

# Are You Hoping For A Breakthrough? part 1

## What does it mean to give up your life?

*Matthew 16: 24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. 25 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.*

Every time I read this I am challenged by it. Are you? What do you think about when you read this? Does it encourage you or discourage you? Or perhaps does it leave you puzzled? After all, how does one give up his life? The NASB reads "but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." How do you lose your life?

This verse has not only challenged me but for many years I was puzzled by it. The idea of losing my life flat out scared me first of all, but then again I didn't completely understand it either. What does it mean? Does it mean to quit your job and join some monastery where you're cloistered for the rest of your life?

In any event, the idea never appealed to me so I simply skimmed the text without really considering it much. In other words, I kept reading to find more comforting words and pretty much ignored verses 24 and 25. That is how I used to live and still called myself a Christian. Read it again: "If any of you wants to be my follower, ..."

## Am I a follower or not?

If I decide to be a follower of His, what must I do in order to lose my life?

I think perhaps John the Baptist shared some insight to this when he said:

*John 3: 30 He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.*

I shouldn't have to state that this should be the main focus of the mature believer. We should always strive to think less and less of ourselves and more and more of Him. I think this could at least be the beginning of what "dying to self" is all about. This is when you forsake all that is precious to you, your ways, habits, desires, attitudes, dreams, and your ideas. These start to take a backseat, little by little, as we draw closer and closer to Him. It's less about me and more about Him.

As we continue to read through His Word we get more and more excited about His ways, His ideas, His attitudes, His habits, His dreams, and desires. If we allow God to work in us in this way over a period of time, persistently seeking Him, it's only a matter of time before what was important to us loses its value and we place a greater value on these things that are important to God.

**This is the process of becoming one with Him and this is what Jesus modeled.**

In this way, God transforms us more and more into His likeness and we become a sort of "Christ in the flesh" for those in our lives.

*John 14: 8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."*

*9 Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father and*

*the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. 11 Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do.*

And also in Colossians...

*Colossians 1: 15a Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.*

We all know people and have loved ones who need God. They, like us, need His unconditional love, His gentleness, His kindness, His mercy, and His patience. What greater purpose or calling could we have than to become more like God so that those in our lives, who are wallowing in darkness, could get to know the living Christ through us? Isn't this a beautiful and glorious plan? And isn't this a great ministry in and of itself, to lead those closest to you to Christ?

### **Do you want more?**

But some of us, including myself (at least on some days), want more. Maybe it's more responsibility or a greater following to reach more people. As if to say "If only I had greater audiences and be like those great preachers" or "If only I could start a soup kitchen or orphan house." Maybe you're hoping to start a full-time ministry. You may have envisioned your "dream ministry", you know, the answer to the question: "If God gave you unlimited resources and your choice of how to serve Him, what would that look like?"

However you answer that question, that is what I'm referring to. I shouldn't have to say that comparing yourself to others in ministry is never a good thing to do, but its human nature and whatever ministry works well for someone else, may not be suited for you. Only God knows how you can best be utilized and where you'll thrive. Some dreams die hard and that takes

us back to dying to self.

## **Are you faithful in the little things?**

While many ministry dreams may be noble or God-given desires, we must know and understand God's ways, principles, and processes of growth and responsibility.

*Luke 16: 10 "If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. 11 And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? 12 And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?"*

Also:

*Luke 12: 47 "And a servant who knows what the master wants, but isn't prepared and doesn't carry out those instructions, will be severely punished. 48 But someone who does not know, and then does something wrong, will be punished only lightly. When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required."*

Throughout all of Scripture God has shown time and time again that if we are faithful and obedient with the "little things", He will reward us with greater things. He works the same today. Therefore we cannot afford to be distracted by what the future may hold in some ideal, fantasy world. We must live in the here and now, where every one of us is called to an immediate, local ministry to serve those that God entrusted to our care.

## **Be faithful in your immediate ministry...**

You may know them as your wife, husband, son, daughter,

mother, father, friend, co-worker, the neighbor across the street, or the lady at the checkout counter that God put in your life to test your patience. Believe me when I say that only when you are faithful and are found trustworthy with your immediate ministry and after a season or more of demonstrating your perseverance and patience with where you're at now, will God give you something greater, which comes with greater responsibility.

So please be careful when you ask for a greater ministry, let me advise you to come first before God and say "Only when I'm ready, Lord, if it pleases you, I'd like to serve you in a greater way, but only in your time". Just be careful what you wish for. There are many Christian leaders over the ages that took on more responsibility before they were ready and many of them faced unnecessary failure and serve as bad examples.

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## Are You Ready? part 4

In my first message of this series, "Are You Ready? part 1", I made some rather criticizing remarks about scholars who've spent vast amounts of time specifically on end-times prophecy.

### **We cannot afford to get distracted.**

I'm not saying that it's wrong to study the end-times, but I certainly don't think it should ever be our main focus. Let's suppose, for example, that Jesus' returns next Tuesday at 6 am, sharp. For those scholars that have spent decades telling others that this would happen or that would happen and they were wrong, how could you begin to count the wasted hours of

being misdirected? Not to mention the people that read their books and listened to their messages.

Do you see how a subject such as this, biblical as it is, can become a distraction? I think you can talk about the end-times without having a firm opinion on any of the main events. There is still a lot to be said about the end-times that is for our benefit but that doesn't mean we have to have it figured out. Heck, we could talk about Heaven all day long and it wouldn't get old for me, we're told to talk about such things, but it really doesn't matter to me what happens between now and then.

### **Just know that what God says will happen, happens.**

I hope that this message (all 4 parts!) gave you a "bigger picture" about how God operates and great hope for His return. Based on the earlier passages of Scripture we can learn that God makes plans and they happen, make no mistake about it. This we can count on. If you study Revelation at all it's not hard to see God working in the world today in a way that is setting the stage for prophesied events to happen. The Bible has a lot to say about the last days and here's a good example:

*2 Timothy 3: 1 You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. 2 For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. 3 They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. 4 They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. 5 They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!*

If there's one "message" that is emphatic, central and universal to the subject of *last days/end times/any date in*

the future, it is this:

## **BE READY!!!**

*Luke 12: 35 "Be dressed for service and keep your lamps burning, 36 as though you were waiting for your master to return from the wedding feast. Then you will be ready to open the door and let him in the moment he arrives and knocks. 37 The servants who are ready and waiting for his return will be rewarded. I tell you the truth, he himself will seat them, put on an apron, and serve them as they sit and eat! 38 He may come in the middle of the night or just before dawn. But whenever he comes, he will reward the servants who are ready.*

*39 "Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would not permit his house to be broken into. 40 You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected."*

### **Do you know what to do to be ready?**

If at this point, you're not sure what you should be doing to "be ready" or you just want to make sure you know or maybe you're clueless. Please ask someone that you regard as godly and trusting and they may be able to offer some guidance. You can always ask the Lord and He will direct you. Lastly, you could reply to this message and we could discuss it. Either way, I would advise you to do all that you can to be ready. As they discovered in Noah's day, just because it never rained doesn't mean that it won't!

Here's more food for thought:

*Revelation 21: 1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

3 I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

***"Oh Lord, your magnificence is breathtaking..."***

*You are so awesome and beautiful. I love to read your Word and marvel at the things you've done and plan to do. How can I ever thank you enough? Please help me to do that which you'd have me do. Help me to know you more so that I can be on the same page as you. I see your plans and I'd like to participate. Thank you for calling us to be your servants so that we can reside with you on that most glorious day. In Jesus' name, amen!"*

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## **Are You Ready? part 3**

Thank you for staying with me for the third installment of this series, "Are You Ready?".

Last week we discussed the question that we all might have entertained at one time or another and that is "Can we really be sure there will be the second coming of Jesus?". Then I proceeded to point out some prophecies in Scripture that show a clear track record of God coming through on the promises He's made. Today I'm picking up where I left off, with more promises. I hope you'll enjoy it...

## **Prophecies of the coming Christ...**

The Israelite's under Moses' leadership prayed for an intercessor after the terrifying experience at Mt. Sinai. An intercessor that was gentle and not as intimidating. In Deuteronomy 18, roughly 40 years later and to the second generation Moses announces that God will deliver "according to all [they] desired".

### **Through Moses**

*Deuteronomy 18: 15 Moses continued, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. 16 For this is what you yourselves requested of the Lord your God when you were assembled at Mount Sinai. You said, 'Don't let us hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore or see this blazing fire, for we will die.'*

*17 "Then the Lord said to me, 'What they have said is right. 18 I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him.*

### **Through David**

During David's life, he writes many Psalms, one of which is Psalm 22. Is it "just another psalm" or is there something a little special about it? Several verses stick out; I'll just use a couple:

#### **Psalm 22:**

*16 For dogs have surrounded Me;  
The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me.  
They pierced My hands and My feet;  
17 I can count all My bones.  
They look and stare at Me.  
18 They divide My garments among them,  
And for My clothing they cast lots.*

Think of this, what did a Jewish reader think about when reading this prior to Jesus' death? "They're pretty strange verses, aren't they? Did this actually happen to David?" They might've thought and discussed. All three verses happen on the day Jesus hung on the cross. And here, about 1000 years prior, they are spoken in the present and past tense. Pretty wild eh?

## **Through Isaiah**

Somewhere around 700 years after Moses, God asked King Ahaz to ask for a sign:

*Isaiah 7: 10 Later, the Lord sent this message to King Ahaz:  
11 "Ask the Lord your God for a sign of confirmation, Ahaz. Make it as difficult as you want—as high as heaven or as deep as the place of the dead."*

*12 But the king refused. "No," he said, "I will not test the Lord like that."*

*13 Then Isaiah said, "Listen well, you royal family of David! Isn't it enough to exhaust human patience? Must you exhaust the patience of my God as well? 14 All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us')."*

There's the sign of the coming Messiah. Over 700 years prior to Jesus' birth.

## **Another, of many, through Isaiah**

I would be remiss if I failed to mention **Isaiah 53:**

*7 He was oppressed and treated harshly,  
yet he never said a word.*

*He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.*

*And as a sheep is silent before the shearers,  
he did not open his mouth.*

*8 Unjustly condemned,  
he was led away.  
No one cared that he died without descendants,  
that his life was cut short in midstream.  
But he was struck down  
for the rebellion of my people.  
9 He had done no wrong  
and had never deceived anyone.  
But he was buried like a criminal;  
he was put in a rich man's grave.*

Need I say more? I think it speaks for itself. If you have not read this complete chapter lately, put it on your shortlist of things to read.

## **Aren't you just blown away with the magnificence of Scripture?**

We all know the rest of the story. But isn't it quite amazing how God used so many participants throughout the ages to prophesy about the coming Messiah? I say this not only to illustrate the amazing way God works but also to consider this: It was impossible for anyone to predict when the Messiah would come and exactly how He would appear and how His life of service would play out. No one knew and no one figured it out. Yet it was all there in the Old Testament for people to see. Only after Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection can we see how the puzzle fits together.

Do you see where I'm going with this? The scholars I mentioned above (part 1), who all have countless hours of study focused on end-times all think they have it figured out to some degree. Whether they predict a date or not, they all have theories, guesses or firm opinions on the second coming. And from one end of the spectrum to the other, there are plenty of differences between the scholars. Do they all study from the same book? I say that jokingly, but the Bible isn't

just another book as we all know.

Next week I'll wrap this up and make it practical, tying it with an essential lesson as part of being a true disciple. I hope you'll stay with me!