

Father, we just come to You, the last Wednesday of this last month. We just want to thank You, Lord, for keeping. Thank You for Your hand over our lives. Thank You, Father, for Your faithfulness. Now, this hour even as we are in Your house, Lord, we pray that You would continue to teach us. Teach us Your ways. Show us Your paths. When Your servant prayed this prayer thousands of years ago, You promised him: "My presence shall go with thee and I will give You rest." And I pray, Father, we would continue to walk in Your presence, continue to experience Your rest in the midst of everything that we go through Father. Speak to us, this evening. For in Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

If you're expecting a Passover or a Good Friday sermon, you're not getting it. We'll just continue with the study of the Word of God and He will continue to teach us. A couple of Wednesdays back, we saw the incident about the Canaanite woman meeting Jesus. And we saw what separates great faith from ordinary faith and we saw that she was not offended. It's not a small thing. It's a huge thing in the Bible. If God has to approve our faith, and say that great is your faith, be sure we are not offended. Deal with it. Because offense is a huge thing in the Bible, in life. Once offence sets in, unless you deal with it like a surgeon's scalpel, that sharp little knife, unless you deal with it, it can destroy us. So, when God talks about offense in the Bible, take it very seriously because you see through history of mankind in God's presence and then, one day, in the Bible, you'll see it comes in so many ways and people are tripped by it. Many people in the Bible who are offended. If you look at the first time God speaks outside the garden, Scripture does not say, God spoke to Abel. Scripture says, "God looked at Abel and his offering and He received his offering." But it doesn't say He spoke to Abel. But Scripture says, "He spoke to Cain." We don't know whether He spoke to Abel. The Bible is silent about it. But we definitely know He spoke to Cain and I believe, He speaks to Cain and he's very offended. In *Genesis 4:7*,

Genesis 4:7

⁷If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.

We don't know what he thought in his mind because God does not say that. But the usual response if somebody were to tell you, "You did not do well. What you did was not right," the usual response is, "What do you mean, that I can't do anything right? Only you can do something right?" God is showing Him a solution for the problem. But we take offense at this. Remember the third thing? The three Cs? The third thing is taking correction. And you will see he is offended. He won't take correction. He is very offended. "What do you mean? Only my brother can do right and I can't do right?" We get offended. An offense will take Cain down because he will not receive correction. You will see through the Bible, different people who are offended. Naomi was offended. Gideon was offended. A couple of towns when he asked for help, they didn't help him. And he said, "Wait! When I come back in victory, I will teach you a lesson." These are his own people. And he's offended and he takes seventy elders, gets a man and gets him to write down the seventy elders of the town when he comes back in victory. Those seventy elders must have been older men and has them whipped with thorns, because he was offended that they did not listen to him. King Saul was offended. Very offended. He's not looking at the victory. He should be the most excited man saying, "Thank You, Lord. You saved my face. Thank You, Lord. We are out of trouble." Instead, he was offended, because of a song. Because they attributed a few more men to David than to him. He was offended. That's how we get offended. In classrooms, in schools, in colleges in homes, everywhere in Churches. If I were to tell, "Peter, you led worship very well," what does Abel think? "What are you saying? I don't lead well?" That was never meant. That was not intended. Because we have five worship leaders. If we commend him, will the others get offended? Or if I were to say, "Your cooking was great!" "He never commended my cooking." We get offended. Understand! The Bible is full of this. Ahithophel was offended. Once offence sets in, we saw on Sunday the Word of God passes by or you pass the Word by.

So, we saw on Sunday in *John 6:61*,

John 6:61

⁶¹When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you?"

Then,

John 6:66

⁶⁶ From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

One of the reasons why God actually tells Israel, the Church and everybody is that, you're forever learning, but you never know. It's the reason people come into the house of God with offense and the Word of God just passes them by. Just passes them by. The word never becomes life. Never becomes life.

Let's say you got an infection in your stomach and you have loose motions (Diarrhea.) So, it doesn't matter how much you eat, it just goes away unless the infection is handled. You may eat the best nutritious meal. To no avail. It just goes away. You may sit under the greatest teacher ever known, the very Son of God the very word that became flesh, anointed with Spirit without measure, but it just passes you by because you are offended. That's why Jesus says, "Guard your heart against offense." Because the Word of God will pass you by. You will pass the word by.

Like we saw on Sunday, the message of the cross is incredibly offensive to the carnal man, to the self. So, remember all these messages. Don't forget. We saw last Wednesday the three touches of Jesus with the blind man of Bethsaida. The first touch is the touch of conviction. Second touch is the touch of conversion. The third touch is the touch of correction and the third touch is what we run away from. That's why Jesus said, "Salvation is a very difficult process. Don't let anybody make you think it is easy." The entire process of salvation is very difficult. Very few will allow in history when we stand before, will allow the work of salvation to be completed in their life. There is a beginning. That doesn't mean you're not saved. But the completion of that work, I believe, very few in terms of people who are saved, I kind of believe in the 144,000 of billions who will be in earth who will be like the 144,000 may be who allowed the completion of salvation because it's a very difficult work. That's why Jesus said, "Straight is the gate and narrow and hard is the way that leads to life. Very few will find it." Why? Because the battle we're struggling with because the message of the cross is offensive. Apostle Peter put it this way.

1 Peter 4:17-18

¹⁷ For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; (When God brings judgment into His house, when he tries us to judge us, He doesn't bring a tank or a rifle, He brings the cross.) and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

This is talking about allowing the completion of the work of salvation. If the righteous one, who is saved, declared righteous is hardly saved at the end, what is going to happen to the ungodly and the sinner? That is why we gather for the study of the Word of God. We make this journey with Jesus so that He continues to teach us. So, let's back with Jesus, back on the road.

Last Wednesday, we were with Him at Bethsaida and after healing the man at Bethsaida... so, when you study Scripture, listen to His instructions very, very carefully. Take it as very personal. Though we call it Bible study but don't look at it as a Bible study, though it is, take it as a very personal conversation where every instruction is for me and He is trying to speak. You and I may fight with it, but we look and we are smart seeing that nobody has fought with Him and won, so, I give in. I may not like it but I give in. Don't throw tantrums with God it doesn't work. So, He told him very clearly; took him by hand, touched him. What do you see? And then He's got an instruction. Now, your sight is recovered, you can see clearly, if you want to continue walking in clear sight, there is one thing you need to do. In *Mark 8*,

Mark 8:26

²⁶ Then He sent him away to his house, saying, "Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town."

God is telling His people, "Now that you are saved and you are able to see the Kingdom of God, if you want to continue seeing, there has to be a separation in your life. Don't go back to the place from where I rescued you. Don't go back to it." He always has something to tell people. To the man at the pool of Bethsaida, He had an instruction. You haven't waked for 38 years, do you see your life in retrospect? 38 years, sat there in one place, you haven't gone anywhere, you are exactly

where you've been sitting for years and so many people, their lives, they may be doing lot of things but if you actually look into the core of their lives, they haven't moved at all. They are exactly where they were 10 years back, 20 years back or like Israel, 38 years back and when God sets him free, He's got one thing to tell him. Tells him,

John 5:14

¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."

He says, "Don't lose your walk! You are starting to move again in the right direction now." To the other man, He said, "You are starting to see. You didn't see all these years, you are starting to see. One thing I have to tell you if you want to continue seeing, that is, don't go back, don't go back to where I rescued you from." To this man, He says, "Don't go back to the things which you used to do. It is not that you will be crippled, something worse can happen." So, don't miss instructions, what Jesus says. To the woman caught in adultery, remember that woman? To her, He says,

John 8:10-11

¹⁰ When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

He says, "I'm not looking at the quantum or the depth, or the nature of your sin, all I'm telling you is this. I'm releasing you, don't sin again, if you do not walk in condemnation again." Three things to three people, He says, "You want to see, you want to walk, you want to walk without condemnation, follow My instructions," because this is our major issue. We don't see. We are not able to walk with God and we constantly walk under condemnation when Scripture says, "There is therefore now no condemnation," yet we feel the weight of condemnation because we do not follow instructions. So, that's from Bethsaida. So, finishing with the blind man who sees now from Bethsaida. Jesus and His disciples are not moving and they are moving to Caesarea Philippi and on the way, He asked them a question. First, He asked them, what do people say that I am? Jeremiah, Elijah all these answers they give. Then He says, "Who do you say that I am?" That is the next one.

Mark 8:29

²⁹ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"...

This is after the incident with the man at Bethsaida. They are moving. He asked them this question. Who do you say that I am? He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

²⁹ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."

Stay close, listen carefully. They are travelling as a group, large group. If you read the context carefully, you will see He turned and asked them. If you were part of a large group and you are walking at the back, you would have never heard this question. You missed out one of the most important question Jesus asked. Listen carefully, when you come into the house of the Lord, remember whether you came on your own or whether you were brought, listen carefully. Don't miss the questions He asked. Now, He is asking them a personal question, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter answered, "You are the Christ!" So, whenever you go to the house of God, pick a place where you can hear clearly. Keep your minds on Christ Jesus, don't get distracted. Who do you say that I am? What is He saying? "I'm not interested in what the people in the world say about Me." Who do you say Jesus is? I'm not interested about other people's opinion. Who do you say Jesus is? You see, many people through the gospels came to Jesus with various needs. So, to different people, He was different persons. In the Church also, many people come to Christ for different reasons. On a regular Sunday, people come at different times and sometimes, those who come the last are the first to meet me because they have come for a specific reason. They have come to meet Jesus the problem solver. "So, Pastor, will you pray over me?" Jesus the healer, they come to meet different Jesus and Jesus meets people at their point of need. That does not mean they know who Jesus is. That does not mean they know Jesus. So, Jesus asked the question, you all have been coming, some of you have been coming for ten years. After ten years, who do you say Jesus is? Peter said, "You are the Christ, the anointed one of God." In the *Book of Acts*, you will see, when the word cuts through, there was a cry that rose from thousands of mouths, thousands of mouths because they heard who He was. In *Acts 2:36*,

Acts 2:36

³⁶ “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

Who is this Jesus? And they heard and cried, they wailed. What will we do? In *Romans 10:9, 10*

Romans 10:9, 10

⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

So, there is a heart and a mouth. With the mouth, what do you confess? The Lordship of Jesus Christ. What do you confess with your mouth? The Lordship of Jesus Christ. No Jesus, it is very easy to confess Jesus. The Lordship of Jesus Christ. What do you believe in your heart? That He is alive, He is not dead. He is alive! Jacob, for 22 years, lived such a miserable life of depression in Canaan because he thought Joseph was dead. Then, when his sons come back after the third trip and says, “Dad, we need to tell you something – Joseph is alive.” He couldn’t believe it. When he finally believes it, Scripture says, “He arose because he knew Jesus is alive.” Scripture is saying, “Do you believe Jesus is Lord? Do you believe that He is risen from the dead, that He is alive, that you are dealing with a living person?” Do we believe that the living person is the Lord Jesus Christ? The fact that Jesus is Lord is more than a confession, it’s more than a confession. That’s why He is asking this question, He is asking this question not because He doesn’t know the answers, to know whether we know the answers. He knows. The Scripture says the Lord in *Deuteronomy 8* says, “He led them in the wilderness, cause them to hunger and fed them with Manna, so that He could humble them, so that they could know what was in their heart.” Until trouble comes, tribulation comes, wilderness comes, famine comes, job-loss comes, no-money comes, we really don’t know who we are, till then we will say, “Hallelujah!” When real tight situations come, we will really know whether Jesus is Lord or not. So, in *Mark 8*, the same situation we will see, He began to teach them. Who do you think? Peter said to Jesus, “You are the Christ!” He said, “Okay, your confession is fantastic!” Now, let me teach you about this Christ.

Mark 8:31-34

³¹ And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke this word openly.

NIV will say, “He spoke these words plainly!” very plainly. See, we don’t speak these words openly. We do but many people try to say, “It is very offensive if you tell all these things, people will run away, let’s try to make the Gospel very comfortable.” But He did not make it comfortable. As soon as the confession came, “You are the Christ!” He said, “Okay, your confession is right! Now, let me tell you about this Christ what is going to happen to Him.”

³² He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

When He spoke about the Cross, the message of the Cross is offensive. Peter rebuked his Lord and we blame Peter but we don’t realize in our hearts also, we also rebuke God. When the Cross comes in we rebuke, we get upset. That is why John the Baptist also said, “Call his disciples and tells them, go and ask Him – are You the One to come or should we look for somebody else?” Why? Because the Cross came into his life. Till then, it was fine; crowds were coming, fire and thunder, brimstone preaching, afraid of nobody. Then you are arrested and put in prison, cross has come and the cross was offensive and you are questioning it. Verse 33 says,

³³ But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, (Now, Peter is rebuking Him, He is rebuking Peter) saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

Three things He said there, but message is not on that. Three things – “Get behind Me, satan.” So, who is the one who makes the message of the cross offensive to us? It is satan. He doesn’t like that message. So, He addresses both Peter and the spirit that is working in Him now from behind. He says, first He addresses the spirit, what is that? “Get behind Me!” Second, He tells Peter, “You are mindful about the things of men. You are thinking carnally. You are thinking the way a

Deny! Pick! Follow!

fallen man things.” Third, “You don’t have the mind for the things of God. We don’t have the things of God in our lives,” Get behind Me, Satan. You don’t have the things of God in your mind. Then, He calls the crowd and the disciples together. He brings them back together.

³⁴ *When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also,*

so, you will see through it all, lot of stuffs happening. The crowd is following Him; He asks the disciples a question, “What do all these crowd say I am?” They are telling this is what the crowd says. Then He asks them, “What do you say?” Then the drama that happened with Peter and Him. Then he calls everybody and then tells,

“Whoever desires to come after Me. . .

“Only those who desire to come after Me.” So, this portion will make no sense, have no impact for anybody who does not want to go after Jesus. That is the first thing. If I don’t want to go after Jesus, I’m very content with where I am. “Thank You, Lord! Bless me, bless my cats, my dogs, my family, my children and when I die, Lord, give me a slot in heaven but leave Me alone.” God says, “Fine, this won’t make any sense to you but anyone who wants to come after Me,” He said, “You have three choices you will have to make.”

Last time, three things, what was it? Conviction, Conversion and Correction. Today, three choices – He said, “Anybody who wants to come after Me, first – you will have to deny yourself; second – you will have to pick up your cross; third – you will have to follow Me.” You know, Peter puts himself ahead and he got rebuked. He puts his self ahead of the plans of God. Self-centered, that is what God is talking about. “If anybody wants to follow Me, you cannot be self-centered.” Every morning, when we rise up to a new day or if you a night shift people, every night, when you wake up for your shift, whichever time you work, every believer has to make these three choices everyday till the last day of your life – will I deny myself today? Will I pick up my cross today? Will I follow Him today? You see the shadow of the self and the shadow of the Cross, you look, you open the Bible from *Chapter 3* onwards, you will see the shadow following. The self and the Cross. The battle between these. It is an unending battle between the self and the Cross and depending upon who will win.

Genesis has how many chapters? Fifty chapters – creation of Adam till the death of Joseph. If you go by calculation, two thousand three hundred and seventy years. How many years? 2370 – starting with Adam, ending with Joseph. 2370 but only seven people managed to carry the cross. 2370 years starting with Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Seven people. Two thousand three hundred and seventy years battle between the self and the Cross. The Cross won only in the life of seven people. It doesn’t mean the others were not saved, that’s not what I’m saying. I’m saying it is a battle between the self and the Cross. Just one Book alone I’m taking as an example. One Book alone records two thousand three hundred and seventy years of human history, only seven won that battle and some of them actually struggle towards the end. So, we have thirty-nine Books in the Old Testament. One man God chooses called Abraham, one family is chosen called Jacob’s family and out of that one family God will have a nation called Israel and that thirty-nine Books is about this man, his family and this nation. You know the history, history is, the self kept on winning. They battled against the Cross. They did not allow the Cross to work in them. They fought the Cross, fought it and Israel kept on losing. They had some good kings here and there, sparks of revival but it did not work. God’s warning over and over, they kept on ignoring and finally Israel goes into captivity. You know the primary reason why God allows Israel to go into captivity and be taken as slaves four times Nebuchadnezzar, three or four times he almost took entire Judah into Babylon, emptied the land. You know why? The primary reason was, idolatry. Idolatry. And we do not realize idolatry is the manifestation of the self. Self and idolatry are like conjoined twins. Cross is the only weapon, there is no other weapon; the only weapon that can destroy both self and idolatry is the cross. Israel went into captivity and literally wept in captivity. This is the weeping described in *Psalms 137*,

Psalms 137:1, 4

¹ *by the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.*

⁴ *How shall we sing the Lord’s song, in a foreign land?*

Literally, if you look at Israel, they wept every idol out of their life. You will never see idols back in Israel after that. It took seventy years of severe judgment and captivity to break every physical idol in their lives. No more idolatry in Israel’s life – destroyed, because it took severe hand of God to destroy self and idolatry in their lives. But, because physical idols have

gone away but that doesn't mean idols have gone away. They just have gone under cover. Idols are very sneaky, very sneaky. That's why John Calvin said; what did he say? "The human heart is an idol factory." It's an idol factory. An idol is when I put something in the centre of my life; my life and my priorities where only God belongs. I think I ruffled a few feathers when I said – romantic alliances are bondages because you actually tend to worship the other person and end up serving the other person. Jacob was called to serve God; he ended up serving Laban, why? Because, he loved Rachel. That's why almost 90% (nobody can do a study on it) probably 90+ songs is on worship of the other, right? It is not the worship of God; it is the worship of man (the lover) or the woman, it is the worship. And it is slavery, it is bondage; we don't deal with the 'idols' first, we deal with 'self' first. What did Jesus say? "Deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow Me." We don't deal with idols; idols are easy to see outside of you and it is visible. But we have to deal with the 'self' first. The Pharisees have no physical idols, when Jesus came on earth; Pharisees have no idols at all, no physical idols at all; but they put themselves first. Therefore, their hearts were full of hidden idols. If you look into Pharisee's house, oh my gosh, you will never find a house like it – absolutely clean, no idols; but, they put themselves first. If you don't deal with the self first, idols will slowly keep coming, crawling inside. Jesus gives practical lessons. And one of the practical lessons about this, He gives in the house of a Pharisee! This is a very nice person, he used to visit Pharisees also. Anybody's house, they call Him, He goes, okay. And the house of the Pharisee, He has one practical lesson; He told a parable to those who were invited; when He noted, how they chose the best places, the house of a Pharisee; Jesus knows, He goes to the temple, He looks at the people, how they are putting their offering; He visiting a house, He will sit and see how they are treating Him; you will invite in to another house, He will watch, He will go early and sit there and see how all others are looking for seats; we didn't realize whether you come late, whether you come early, Jesus looks. He watches every move of ours because every move of ours is a reflection of our self. He was watching people coming to choose the best places; it's a big dinner, table is over there, everybody is trying to sit at the head of the table close to the host. Jesus has something to say:

Luke 14:8

⁸ "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place..."

Don't put yourself first. This is an attitude. Jesus says, "It is not nice." When it is lunch time, you know exactly by now, you know 9 o' clock is the lunch time; 8:58, you are out, because you want to stand first in the line. So many people do. In Kerala, when we are growing up the buses used to be full and the dudes will come. I also did it many times. You just come and put your kerchief through and then, you wait; everybody is rushing, pushing people all look at the kerchief and say, "Somebody already booked it," you never push, but yourself first though you got in last.

¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place...

A very difficult thing to do this consistently – put yourself in the lowest place because self always needs and demands attention. That is the nature of the fallen man, why? Fallen man's nature comes from the fallen man's father – the devil. The saved man's nature has to come from his Father – God. So, there are only two fathers only; only two fathers. One is God and the other is the devil. The nature of the devil, he doesn't want the lowest place, he wants the highest place; God says, know this and constantly fight that nature with that Cross. In *Isaiah 14*, Scripture says,

Isaiah 14:13

¹³ For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, (this is the devil) I will exalt my throne above the stars of God...

There are many things – Cherubim, archangels, many stars are there, and I am looking at them and said, "You know what, I am going to be Number 1 here; not Michael, not Gabriel. I, Lucifer, will be number one. I am going to exalt myself above all the other archangels."

...I will also sit on the mount of the congregation, On the farthest sides of the north...

"Not only that, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High." That's why this comes from. That's why Jesus said fight it constantly, because there is old man in you, which is born of the devil; there is new man in you which is born of God in you; and you always have to wake up each day and say, "I am going to deny myself. I will deny myself," because self craves for attention. Men crave for attention; women crave for attention; children crave for attention

and employees crave for attention and even employers; everybody crave for attention. That's the problem. The question is, practical way: how could you answer? How could you tackle practically this craving for attention? How do I put something ahead of myself? There's a word in the Bible for that, a word in life; a word for that, understand the spiritual meaning of it, that word is called 'duty'. We have to say put duty before self.

Finally, after all his crazy and enquires and miseries, the last words of Solomon is this –

Ecclesiastes 12:13

¹³ Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandment, for this is the duty of all mankind.

To fear God and obey God, whatever He has said; if we take it as our duty, as our duty, you can overcome yourself – as your duty. Duty puts something ahead of you; ahead of yourself. It's my duty, I need to do it and there is no 'No' to it. And one of the most powerful things God will give to Israel like every; like all the unmarried people, please show your hands. Most of them are unmarried. So, you are thinking of getting married, dreaming of building a house and getting this man to marry, this woman to marry, all these pictures you have in your mind; okay.

But let's replay and take all back to 3000 years. You are not in 2011; you are living before Jesus Christ in a Jewish system. There is Peter. Peter has planning his wedding. Peter has been preparing to get married. And he has this girl in mind and he is crazy about this girl and everything and then, one thing happens, Peter's brother dies. His elder brother dies. Peter's elder brother is married; they have no children. You know what the law was?

Deuteronomy 25:5

⁵ "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.

He says, "I don't care what your feelings are in this; what you want for yourself. Duty comes before self, your brother's line must not go cut, you need to put him ahead of yourself." So, to the Jew, when Jesus said, "*Love your neighbour as yourself*," which meant many things you put him ahead of yourself

...and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.

It's your duty. You cannot escape duty. "No, Lord. What are You telling? I have been planning, dreaming. We have even planned out a wedding and the event manager has got it all. I have everyone invited." God says, "Duty above self." The only thing you can to overcome the self is to see the whole Word of God as my duty. That's what Solomon is saying "*Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*" Otherwise, you know what? We will stop when we are not praised, we will stop when we are not encouraged, we will stop when nobody gives us a commendation, but to do your duty, you don't need any of these things; you don't need anything. 21st century world, the Facebook, WhatsApp world – fathers want to be praised, mothers want to be praised, Pastors want to be praised, employees, children, everybody lives not on food, but on praise. What I have done for my children is not even sacrifice, it is duty. The minute I think as sacrifice, I have put myself ahead. The minute I think it as my duty, I expect nothing from you. What I did to you is because that's what is demanded of me. You have to give nothing back, to me; it is my duty. As parents, we have to believe whatever we have done for our children was my duty, it is not sacrifice. There may be sacrifice in duty, but that is irrelevant. The minute you put sacrifice first, then we are demanding and expecting something back. That's what the Scripture says, "Jesus Christ came 2000 years ago and died for us when were sinners when we were powerless when we were enemies of God, because that was his duty to his father, "*not my will, but Thy will be done*." The greatest battle was fought the previous night in the garden of Gethsemane between the will of Jesus, the man, and the will of God in his life and the will God won over him. He says "*Not my will, but Your will be done*." He says, "I will not put Myself ahead. I will deny Myself," and then, the next day, He will literally pick up His cross and walk. Otherwise, we will never ever win this battle with duty, with self, will never. Whatever we do it is just our duty, when we have forgotten what our duty is, self becomes king, self becomes king. Jesus had an incredible example to give in *Luke 17*, I want to read the whole parable.

Luke 17:7

⁷“And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’?”

Imagine you are a lord, master and you got slaves and one of the servants was either working in the field or was taking care of sheep and when he comes back after whole day's work does the master say, “Oh, you worked so hard come and sit down with me and eat?” No, he doesn't say that. Even if the master was watching TV the whole day and doing nothing, you will still tell him, what will you tell him?

⁸But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper...

“You go to the kitchen prepare.” Why? “You belong to me. You are my slave, you belong to me.”

...and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink’? ⁹Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him?

After all that, does he say, “Thank you!” Does he say that?

...I think not. ¹⁰So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”

God owes me nothing, I owe God everything, everything. If we don't get that clear, we'll fight ourselves all the days of our life – self will rule. That's the first thing he says over there – duty. Understand duty. Deny yourself. Problem is – you have forgotten what duty is. For a self-centered person, it is all about me what I feel, what I think, what I want. The disciple thinks about what does Jesus want. So, Paul when he is writing to his disciple, Timothy gives him an incredible example from one part of humanity where there is very clear, only in India, if you look at one place where there is very clear where nobody has to tell him what, what is that? In the army. In the army, in the army, no soldier has to be told what is your duty. Never, whatever you are in the army, I have seen drivers, one call they got whistle the uniform and gone, gone like that. When I worked with the army, we used to sit in the mess, and the mess was made into a service place put a white cloth the jawans (soldiers) are all sitting over there and many of them are drivers, sitting over there, they are weeping, they are crying they are worshiping and everything and suddenly, one whistle, “Pastor, praise the Lord” uniform, gone. Duty is above everything. This Sunday, it's 7 o'clock nothing, gone. “See you next Sunday.” Gone. They understood that. That's what Paul will say in *Timothy*,

2 Timothy 2:4

⁴No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

His only desire is, “I have to please my CO, my Commanding Officer, I have a duty. I have enlisted the only thing is I have to do is, my duty, the duty is that my officer is pleased”. That's our duty. That's why the Scripture says, “*Without faith, it is impossible to please God.*” So, it is our duty that we hear and we walk by faith, hear and walk by faith. It is our duty and there when you walk by faith you can never put yourself first. In genuine walk of faith, you always have to put God first and never yourself. It is impossible to put self-first, you have to put God first, first thing is denying yourself.

In *Mark 8:34*, second thing – take up your neighbour's cross. No, He didn't say that – *take up your cross*. It's an action word – take up your cross. Deny yourself. It's an action word. Pick up your cross. It's an action word and the cross is very, very powerful, not the cross that hangs around your neck, not that one; the real cross, the spiritual cross is a powerful weapon that destroys all idols. They understood; we don't. We don't understand what is to pick up your cross. They understood very well what he meant. I'll show you an example, *John 19*.

John 19:17

¹⁷And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha:

Deny! Pick! Follow!

In the Roman age, the only one who carried a cross is the man who's been condemned to die. Only he. If I have been condemned to die, the Roman authorities next day is my execution, I carry my cross through the streets so that the whole public will say, "This man is condemned to death. He is carrying his cross. He is dead." You say in English like the title of that movie, "He was a dead man walking". And end of his walk, they knew he is going to die the most horrible, miserable death. Pick up your cross was a death sentence. It was not a nice gold one with huge jewels hanging like how it hangs on the Bishops, the big ones. Do you know about the first council of Nicaea when Constantine became the emperor and suddenly, the whole Roman empire has become Christian because the emperor has become Christian and there were so many issues going on? So, the emperor, after years and years of persecution, the Church was underground, persecuted, killed and everything. Now, the emperor is Christian. So, he calls all the Bishops and the leaders from the Churches from the Roman empire for a meeting called the 'Nicene Creed'. It was in Nicaea. When they came, the Roman emperor came in all his glory, dressed in all the pomp and there were the bishops coming out of the underground, sitting around him – some are lame, some have one eye, some have no hand, some have another defect. Nobody is walking around in robes and with crosses like today. They had borne their cross for years and in the process, they had lost parts of their bodies, beaten up, cut, eyes gorged out and they are now coming and sitting in the presence of the emperor. So, they knew what it meant to pick up their cross. It was a death to self. Anyone in that time, if they were told, "Pick up your cross," they understood what it meant. We struggle to mean what it is. Dead man walking. That is what Paul was talking about in *Galatians 2:20*,

Galatians 2:20

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

He says, "I'm a dead man walking." Who is Paul? Dead man walking. Who is living? "Christ lives in me." Every day, he is saying, "I deny myself, I pick up my cross and I follow Him. When I follow Him, I no longer live. He lives in me." The walk of faith means that He lives in me.

There were three men hanging on that Cross, remember on that day? 2000 years ago, there were three men hanging on the Cross. One thief, we know, repents and comes into the Kingdom. Think about that thief for a minute. Think about that thief hanging on that cross. His body, from head to toe, is wrapped in pain. He is hanging over there. Legs were all pierced and he was hanging over there. We will think of the illustration in their times. Imagine a Roman Centurion comes there in his incredible chariot, drawn by white horses. Is he going to covet that horse? An incredibly pretty Jewish girl looks at him and winks at him, is he going to lust after her? And there is a Sadducee standing there in his purple robe and is he going to think, "I wish I was dressed like him"? Another man opens up his dabba and he has a fantastic dabba and he is eating in front of him, is he going to hunger? He is a dead man hanging there. At that point, when you have picked up your Cross, Scripture says in *Luke 23:42*. He had his eyes and ears only for Jesus.

Luke 23:42

⁴² Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

He has forgotten everybody there. He is aware of nobody. He is aware of the other thief and he says, "Shut up, okay? We deserve this. He doesn't deserve it." He is suddenly aware of everything – his sinfulness, His holiness, that, "we are right to be condemned." He did not care who was there. He was not aware of any other reality except the reality of the One who is hanging in the middle and he says, "Lord, remember me." That's what the Cross does. When the Cross does its work in us, we are not aware of anybody else. We are aware only of Jesus and what He wants us to do in our lives. We will only have eyes for Jesus. And that's what Jesus is talking about.

Another thief was hanging on the cross. The other thief was also hanging on the cross but the cross was not doing any work in him. That's what Scripture is talking about – two men are hanging on the cross – one is hanging on the cross, the other is hanging on the cross. In one, he is not only hanging on the cross; the Cross is doing a deep work in him, cuts off everything and he has eyes only to see Jesus and he sees. He sees what nobody standing in the crowd is able to see. That's what is interesting. His mother, who had incredible revelations in the beginning of His life, doesn't see. His disciples are all standing far away, including John, all who have seen in the Mount of Transfiguration, do not see. Mary Magdalene, who followed faithfully, doesn't see. Nobody sees but he sees. When he was hanging on the cross, he sees the Kingdom and he sees the King. His eyes were open because he was not only hanging on the cross, he allowed the cross to work in him. His eyes were

open and he saw the King and the Kingdom and he says, “Remember me.” Jesus says, “Definitely. You will be with Me in paradise today.” It’s an incredible conversation that is taking place on the crosses while on the other hand, another man is hanging on the Cross, misses the work of the cross completely. Understand how the Kingdom of God works. Why did He say, “Pick up your cross and follow Me”? Why? Because only the Cross can open our eyes. Otherwise, we will see everything through eyes of self. “You didn’t do this for me.” “He ignored me.” “She spoke like this. Her tone was different today. I don’t know what she was thinking.” Why? Because there is no cross in our lives. Therefore, we only see self. When the Cross has done its work, we see Christ; we see the Kingdom and we realize – these things don’t matter. The whole duty of man is to obey God. Whatever He tells, it is fine. My duty is to obey Him. When the cross doesn’t see, even when we do our greatest, most noble work, we don’t see Christ, we don’t see our neighbor; we only see ourselves. That’s why Jesus said, “You do your acts of righteousness to be seen; not unrighteousness.” Everybody does their acts of unrighteousness secretly. But they do their acts of righteousness publicly because they want their self to be recognized. Jesus said, “No. Pick up your Cross and deny yourself.”

And then, the third instruction He gives. He says, “Don’t leave it there. Don’t deny yourself, pick up your cross and just hang in there.” No, He says, “Follow Me.” There are three steps to this completion. He says, “Follow Me. Keep following Me.” Follow means – to walk in His footsteps. Follow means – to go wherever He takes you. But step 3 – “Follow Me” is only possible if step 1 and 2 are done. If people who have no step 1 and step 2 ask, “Where will You send me? First tell me. Then, I will decide.” You see, when step 1 and step 2 are not there, they don’t follow. They go in the Name of God where they want to go and it doesn’t matter how great a man he is; he can be as incredibly great as Elijah or the greatest in the Old Testament. He runs from where God wanted him to be and God is kind to him. He gives him two angelic ministrations. He eats and gets strong for 40 days, comes to Mount Horeb and when God speaks to him, what is the first thing God tells him? “What are you doing here? You ran. You didn’t follow Me. You followed yourself.” That’s why under the juniper tree, you said, “I’m no better than my fathers. I want to die.” In so many ways, depression and suicide is the ultimate manifestation of the self, unless it is demonic. “I am not going have my way. You are not going to have Your way either in my life. I’m not going to give You the joy of my salvation. I am going to tie my robe. I, Ahithophel, am going to kill myself. I’m not going to give You Your joy. I will have my joy in my death. I will choose my own way out.” That’s what he is saying – “I don’t want to live. I want to die.” Because he put his self ahead. God says, “It doesn’t work that way. You have to deny yourself, you have to pick up your cross and you have to follow Me and wherever I lead you, you should be willing to go.” And that’s because He says, “I have shown you a way. The Father told Me to go to the Cross. Yes, I struggled but I said ‘no. Not My will; Your will be done’.” That is our struggle. That’s why He said, “The road to life is not easy. It’s very difficult.”

One of the most influential people in God’s eyes, as we close, one of the most influential people in the Bible before God is a man called Daniel. He is a cut above almost all the others in the Bible and God Himself gives His testimony when God is so angry with Israel and He talks about the power of intercession. We talk about the power of the righteous prayer; the fervent prayer of a righteous availeth much. God says, “Yeah, yeah. All that is true but that doesn’t mean you can make Me do anything. I’m giving an example.” In *Ezekiel*, He says,

Ezekiel 14:13-14

¹³ “Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it. ¹⁴ Even if these three men, (who are they?) Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness,” says the Lord God.

“I’m not going to hear them.” What does He say? One of the oldest persons in the Bible, oldest books in the Bible – Job, Noah and the youngest in these three, Daniel. He says, “Even if these three incredibly righteous men were to stand together and agree in unity, bind, release, intercessory prayer, fervent prayer,” He says, “once I’ve made up My mind, it is done. They cannot change My mind.” So, don’t put your trust also in your prayer; put your trust in the mercy of God because there are a lot of people who will say that you can change the heart of God through prayer and all. That is only if He had willed it that way. You cannot bend God’s arm. That’s what He says. And even an incredibly righteous man like Daniel.

This is connected with following Him – If you go through the Bible, one of the beauties about the Word of God is that it is the Word of God. It never lies. It never whitewashes the characters in the Bible. You see them in their weaknesses, their blemishes, their warts – everything. But if you read the entire account of different people in the Bible, there seems to be

only one man in the Old Covenant, of whom no blemish was recorded. It doesn't mean he was sinless but he seems to be blameless. In the entire Old Testament account, there seems to be only one man about whom no blemish is written and that man is Daniel. Nothing negative is written about him. Even if you talk about Joseph, you can bring a couple of things out like – “Why did he marry the Egyptian priest's daughter?” Right? His father did not marry; his grandfather did not marry; his great grandfather did not marry. Why did he marry an Egyptian priest's daughter? You can ask. But let's leave that aside. There are a couple of other questions also that you can ask like, you will say – Uthama purisha rama, this thing and all; finally, they will come and ask, “You are uthama purisha. Why did you put the throne ahead of your wife? She came through fire, right? So, she's pure, right? So, why did you put power ahead of your wife? You can't say you are the only one to rule because for 13 years, Dasara had ruled fantastically. So, the question of a successor is also not there.” So, there are fallacies, blemishes in all these uthama purisha of the Bible also, shown exactly as it is but this young man and if you look at his record – unbelievable. A young teenager forcibly taken from his own family and land. He was subjected to the most powerful indoctrination – programming – possible. Your eating, your dressing, your language, your studies – everything is to make a Babylonian out of you – 24X7. By the time they are finished with you in 3 years, you will no longer be a Hebrew. You will be a Babylonian, to be used in the Babylonian court. That was the training. Surrounded by temptation to pursue personal gain and prosperity. When the sons of Judah were being all taken, we don't know what was the advice parents gave. Many of the parents must have said, “You know, Babylonians have this system. If you are very smart and if you are very, very smart, you can really rise up the ranks. Okay? Anyway, we have lost. They are taking you. Be good boys. Listen to whatever these Babylonian say. Study well and one day, you can become a collector in the Babylonian court.” Many must have given advice like that. “You can rise.” Not Daniel. Surrounded by temptation to pursue personal gain or prosperity. Surrounded by evil and enemies. Yet, he never failed God and God never failed him. This was simply because he made one resolute decision in the beginning. He purposed in his heart to follow Jesus. One decision he made very early as a young boy – “I am going to follow Jesus wherever I am.” Therefore, to the young ones sitting here and everyone – how do you follow Jesus consistently and all your life? How did Daniel follow God in the Babylonian court for 70 years? That's what the Bible says, right? 70 years in the world, in the Babylonian court. I mean, if you were in the Jerusalem, you have the temple, you have the priest, you have the sacrifices, you have the offerings, you have the community. You have everything. You are in Babylon and your own community has let you down by going the Babylonian way. How did he follow Jesus? We know already about denying yourself; we know about picking up your cross but how do you practically follow? We will look at it in one simple decision that he makes first. In *Daniel 1:8*,

Daniel 1:8

⁸But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

He made a decision about purity. A simple decision. A very important decision in his life – if I have to follow Jesus, I will have to say ‘no’ to a lot of things which will defile me because my Jesus is holy. So, I'm going to say ‘no’. The first thing he looked was not vegetables but meat and wine. The Old Testament does not tell you that you cannot drink wine but the problem is – both the wine and the meat came from the idols. They were offered. The vegetables were not offered to the idols. Meat and wine was offered to the idols. So, they were brought from idols. So, he asked, “Can I leave this out? Can I just have vegetables, fruits, whatever and water? Can I keep myself pure?” That's the first decision he made. That's the first decision. If you want to follow Jesus, there are decisions you have to take in the New Covenant, people have much more reasons to take it because we know who He is and we have the Blood which was not available for them. Meaning – even if you were defiled till yesterday, you can start new today because they did not have the blood; we have the Blood of Jesus. They had the blood of lambs and goats; we have the Blood of Jesus.

Second thing – when Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and he decided, “I'm going to kill everybody off if you don't tell me what my dream is.” Everybody was panicking. Daniel intervened. What does Daniel do in *Daniel 2*?

Daniel 2:17-19

¹⁷Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, ¹⁸that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁹Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

What was the first thing you hear about him? This man prays. It may look like a very simple thing. He is very clear about his purity; he is very clear about his prayer life and he is used to hearing from God and getting answers to his prayers. It's not just a mechanical prayer; he is used to hearing from God. He is absolutely confident. You will get this confidence only when praying and hearing from God is part of your life. When he is thrown into the lion's den, what does Scripture say in Daniel 6?

Daniel 6:10

¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

Childhood onwards. That was his habit. He prayed three times a day. And what is Daniel 9 all about? It's about his prayer life. So, what do you see? He is very clear – "If I have to follow Jesus, I am choosing purity over everything else." Second – "I will pray daily and I will pray three times a day." In his case, it is three times. It is up to us to choose how many times but he is very clear – "This is part of my life – I pray."

Third thing – in *Daniel 9:2*,

Daniel 9:2

² in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

So, he's got till *Jeremiah* with him. When Daniel is leaving, one of the last letters, probably, in his hands, written so far starting from *Genesis* down to *Jeremiah*. And he has got it and he reads from *Genesis* to *Jeremiah*. Simple things. Simple secret – if you want to follow Jesus, it is very simple – "Read your Bible, pray every day." You can follow Jesus. This is not a magic formula. This is very simple. He read his Bible. To him, *Genesis* to *Jeremiah* was available and he read. And when he read, he was not reading as a ritual, he was reading to understand, "What are You telling, God?" He read and he understood that 70 years are almost up. He read his Bible. In *Daniel 9:13*, Scripture says,

Daniel 9:13

¹³ "As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us..."

He also enquired, "Why are we here?" And he saw. Sowing and reaping. Today, we talk about sowing and reaping in terms of making money. We never read the Word of God and say, "Oh my God. This is why I'm going through this. Because I sowed in the flesh, I'm reaping corruption." We never see that but that's how he saw it. "I didn't sin it but that doesn't make any difference. My father sinned; my forefathers sinned and here am I in Babylon and I have nothing. We knew it would happen – if you sow in the flesh, you will reap corruption." He understood the law.

...yet we have not made our prayer before the Lord our God...

He is saying, "A lot of people have never come to the end of themselves. They are still trying in their own strength to wriggle out of the situation even though they are in Babylon and in chains. They have not prayed."

...that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth.

You have to turn from your iniquities to understand His truth. Where there is no turning away, there is no understanding of His truth. So, look at this young man; now, an old man in this case, he made a very clear decision early in his life – he prayed, he read his Word and he understood the Word. He knew his Bible. He didn't just read his Bible; he knew his Bible and his Bible knew him very well. That was why Daniel was able to follow Jesus all the days of his life, that God was able to open to Daniel about our times. He kept on asking, "Lord, more." He said, "Enough, Daniel. Close the book." We also do it with children, "Daddy, one more story." "Enough. Go to sleep now." That's what God tells finally to Daniel, "Enough. I'm not going to tell you anything more. Enough. Close the books. Now, you go and sleep and be gathered with your fathers. That's all." What a relationship for a young teenager in the middle of pagan Babylon! Think about it because we think we need

ideal conditions and circumstances to follow Jesus. "I'm feeling a little down today." Why? "Because worship was dull." "I think Pastor was very hard from the pulpit today. So, I'm not feeling so good." No worship team, no preacher, no fellowship, nobody. You don't need any reason to follow Jesus. He is reason enough. So, don't make it complicated to follow Jesus. Decide early for purity. Pray and read your Bible. Daniel had incredible experiences with God. Incredible experiences but the interesting thing is that he never sought those experiences; he only sought God and God gave him those experiences. Today, people seek experiences; not God. I'm not saying there is anything wrong per say, "Oh, there is a meeting. I want to be baptised in the Holy Spirit and I want to speak in tongues." That's an experience. On the Day of Pentecost, when it happened, they were not seeking something; they were seeking God. And God found them. The fact they spoke in tongues was that God found them and filled them. He didn't seek any experience; he sought God. He sought God for God's sake and God gave him all those experiences and Daniel enjoyed being with God. He enjoyed communing with Him in prayer. He enjoyed discerning God's will from His Word. For us, this is crisis book, only when crisis comes, we open. Honestly. That's why I'm not boasting. One of the things I constantly say is – when I found Christ, I found Him in the best time of my life. I never found Him in crisis. My crisis started after I found Him. The problem is – if you have had a panic conversion and a crisis conversion, you will only pray and read your Bible when crisis comes and God knows you so well that He never takes a crisis out of your life, saying that, "Otherwise, My child will not read and seek Me. So, walk in crisis." Daniel did not start praying when he reached Babylon. I believe he prayed when he was in Jerusalem. I believe he studied his Word when he was in Jerusalem. It was a habit. So, he decided to be pure not in Babylon; he decided to be pure in Jerusalem. So, these are decisions that are taken. Therefore, he did great exploits simply because he knew his God. That's why *Daniel 11:32* says,

Daniel 11:32

³² *Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.*

They who know. If you don't know somebody, how do you follow Him? The most difficult situation for a believer – when you are a very high place, let us say you are at a very high place in Prime Minister, Modi's government. Very high. We have a gentleman called Mr. Alphonso. He is there in a high place, a Christian. He talks all kind of junk. He's a tool that is used by the government to get the Christians on this side because he was an ex-priest from the Seminary, a Jesuit. So, he knows how to speak well. He rose up high up in the court but his enemies tried everything but they couldn't find anything on him. Never ever compromised on his loyalty with God. Never ever. Christians, when they reach high places, they go with the power structure to rise up in the world and they are disloyal to the Living God and they betray their own people. He never did. He was loyal to God always. King after king after king, dispensations change in Babylon – Assyrians come, Babylonians come, Medes come – every new king comes; they destroy their entire leadership but they will say, "But Daniel, I want him." So, you will see, Daniel is through the 12 chapters of the Bible with different kings because they knew, "This is a man who is true to his God." Not only was he highly esteemed on earth before every king, angel Gabriel has something to say; the final word for today.

Daniel 10:19

¹⁹ *And he said, "O man greatly beloved, fear not!..."*

"I want to tell something about you on what is your report in Heaven. You are greatly beloved in Heaven. Everybody in Heaven knows you. Fear not." Another version will use this term as 'highly esteemed'. "Heaven holds you in high esteem; not only in the Babylonian court, the king holds you in high esteem, in Heaven's court, the King of Kings holds you with high esteem." He was an Old Testament man who followed Jesus. Did you see what the message of the Cross is? The message of the Cross is this – deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow Me. Our end on earth may not be like this but that's not the reason we follow Him. Don't get all excited and say, "If I follow Him, I can also become a minister in the cabinet." No, that's not what it means. You may end up in prison but even in prison, I will still follow Him because He is the only One worth following. That's the message for this week. The message for Passion Week is this – He was passionate about us. We are not passionate about Him. We are not. And many of you think you are too young. Most theologians say that Daniel was around 14 years, 15 years when he was taken to Babylon and most of you sitting here and 15+. Most of you, probably, have more given to you than what was given to Daniel at his age. At least, you are born of the Spirit. He was not even born of the Spirit. So, age is not a factor but these decisions are made now and we struggle with self. The struggle is with self. That's why Jesus said, "First thing you have to do is, what? Pick up your cross and follow Me." He said, "No, deny yourself." Why

are you here? Not the ones who are brought but the ones who came on your own. Why is half the Church not here? Do you think all of them are working? No, they are not working. Some of them are mothers with small children and all. That's okay. All of them are not working. "In another one hour, Sammy will put it on WhatsApp. I will sit there, relax with my feet up and listen on WhatsApp." It doesn't work. That is, if you listen. The more you do it, you are feeding your self. Your self gets stronger and stronger. The Word of God is coming in but the self is getting stronger because you've chosen, even to listen to the Word by inflating yourself because this is the age when you can do a lot of stuff. What we don't realize is – there will be a time in our life when God will say, "I actually wanted to use you but I know I cannot use you because you have been feeding your self all these years. I need somebody who will obey now." That's why I believe, God looked at all His disciples, "Yes, you walked with Me for 3 and a half years. Everything. I see all of you but I also know you made great proclamations and everything; and then, you all ran away. And still, you are struggling." And he looks and says, "You know Saul of Tarsus? You, follow Me." And he followed Him till the end and never turned back, unlike the other apostles. He never turned back. He had no crisis in his life concerning whom he has to follow. Even Peter struggled with convictions, going back and forth. Paul never struggled with those crises. Why? Because he had set his mind. Once he knew Christ, he saw Him, "Who are You?" "Jesus of Nazareth." Next question, "What will You have me to do?" "It will be told to you. Go." From that day, his walk of obedience began. He never stopped. You can do and the Bible says that he was a young man. He was not an old man. When Christ found him, he was a young man. Read the Bible very carefully. Very young man. When he died, maybe, he was an old man. Never turn back. So, we have to decide each day – I deny myself; I pick up my cross; and I choose to follow Him. And how do I choose to follow Him? First, I make a decision for purity; second, I read my Bible; three – I talk to my God. I listen to Him and I talk to Him and I keep my life clean so that He can come and be comfortable in my life because He said, "You are My house." That's all. Very simple. Don't make it complicated. The Bible is a very simple Book. When you don't want to obey God, you make it very complicated. If you want to obey God, this is the most simple Book in the world. Shall we pray?

Closing Prayer:

Father, this evening, we just come to You, Lord. O Father, round the world, Your people are gathered, Lord, in so many places. And in so many places, they are gathered in extreme danger, Lord, simply to come together to strengthen one another in prayer, in fellowship, in the ministry of the Word. Your Word says in Hebrews 13, Lord, for those who are prisoners, "Consider yourself bound with them." In our spirit, we join ourselves with them, Lord. We have the freedom. They do not have the freedom and we pray in this hour, protect them, Lord. Many of them will risk their lives this week to come together as a Body of Christ and secret police and soldiers and spies will be watching them and I pray, Father, that You would protect them. You would blind seeing eyes, they will not see and Your people will be able to gather, Lord. I'm praying for those who long and don't have the freedom tonight, Lord – only for them. I pray, Lord, You would manifest Yourself to them, Lord, in Korea, in China – all of the Middle East, Afghanistan, Northern Africa – so many parts of the world. If even the sign of the Cross was to be seen on their body, they would die. I pray for them, Lord, that You would be with them. You would empower them. You would strengthen them and You would speak to them. And to us, Lord, as we go back, continue to speak to us that we may put You ahead of everything else. Seek You, find You and follow You, Lord. I commit these young ones into Thy hands, Lord. I pray, Father, they will make their decision soon. Very soon, they will make their decision, Lord, like Daniel did in his teenage. Thank You, Father. Go before us and go with us. For in Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.