it is possible for believers to lose their first love when they first surrendered all they were and had to Him. It is a constant temptation to want to take back what was given up and to reclaim what was forsaken. It is not impossible to again place one’s own will above God’s and to take back rights that were relinquished to Him. The bottom line: the character of a true disciple is manifested in obedience.

A. A DAILY DECISION. 24a

“let him deny himself” – means to completely disown, to utterly separate oneself from someone. That is exactly the kind of denial a believer is to make in regard to himself. He is to refuse to acknowledge the self of the old man.

“let him refuse any association or companionship with himself” The self of which Jesus is speaking is rather the natural, sinful, rebellious, unredeemed self that is at the center of every unsaved person and that can even reclaim temporary control over a Christian. I want nothing to do with the old me.

Ephesians 4:20-22, “But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.”

It is the Apostle Paul’s struggle in Rom. 7:18

Romans 7:18-22, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.”

To deny that self is to have the sincere, genuine conviction that one has nothing in his humanness to commend himself before God, nothing worthwhile to offer Him at all.

To deny self is to put no confidence in the flesh. Romans 13:14, “make no provision for the flesh”

To deny self is to subject oneself entirely to the lordship and resources of Jesus Christ, in utter rejection of self-will and self-sufficiency.
David Jeremiah, “When we try to live our lives in our own strength, we ultimately fail. And if we don’t fail, we fall very short of God’s purposes for us. When we operate in the flesh, three things are always true:

(1) we will always lack the power of the Spirit, and we’ll suffer from fatigue; (2) we will always lack the vision of the Spirit so we’ll suffer from frustration; and (3) we will always lack the sustaining ministry of the Spirit so we’ll suffer from failure.

Do these consequences sound familiar? You will always suffer these results when you tackle life in your own strength. But when tragedy strikes – an illness, financial hardship, rebellious children – you turn to God. When you feel helpless, inadequate and weak, the Spirit of God gives you strength. All of a sudden you realize something dynamic is going on that you have never experienced before. It’s not your power, it’s God power. The apostle Paul admits that if it takes weakness to get God’s power in his life, he’s better off weak than strong. Because when you are weak, then you are strong.”

“It takes a crisis to get many Christians to Christ.”

2 Corinthians 12:9, “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

Oswald Chambers, “Where the Battle’s Lost and Won”(For control)

“The battle is lost or won in the secret places of the will before God, never first in the external world. The Spirit of God apprehends me and I am obliged to get alone with God and fight the battle out before Him. Until this is done, I lose every time. The battle may take one minute or a year, that will depend on me, not on God; but it must be wrestled out alone before God, and I must resolutely go through the hell of a renunciation before God. Nothing has any power over the man who has fought out the battle before God and won there.

If I say, ‘I will wait till I get into the circumstances and then put God to the test,’ I shall find I cannot. I must get the thing settled between myself and God in the secret places of my soul where no stranger intermeddles, and then I can go forth with the certainty that the battle is won. Lose it there, and calamity and disaster and upset are as sure as God’s decree. The reason the battle is not won is because I try to win it in the external world first. Get along with God, fight it out before Him, settle the matter there once and for all.

In dealing with other people, the line to take is to push them to an issue of will. That is the way abandonment begins. Every now and again, not often, but sometimes, God brings us to a point of climax. That is the Great Divide in the life; from that point we either go towards a more and more dilatory and useless type of Christian life, or we become more and more ablaze for the glory of God – My Utmost for His Highest.
Arthur Pink, “*Growth in grace is growth downward; it is the forming of a lower estimate of ourselves; it is a deepening realization of our nothingness; it is a heartfelt recognition that we are not worthy of the least of God’s mercies.*”

Oswald Chambers, Dec. 30th, “*The life Christ plants in us develops its own virtues, not the virtues of Adam, but of Jesus Christ. Watch how God will wither up your confidence in natural virtues after sanctification, and in any power you have, until you learn to draw life from the reservoir of the resurrection life of Jesus. Thank God if you are going through a drying-up experience!*”

*It is the saddest thing to see people in the service of God depending on that which the grace of God never gave them, depending on what they have by the accident of heredity. No natural love, no natural patience, no natural purity can ever come up to His demands. But as we bring every bit of our bodily life into harmony with the new life which God has put in us, He will exhibit in us the virtues that were characteristic of the Lord Jesus.*”

This is simply the principle of “*Living His Life.*”

**B. A DEVOTED DUTY. 24b**

“*take up his cross*” – this is not the common trials and hardships that all persons experience sometime in life. A cross is not having an unsaved husband, nagging wife, or domineering mother-in-law. To take up one’s cross is simply to be willing to pay any price, for Christ’s sake. It is a willingness to endure shame, embarrassment, reproach, rejection, persecution, and even martyrdom, for His sake.

The **cross** was the instrument of execution of the Romans in Jesus’ day. Not every disciple is called on to be martyred, but every disciple is commanded to be willing to be martyred.

1 Peter 4:12-13, “*Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.*”

To come to Jesus Christ is to come to the end of self and sin, and to become so desirous of Christ and His righteousness that one will make any sacrifice for Him.

Note the context of **Matt 16**.

Matthew 16:21-23, “*From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’*

*But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’*"

Anyone seeking to thwart God’s plan was doing Satan’s work.
The cross represents suffering that is ours because of our relationship to Christ. Christ does not call disciples to Himself to make their lives easy and prosperous, but to make them holy and productive.

“Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free? No, there’s a cross for everyone, and there’s a cross for me.”

Many people want a “no cost” discipleship, but Christ offers no such option.

C. A DILIGENT DEVOTION. 24c

“follow me” – a call to loyal obedience. True discipleship is submission to the lordship of Christ that becomes a pattern of life.

1 John 2:6, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”

John 8:31, “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.’”

Every believer’s life should be characterized by obedience to God as a pattern of life.

II. THE PROFIT OF DISCIPLESHIP. v.25-26

A. LIVE HIS LIFE. 25

“life” – the real you; same as soul. The Lord is saying that whoever lives only to save his earthly, physical life, his ease and comfort and acceptance by the world, will lose his opportunity for eternal life. But whoever is willing to give up his earthly, worldly life and to suffer and die, if necessary, for Christ’s sake, will find eternal life.

He can “go for it” now and lose it forever; or he can forsake it now and gain it forever.

Movie, End of the Spear - Jim Elliott, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep in order to gain that which he cannot lose.”

Jesus made reference to some who followed Him with a superficial commitment, but never found real life through Him.

In the Parable of the Soil
Matthew 13:22, “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.”
ILLUSTRATION: I got saved at 20 years of age. I was just getting in, when so many seem to be just getting out. Many leave the church after high school or young adults; problem is often greed!

1 Timothy 6:6-10, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

1 Timothy 6:17-19, “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

v.8 consuming desires trap them; Matt 6:33 is the key

v.10 – strayed from Christian truth; gold has replaced God. No longer pursuing the things of God in favor of gold.

v.17-19 – call to be good stewards

v.17 – exalted opinion of oneself “trust in uncertain riches” – poor security for the future; especially eternity

v.18 “ready to give” – liberal; generous; unselfish

v.19 – amassing a treasure; eternal dividends

The true disciple is willing to pay whatever price faithfulness to the Lord requires. Cross-bearing often calls for you to abandon safety, security, personal resources, health, friends, job, and even life.

EXAMPLE: 5 Missionaries Ecuador; Auca Indians, Jim, Pete, Nate, Roger, Ed

They had guns, but would not use them, because the Indians were not ready for heaven.

It is not that a disciple has to be a martyr, but that he is willing to be a martyr if faithfulness to Christ demands it.

John 12:24, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”
B. DON’T SETTLE FOR YOURS. 26

A “wake-up” question – “What are you forfeiting in order to gain?” (Your soul?)

Old saying, “You must give up to go up.” However, you can give up and go down!

Such a person would be a walking dead man who temporarily owned everything but who faced an eternity in hell rather than heaven.

**MAJOR QUESTION:** What could possibly be worth having during this lifetime, if to gain it you would have to exchange your soul?

The question of this verse finds its ultimate answer in Jesus Christ. I don’t have anything now, or at the Judgment of God, to give in exchange, but God gave Jesus and He paid my debt.

III. THE PROMISE OF DISCIPLESHIP. 27

A. CHRIST’S RETURN. 27a

Second Coming of Jesus Christ

B. CHRIST’S REVIEWS. 27c

“according to his works”

Romans 14:12, “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”

1 Corinthians 3:11-15, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

“gold, silver, precious stones” – quality materials which are representative of spiritual service.

“wood, hay, stubble” – inferior materials (like Malachi’s servants); left-overs

What will stand the test of fire?

1. That which was Motivated by love
2. That which was Empowered by God’s Spirit
3. That which was Done for God’s glory
2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

We are accountable to God

C. CHRIST’S REWARD. 27b

“He will reward each”

1. Reward for Service and Salvation.
   BEMA – Judgment Seat

2. Reward for No Salvation
   Great White Throne Judgment

   Revelation 20:11-15, “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”