

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 24 November 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **Die to Live!**

### **Matthew 16:21-27**

In January of 1858, a 23-year-old English woman named **Frances Havergal** was spending some time in Germany, in the home of a pastor's family. Frances herself had grown up in a pastor's home; and at age 15, she had received Christ as her Saviour. Over the next eight years, she studied extensively, and became fluent in several languages. Yet, despite all her abilities, she wasn't sure of what God wanted her to do with her life. Her constitution was poor, and she was frequently ill. What could *she* do for the Lord? Also, something seemed to be lacking in her Christian life; and she didn't know what it was.

Little did Frances know, as she sat by the fire that day, that God was about to use her *pen* to touch the hearts of many for the Saviour! However, something had to happen before God could use her in this way: she had to die, completely and utterly, to self! As she looked up at a painting of Christ on the cross, she noticed the words, "**I Gave My Life for Thee**" under the painting. Suddenly, it seemed that she heard a voice asking her, "**What hast thou given for me?**"<sup>1</sup> She scribbled down those words on a scrap of paper; and building upon this thought, she wrote a poem. After she had finished it, she looked it over; but she wasn't satisfied with the quality of the poetry. So, she threw it into the fire. However, something strange happened. Somehow, the paper didn't ignite: it simply lopped over onto the hearth, with barely any singe marks on it. She snatched it up, and decided to keep it after all.<sup>2</sup> When she arrived back home in England, she shared this poem with an elderly lady in a poor house; and the lady liked it so much, that she requested a copy of it.<sup>3</sup> Soon, many others requested copies; and then her dad, who was a musician, wrote music for it.<sup>4</sup> Today, this hymn is known all over the world as "I Gave My Life for Thee."<sup>5</sup>

Frances went on to write many hymns and books, which have touched millions of lives. The joy that permeates her writings came from a sweet fellowship with the Lord. However, this joy didn't come overnight. It began, in earnest, a few years after she had written "I Gave My Life for Thee." God had been moving her closer to a place of complete death to self; and finally, God used a small booklet called *All for Jesus*, by a pastor named J.T. Wrenford, to open her eyes to the joy that comes from surrendering *all* to Jesus.<sup>6</sup> That is what we will be talking about this morning. As we finish our study of **Matthew 16**, we will see what Jesus had to say about the reward that comes with complete surrender to Himself. The title of this message is ***Die to Live!***

**Read Matthew 16:19-27.**

## I. The revelation (v. 19)

In last week's message, we touched briefly on **verse 19**, in which Jesus told Peter, ***"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."*** As we compared this Scripture to **Matthew 18:15-20**, we saw that the ***"keys of the kingdom of heaven"*** were given not just to Peter, but to *all* believers. God has given *all* believers, in all local churches, the authority to "bind" and "loose" spiritual forces, through prayer. However, there is much more depth to what Jesus was saying here. Let's read **verse 19** again. **(Read verse 19.)**

What, exactly, does this ***"key"*** metaphor mean? It means a couple things. First of all, in Hebrew culture, a "key" was a symbol of **the authority to rule and govern**. A good example can be found in **Isaiah 22**. In that chapter, the LORD said that He would give **Eliakim** (one of King Hezekiah's servants) the ***"key of the house of David."*** He said that He would lay this key upon Eliakim's shoulder; and He said that Eliakim would open, and no man would shut, and that he would shut, and no man would open. In other words, God was saying that Eliakim would be advanced to the position of chief governor of Hezekiah's household—the king's "right hand man." In this, Eliakim was a prophetic type of Christ Himself. In **Revelation 3**, Jesus described *Himself* as the one who holds ***"the key to the house of David"***—the one who ***"openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth."*** In the 1,000-year Kingdom, Jesus Christ, the Son of David, will rule for His Father, at the right hand of power.

What does this mean, then, for Peter, and for the Apostles, and for all of us? It means that in the 1,000-year Kingdom, we will rule and reign with Christ! It means that we will share in the administration of His Kingdom. We know, for a fact, that the twelve Apostles will rule over the twelve tribes of Israel, because Jesus specifically told them so.

**Read Matthew 19:27-29.**

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus promised His followers that they will be given positions of authority in the Kingdom, according to their faithfulness. In the parable of the three servants, Jesus said that His servants will be given cities to rule over. In **1 Corinthians 6**, Paul said, ***"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?"*** In **Revelation 2**, Jesus said, ***"He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations."*** In **Revelation 5**, we are told that all believers are ***"kings and priests"*** unto God, and that ***"we shall reign on the earth."*** However, the keys don't merely represent *temporal* authority: they also represent *spiritual* authority. You see, in Hebrew culture, a key also symbolised **the authority of a scribe**. How so? Because a "scribe" was a man who

“opened” people’s spiritual understanding, by teaching and interpreting the Law of God to them.

Now, think back to **Matthew 16:19**. When Jesus gave that “*keys of the kingdom*” promise, He was addressing Peter. We know, by comparing this Scripture to **Matthew 18**, that the “*keys of the kingdom*” have been given to *all* believers. Yet, why did Jesus address *Peter*, in particular, as He said this? Because after Christ ascended back to Heaven, it was *Peter* who opened the “door” to the Kingdom of Heaven to multitudes of people, on the Day of Pentecost! As the result of Peter’s preaching that day, at least 3,000 souls went through the “door,” and became citizens of the future Kingdom of Heaven! From that point, the door opened wider and wider, as God’s people took the Gospel throughout the world!

Peter wasn’t the *only* one with the authority to open spiritual doors; he was just the *first* one. The authority that God gave to Peter has been given to us, too! Remember what Jesus said back in **Matthew 13**? Jesus told His disciples that He had made them “*scribes*” in the Kingdom of Heaven, to bring forth out of their treasure “*things old and new*.” In other words, Christ was giving them the authority to teach the truths about the Kingdom, both from the treasury of the Old Testament, and from the New Testament. That they did; and they did it with great power and authority. There is no other group of men like them. Christ used the Apostles to lay the foundation of the churches, and to write the New Testament Scriptures. Yet, the authority to open the truth of Scripture wasn’t given merely to the Apostles. The Bible says that *all* believers are kings and priests before God; and though not every believer is called (or qualified) to be a pastor, God *does* call all believers to grow into spiritual maturity, so that they can teach God’s Word to younger believers, and mentor them.

#### **Read Hebrews 5:11-14.**

We have spent a good deal of time on **Matthew 16:19** this morning; but it is time well spent. It is important that we understand this verse. Sooner or later, as you share the Gospel with your Catholic friends, you will be challenged about **Matthew 16:19**. They probably won’t know the verse reference: but they know *about* it! From this verse, they have been taught that Peter is the holy father, and that the “keys of the kingdom” is the power of Peter, the Apostles, and all their priestly successors, to forgive people’s sins. Nothing could be farther from the truth! Let’s go back to **verse 19**, and look closely at it. (**Read Matthew 16:19 again.**)

At this point, a little lesson in Greek grammar is helpful. Those phrases “*shall be bound*” and “*shall be loosed*” are both in the future perfect periphrastic tense. Now, there is no exact, set-in-stone way to interpret this into English; but it could also be said, “*shall have been bound*,”

and “*shall have been loosed.*” This verb tense has the idea of a *past* action, which continues to have results in the present. In other words, Jesus is saying, “Whatever *you* might bind on earth has already been bound in Heaven; and whatever *you* might loose on earth has already been loosed in Heaven.” Simply put, when we, as a church, get together and pray, and seek God’s will, and *carry out* His will, we are simply carrying out what has *already* been determined in Heaven. When we seek God’s guidance in prayer, God reveals His will to us; and we obey it! The same is true when it comes to declaring the forgiveness of sins.

**Read John 20:19-23.**

Brethren, it’s important that we understand this verse, because the Catholic Church twists this verse to mean that their priests have power to forgive people’s sins. They say, “See? *Jesus* isn’t here; but our *priests* are here! You need to go to our priests to receive remission of sins.” My friends, this is utterly false! The Bible says, “***For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.***” Only the sinless Son of God can mediate for us, and forgive our sins! Yet, if this be so, why *did* Jesus say, “***Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained***”?

Well, let’s take a close look at the grammar. When Jesus said, “***Whose soever sins ye remit,***” and, “***Whose soever sins ye retain,***” He was using subjunctive voice of the verbs. This means that the action of remitting or retaining was *possible*, but not definite. With that in mind, let’s look at the second half of these two statements. When Jesus says, “***they are remitted,***” He is using a present indicative active verb. This means that the action is *continuously* taking place. Then, when He says, “***they are retained,***” He is using a perfect indicative passive verb. This means that the action of retaining sin happened at a definite time in the past, and continues into the present. To put it all together, Jesus is saying, “Whoever’s sins *you* may forgive, they are *already* being forgiven; and whoever’s sins *you* may retain, they’ve *already* been retained.”

It doesn’t sound as though the Apostles were the ones doing the actual remitting and retaining, does it? *Jesus* is the One who forgives or retains people’s sins: the Apostles simply *affirmed* what Jesus had already done. Now, make no mistake: Jesus *was* giving them authority. However, the Apostles’ declaration that “you are forgiven” had authority *only if Christ* had already forgiven that person’s sins. For example, in **Acts 8**, Philip the evangelist *thought* that Simon the sorcerer was saved; and he had even baptised him. However, there was just one problem: Simon wasn’t really saved! Why? Because he had only a *head* belief, and not true faith. Philip had *said*, “You’re saved, my brother”; but he was mistaken. Now, later on, *Peter* came along and perceived that Simon’s sins were *not* actually forgiven, and that he was still in the bond of iniquity: and he frankly told him so. However, it wasn’t Peter’s *pronouncement*,

“You are in the bond of iniquity,” that caused Simon’s sins to be retained. Simon’s sins were *already* being retained, because he had never been saved in the first place!

Brethren, God has also given *us* the spiritual authority to affirm to people that they are saved, or not saved. However, we need to use careful spiritual discernment, so that we don’t mistakenly tell people that their sins have been forgiven, when, in fact, they have never truly been saved! God has given us the “keys of the Kingdom”: so let’s use those spiritual keys carefully, and wisely, and *prayerfully*, to open people’s hearts to the Gospel of the Kingdom!

## II. The restriction (v. 20)

**(Read Matthew 16:20 again.)** Why did Jesus command His disciples *not* to tell anyone that He is the Messiah? There are several reasons why.

First of all, Jesus is *meek and humble*! That was His character. Though He is God in flesh, He never exulted Himself. That is why He never *directly* said, “I am God” (although countless things that Jesus said would have led people to that conclusion, if they were paying any attention)! Likewise, Jesus almost never *directly* said, “I am the Messiah.” God’s Law says, **“Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips”**: and Jesus, as a Man, subjected Himself to the Law of God!

Why else did Jesus not directly declare, “I am the Messiah”? Because if He *had* directly said, “I am God,” or “I am the Messiah,” the backlash and opposition from his enemies would have been furious, and immediate; and it could have hindered His mission. We mustn’t forget that Jesus, in His humanity, appeared no different from any other man. In order for people to believe that He is the Messiah, He had to *prove* it: and that is exactly what He did. Christ is the God who said to the people of Israel, **“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD.”** Christ invited people to hear His words, and observe His works, and to reason together with Him. He offered, as evidence of who He is, the testimony of His forerunner, **John the Baptist**; the testimony of **His Father**, who had spoken from Heaven on several occasions; the evidence of **the miracles** that He had done; and the testimony of **Scripture**.

**Read John 5:30-47.**

Did you notice that Jesus presented the *Scripture* as the final, and most important, evidence of who He is? Jesus constantly held up the *Scriptures* as the highest authority. He held the

Scriptures above even His miracles, or the verbal testimony of the Father Himself! Even Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist, had momentary doubts about Jesus' Messiahship; but when John struggled with these doubts, what did Jesus offer to John as the proof of who He is? He reminded John of the prophecies of *Himself*, in **Isaiah 35**, and in **Isaiah 61**. He then instructed John's disciples to ***"Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached."*** Jesus' works had been foretold in the *Scriptures*; and the *Scriptures* declared that He is the Christ, without Jesus' having to declare it Himself. Now, the time would come, after Jesus' resurrection, when the Apostles *would* boldly preach that Jesus is the Messiah; but for the time being, they were to remain quiet, and let God the Father reveal His Son to those whose hearts were humbled, and spiritually prepared to receive Him. I would ask, "Have *you* received the Lord Jesus Christ into *your* heart?" Perhaps God has been slowly and silently preparing *you* to believe, *with your heart*, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and to place your trust in Him. If He is calling you to salvation this morning, I plead with you to respond to Him today!

### III. The rebuke (vv. 21-23)

**(Read Matthew 16:22-23 again.)** Jesus was now entering the last phase of His ministry. From this point onward, Jesus' main emphasis was on preparing His disciples for His *official* rejection by the leaders of Israel, and by the nation. The elders, chief priests, and scribes would soon officially condemn Him to death. Jesus was not speaking in parables, here: He was plainly telling them that very soon He would be crucified, and rise again on the third day.

Now, obviously, Peter (and all the other disciples) didn't want to believe this. The Messiah would *die*? Impossible! In an almost rebuking tone, Peter said, ***"Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee."*** Little did he know the shocking response that he was about to receive from the Lord! Immediately Jesus replied, ***"Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."***

Now, why was Jesus so hard on Peter? After all, Peter *thought* he was being sincere. Peter was recoiling in horror from the thought of his Master's being crucified. Was it not out of *love* for Jesus that Peter had uttered this little rebuke? So it would seem to us: but not to the Lord. Jesus knew that Peter's words had come from the mouth of the enemy; and for this reason, Jesus actually called His own chief Apostle "Satan"! The Lord knew that Satan was near at hand, and that *he* had whispered these words into Peter's mind. Peter had not been spiritually on guard; and because he was not on guard, Satan had used him as a tool to try to weaken Christ's resolve to do His Father's will.

There are several things we can learn from this account. First of all, this account goes to show that spiritual downfalls often come just *after* spiritual victories! Only a moment earlier, Jesus had *commended* Peter for his faith, and had said, ***“Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my father which is in heaven.”*** Yet, scarcely a moment later, Peter *disbelieved* Jesus’ words; and he actually had the audacity to rebuke the Lord. Christian, be on guard! You are no better than Peter! When you experience spiritual victories, be on guard! It is easy to become prideful about your spiritual victory; and when pride comes, a fall is just around the corner. Paul said, ***“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”***

Secondly, please notice what Peter’s sin was. It was sheer, wicked unbelief! *We* might see Peter’s words as loving and compassionate, in that he didn’t want his Lord to die; yet, Jesus saw it for what it was, and refused to sugar-coat it. Beware of unbelief, brethren! It is deceitful and insidious. Whenever we say in our hearts, “I know that this is what God says, *but...*”, we are in serious trouble. What we are saying is, “I know better than you, Lord!”

Thirdly, please notice the source of Peter’s sin. The source was Peter’s own lusts. Now, on the surface, it may seem that *Satan* was the source, since Jesus had said, ***“Get thee behind me, Satan.”*** However, Jesus went on to say, ***“Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”*** That rebuke was clearly to Peter himself! Now, to be sure, Satan did whisper this opposing thought into Peter’s ear. However, Satan was merely fanning the flames of the unbelief and pride that were *already* in Peter’s heart. Satan knew that Peter was not savouring the things that are of God, but the things of men. Satan knew that Peter’s head was filled with visions of the glory that *he* would have in the Kingdom; and for that reason, he knew that Peter would not savour the thought that the Messiah would have to suffer and die. Satan was merely stirring up the selfish thoughts that Peter already had.

### **Read James 1:13-16.**

I fear that we too often try to blame the devil for our wrong thoughts. Now, to be sure, Satan’s minions *are* there to fan the flames of our lusts. However, our lusts come from the inside, not the outside. James said, ***“Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”*** Rather than recognising his unbelieving thought as sin, and resisting it, Peter instead *entertained* the thought, and embraced it. So it often is with us. Satan’s demons may whisper wrong thoughts in our ears; but as Spirit-indwelt believers, we have the ability to recognise these thoughts as *enemies*, and to cast them down, and take them captive. It doesn’t matter whether an unbelieving thought originates from Satan, or from our own wicked hearts: either way, we *must* take that thought down immediately, by the power of the Holy Spirit!

#### IV. The requirement and reward for discipleship (v. 24)

**(Read Matthew 16:24 again.)** Jesus had informed Peter that He would give to him the **“keys of the kingdom of heaven.”** These were comforting words! But now, Jesus was speaking of a *cross*! Jesus Himself would soon carry a *literal* cross; and Jesus was telling His disciples that *they*, too, must “take up the cross.” Can you imagine how shocked the disciples were to hear this? A cross was the ultimate symbol of shame. It was the Romans’ most cruel method of torture and execution. Why was Jesus speaking of a *death*? Did He really mean this? Did they *really* have to bear a *cross*? Yes, they did; and so must we!

To this day, Jesus still puts forth this requirement. To be *His* disciple, you must take up the cross of death to self. There is always a high cost for serving the Lord; and oftentimes, Jesus’ demands *seem* impossible. “Jesus is calling me to do *that*? Surely He can’t mean it! I’ll lose friends. I might even lose my job! I’ll have to give up that relationship with that person who doesn’t love the Lord. I’ll have to give up all these things that I’ve worked so hard for. And where will this end? What if God should call me to go to a place that is truly dangerous, such as an inner city? What if He should call me to go to a land where people would try to *kill* me? Can’t I be a disciple *without* walking such a difficult road?” The answer to that question is, “No, you can’t!” To be Christ’s disciple, you *must* take up the cross!

In the year 1838, an Englishman named **James Calvert**, along with his wife **Mary**, his missionary partner **John Hunt**, and Hunt’s wife, **Hannah**, sailed across the world, and stepped into the satanic darkness of the Fiji Islands. Amazingly, over the next 18 years, hundreds of these cannibals placed their faith in Christ, and abandoned their wicked ways. However, at the time of their arrival, Calvert, Hunt, and their wives looked like utter fools! The captain of the ship that took them to Fiji didn’t think that they’d survive. He tried to persuade Calvert to turn back. He said, “*You will lose your life, and the lives of those with you, if you go among such savages!*” To that Calvert replied, “*We died before we came here.*”

My friends, *this* is what Jesus demands: **death to self**. The cross was the ultimate symbol of death in the Roman world; and no matter how much we may try to beautify it, we cannot remove its message of death. Jesus died for us; and we, too, must die, if we would follow Him. Paul said, **“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live.”** To lost people, this teaching is incomprehensible; but to us who are saved, it should be a daily reality. It’s not just a nice goal to strive for: it is the Christian’s charter for life. To *win*, you must *surrender*. To *gain* your life, you must *forfeit* it. To *find* your life, you must *lose* it. To “lose” your life means to surrender your *whole life*--every part of it--to Christ. By the way, you’ll notice that Jesus said, **“What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”** When we enter this world, our

souls are *already* lost, because we were born in sin, and separated from God. Satan wants people to believe that they can *sell* their souls to him, by doing something extremely evil (such as signing your name in blood, and joining a witch's coven); but this is a lie. You *can't* sell your soul to the devil, because until you come to Christ for salvation, *your soul already* belongs to Satan! That's why Jesus says, ***"What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"*** In other words, "What can you *give* to ransom your soul?" The answer to that question is: Absolutely nothing! There is *nothing* you can give to ransom your soul! Christ has already purchased your ransom on the cross *for* you: you simply need to *receive* the gift of salvation *from Him*, by humbling yourself, admitting that you *need* His gift, and, by faith, *receiving* it!

The **requirement** to be a follower of Jesus is that you die to self. However, there is also a wonderful **reward** for being Christ's disciple. Jesus says that those who ***"lose"*** their lives will ***"find"*** it. Yet, what exactly, does it mean to ***"find"*** your life? We know that Jesus wasn't talking about finding "life beyond the grave," because *everyone* will have eternal existence beyond the grave (whether in Heaven, or Hell). What is Jesus talking about, then? He's talking about the *abundant life* that God has promised to all who follow Him.

**Read Luke 18:28-30.**

When Jesus promised ***"manifold more in this present time,"*** He certainly wasn't talking about *material* riches! According to history, every one of the Apostles (except John) died a martyr's death; and all of them lived lives of poverty and persecution. Whatever this ***"manifold more"*** is, it has nothing to do with the physical and material. What *is* this ***"manifold more,"*** then? It is the things that money cannot buy—things such as ***"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness,"*** and ***"temperance."*** Christ promises to give His followers things such as patience, comfort, hope, and consolation. When we lose our lives for Christ's sake ***"and the gospel's,"*** and live a life of dependence upon Him, we receive all these spiritual blessings. We also receive the blessing, in *this* life, of seeing souls saved, through our testimony; and this blessing carries on into ***"the world to come."*** The souls that we had part in leading to Christ will be our ***"hope," "joy,"*** and ***"crown of rejoicing"*** when Christ returns. On that day, Christ will give crowns to those who served Him faithfully!

**Read Revelation 22:12.**

**Conclusion:** Have *you* died to live? Have *you* taken up the cross of death to self? If you've never taken up the cross of death, and surrendered your life to Jesus, then you are not saved: and you need to receive His gift of eternal life! If you need to be saved, *now* is the day of salvation! Perhaps you *did* take up the cross at some point in your life, and you *do* have eternal life; yet, you are not consistently taking up the

cross. Perhaps somewhere along the line, things of this world have become more important to you. If so, I urge you to take up the cross of death again this morning, and follow Christ with your *whole* heart!

<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Morgan, *Preacher's Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Alfred B. Smith, *Al Smith's Treasury of Hymn Histories* (Greer, SC: Al Smith Ministries, 1985), p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Morgan, *Preacher's Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations*, p. 169.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> "Frances Ridley Havergal," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frances\\_Ridley\\_Havergal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frances_Ridley_Havergal).