

Good Morning,

In my reading this week, I came across a newspaper headline but it was the quote that followed that made the story. Here it is; **8-YEAR-OLD BOY SAVES SISTER'S LIFE** – and the boy quotes “I wouldn't do it again. She's been a pain this week”. How many of us have done things that we wouldn't do again? Or better yet how many of us have truly said what we wanted to say? This 8 year old boy's quote is a wonderful example of being honest and saying what he truly wanted to say. And in today's message we are going to begin by listening in on a conversation between Jesus and His disciples. And what we will find in this conversation is Jesus telling the disciples about some future events that will change their lives forever. But there is one concern, the truth of what Jesus is telling them is way beyond what they can humanly imagine. But just like the 8-year-old boy in our headline story, Jesus is saying exactly what he wants to say to His disciples. And here is the conversation between Jesus and His disciples. **From Matthew 16:21-24**

21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.'*³*But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things. Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

As I read and studied this passage in preparing for today's message I found myself thinking like a newspaper reporter and began to think of Headlines as a way to report the story. “Extra, Extra, Read All About It” **JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH.** And this one “Extra, Extra, Read All About It” **JESUS ESTABLISHES GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLESHIP.** “Extra, Extra, Read All About It” **JESUS RECOMMENDS TO KEEP YOUR MIND ON DIVINE THINGS.** And “Extra, Extra, Read All About It” **JESUS PREDICTS HIS RISE FROM THE GRAVE.** Now those are some headlines, but can you imagine standing in a grocery line looking at the magazines and noticing a headline where someone is saying that they will be returning from the dead. I would probably believe that there is a Loch Ness Monster before I would believe that someone is going to rise again three days after they died. So let's recap what has happened to the disciple's so far. First we find the disciples talking with Jesus when he tells them about his upcoming suffering and death. Next we find Jesus telling His disciples that they are to deny themselves and take up their crosses and

follow Him. We can even imagine that by the end of the day, when the disciples were reflecting on everything they had just heard, that they would probably admit to having “one of those days”. They might have even asked themselves; why is Jesus going to suffer and die? Wasn’t Jesus supposed to be our savior? What will happen to us without Him here? How are we going to deny ourselves? What does Jesus mean “to pick up our crosses and follow him” Aren’t we following Him already? Now that’s a lot of thinking for just one day! And since we’re like the disciples I bet we’re doing a lot of thinking too. In fact, one of our goals for today’s message is to help us sort out what Jesus was saying to His disciples and for us to be able to apply it to our own lives. I recently read an article by John Koessler of the Trinity International University and he brings to us a different viewpoint on what it means for us “Take up our cross and follow Jesus”. Now before we go into the article’s viewpoint let’s ask ourselves this question, “What do we think it means for us to take up our cross and follow Jesus”? Well the article begins by telling us “What Jesus didn’t mean when He said to “take up our cross”. You see many people in today’s world think that the cross we take up is a cross of our burdens; you know those troublesome things that we suffer in our earthly lives. But what if I told you that for a person in the first century it had a completely different meaning. What if I told you that the symbol of the cross, symbolized a death that was the most painful and humiliating death one could suffer. The symbolism of the cross in the first century was a cross of a torturous death and it was more than the burdens that one carries in their lives. So when Jesus said to His disciples for them to “take up their cross and follow Him” he was basically saying that for them to be followers of His they would have to be willing to die for their beliefs and actions. In fact as many of you may already know 11 of the 12 disciples’ lost their lives for spreading their beliefs in the salvation of Jesus Christ. So when we think to ourselves that we are followers of Jesus are we willing to give up our lives for Him? Well, it depends on which life we would be actually giving up. You see when most of us think of losing our lives for Jesus we immediately think of losing our physical bodies in death. But what if we thought that losing our lives for Jesus meant that we were to lose our sinful nature. You know the life that keeps us from being in a relationship with God. You know the life that keeps us from being the person God’s wants us to be. You know the life where we never know of God’s loving grace in our lives. As we look back to our earlier eavesdropping on the conversation between Jesus and His disciples we might try and listen to another reason for Jesus sharing with them what was about to happen. Could it be that

Jesus knew of the grief and anguish that His disciples would be experiencing after His death and that He was beginning to teach them, what they would need to know, to survive and manage the pain of their grief after he was gone. Jesus begins by telling them that they will have to let go of their sinful lives. And by letting go of their sinful lives and living a life of faith in Jesus, they will be alive in the life that God has prepared for them and they will not have to fear a death in this sinful world. In the Book of John we find a passage that is very similar to what Jesus has just told His disciples. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life." So what can we learn from the advice that Jesus is telling His disciples? I believe we can learn that Jesus is simply telling us that if we have faith in Him then we will never know the painful taste of a sinful death but we will always know the joy and peace of living. But I can tell you that God loves us so much that He will give every opportunity to for us to come to know Him. To illustrate this point that God loves us so much, and that He will not give up on us, no matter how sinful our lives have been, I would like to share this next story with us today. Our next story is an example of Jesus' love and mercy being given to a man who at the very last moment of his life understood and recognized Jesus as being the Son of God. Then as he felt Jesus' love, grace and forgiveness flow through his body he knew of a new life, a life where death does not come to those who believe in Jesus Christ. We find our story in ***Luke 23:32-33; 39-42 Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left... One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*** So what are we to learn from the story of the "Thief on the Cross"? What we learn is that the thief was saved even though he was a sinner and yes, we too are sinners in need of Jesus coming into our lives. The thief in that moment of clarity on the cross admitted his sins and saw Jesus as his way to salvation. When was the last time that we sat down and contemplated all of our sins. Not just the little ones but also those sins that are deep inside of our hearts. You know the ones were we

have buried them from our everyday thoughts. You know the ones that hurt so bad when we think of them because we know that others were hurt from them. You know the ones that we believe are so bad that God will never forgive us. So when was the last time you had the courage to face all of your sins? Think of the words that the repentant thief uttered while hanging on the cross, "For we are getting what we deserve, but this Man has done nothing wrong". As we think of these words it is evident that the thief knew of what he did and was ready for his punishment and death. But what is most striking is that the thief was also able to recognize that Jesus had no sin and had done nothing wrong and spoke up for Him. It would be one thing for us to recognize Jesus in our lives but when have we taken that extra step and stood up for Him. Unfortunately in our schools and society today, we are facing an epidemic of bullying that is devastating many lives. And sometimes what is worse than the bullying itself is when someone witnesses the bullying and does nothing about it. This was not the case of our Thief on the cross when he rebuked the other thief was it? You see when the Thief on the cross stood up for Jesus it showed the care he held for Jesus. The same kind and care it takes for someone to stand up to a bully. When we stand up for someone what is most evident is that we are now in a relationship with whom we are standing up for. And it is this relationship that the thief entered into with Jesus when he stood up and defended Him. What Jesus wants from us is the effort to enter into a relationship with Him. And once we are in that relationship with Jesus we will feel His love and grace and most of all we will receive his forgiveness for all of our sins, even the one we have buried deep within our hearts. So what is it that we can learn from the "Thief on the Cross". We can learn of the importance that the relationship we have with Jesus is the key that will open the doors and allow us to enter into the paradise of His Kingdom. When we look up the definition of what is a relationship, we find that a relationship is a connection, an association and an involvement with someone. So when we are examining our relationship with Jesus we can ask ourselves, "What is my connection to Jesus"? We can ask ourselves, "How do I associate with Jesus"? And we can ask ourselves "Am I involved with Jesus"? So just like the "Thief on the Cross" we too can enter into a relationship with Jesus and yes, we too can hear the words ***"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*** Amen.

a connection, association, or [involvement](#).

So what was it about the repentant that made Jesus

What we learn from the saved thief on the cross is that we are all sinners in need of a Savior, and no matter the number of our sins and no matter if we, or the world, think our sins are minor or extreme, it is never too late to repent and accept the free gift of salvation ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#); [Revelation 22:17](#)). Moreover, as long as someone still has a mind and the will to choose life over death ([Hebrews 9:27](#)), it is never too late to proclaim the gospel, which hopefully will open a heart to a miracle by the Holy Spirit.

Read more: <http://www.gotquestions.org/thief-on-the-cross.html#ixzz3UvTVr1VR>

If you recognize Jesus for who he is.