In our New Testament reading today, we pick up very close to where we left off last week. Jesus then asked the question, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responds with a beautiful confession of Christ. Remember that we said last week that how we answer that question is the most important thing about us. In our passage this week, we see what it looks like to live out practically the correct answer--what it means to be a Christian, a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. Immediately after Peter’s victory with his correct answer that Jesus is, indeed, the Son of the Living God—before Peter even gets to tweet about it, he finds himself in trouble (\*Matthew 16:21-23). Jesus has to correct Peter’s perspective. I don’t know about you, but I need that often, to remember who and what I am. Jesus has just affirmed the true identity of His person; now He declares the nature of His work. He tells of the cost of discipleship, how our minds are to be set upon the things of God. In \*\*Matthew 16:24 He tells his disciples, including us, that we are each to take up our cross and follow Him. Denying ourselves, we are to be fully devoted to Christ, His cause, and His kingdom. Devoted to Christ, we are to take a serious look at what governs our priorities and at the priorities that govern our lives. “Oh, Pastor Christ is going to call us out and challenge us today.” Well, yes, I am. But I also hope to encourage you as you deny yourself and follow Christ.

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\*Matthew 16:21-23

21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. 22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

\*\*Matthew 16:24

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

And in this spirit, we read the question in this passage, Matthew 16:26: “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” Here, Jesus speaks to the value of the soul—the *value* of the soul (\*2 Corinthians 4:16-18). When we realize the value of the soul, our perspectives, priorities, and position changes. Theologian Charles Spurgeon said, “Consider how precious a soul must be when both God and the devil are after it.” And something of such great value should be cared for. The payment that was given for our soul was the sacrifice of Jesus. And, Church, realizing our value changes our perspective. We seek first the Kingdom of Heaven. Knowing that, our lives in the hands of Jesus makes us rich forever, changing our perspective, investing in our soul as we invest in the Kingdom. This earthly tabernacle will cease to exist one day. While we each spend money and time caring for our tabernacles with beauty regimens and gym memberships (and we should), we each should also be aware of the health of our souls. Each of us should guard his soul, investing in the relationship with Jesus, investing in our brothers and sisters, being the light in a dark world, pacing trust in Jesus (\*\*2Corinthians 5:9-10). We make it our aim to please Jesus, focusing on things that are unseen: “My soul waits in silence for God only; from Him is my salvation--Psalm 62:1.

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\*2 Corinthians 4:16-18

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

\*\*2 Corinthians 5:9-10

9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

And the value of that waiting soul is clear in 1 Peter 1:18-19: “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” This is your value! The world doesn’t set the standard for your value. The one who made you does. Embracing this understanding changes the believer’s perspective. It’s not about following a set of rules. It’s about following Him. And to focus on the unseen should be our default setting. It’s as simple as saying this to yourself: “Lord, I don’t know what you’re doing right now, but I know it is something amazing.” With this understanding, you must live with His Kingdom in mind, not your own. That the Son of the Living God allows me to follow Him at all, let alone invites me to do that causes great awe in my spirit. These are the marks of a Christian: Denying self, picking up our cross, and following Him, as Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10: “For we are God’s masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Wow! His *masterpiece*! We are NOT working to earn salvation. We each have tailor-made Kingdom work to do. We are following Him and are available *because of salvation*. In the midst of a broken world in which Satan tries to tempt us, Holy Scripture says we are being renewed day by day. Praise God!

Listen, Family, I want to change gears as we close. We are about to be given an opportunity to put our faith into action. After meeting with Linda Perrey and the prayer team, we feel strongly that the Lord is calling Shepherd Church to a time of focused prayer and fasting. Now you and God can talk about what your fasting looks like, but we are entering into a period of seventy-two hours of prayer—someone praying every half hour for three days. You can come here to the church or pray at home. We need you to sign up. Pray for Covid; many of our church are very sick. Pray for our nation. Maybe you want to take home the elements and celebrate Holy Communion during that focused time of prayer. However you can participate, turn your soul to action. Focus on the unseen, live with His Kingdom in mind, denying the self, picking up the cross He has for you, and following Him.

Passages in Support of This Sermon

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Matthew 16:24-27

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.