

## **The Most Important Inconvenient Truth**

April 26, 2009 - Matthew 16:21-28

“Humanity is sitting on a time bomb. If the vast majority of the world's scientists are right, we have just ten years to avert a major catastrophe that could send our entire planet's climate system into a tail-spin of epic destruction involving extreme weather, floods, droughts, epidemics and killer heat waves beyond anything we have ever experienced- a catastrophe of our own making.”

So says a summary of Al Gore’s film “An Inconvenient Truth.” One reviewer calls it “a passionate and inspirational look at one man’s commitment to expose the myths and misconceptions that surround global warming and inspire actions to prevent it.” Others criticize the film for misrepresenting the facts. Whatever you think of this film, they certainly picked a good title – “An Inconvenient Truth.”

Here’s a claim to truth that if we are willing to hear it and do something, it will cause us some inconvenience. We’ll need to recycle. Governments and corporations need to do something about carbon emissions. We’ll need to show great concern in reducing our carbon footprint. But if we all show willingness to bear with these inconveniences, the film claims we can turn this thing around.

Something is inconvenient if it is tiresome; difficult, untimely, or involves unwanted effort. Unless there is something more important than the inconvenience required to attain the more important. If in fact the world will end in 10 years, we would likely put up with whatever inconvenience necessary to do our part in saving it. If the doctor tells us we have a serious but treatable illness, we likely will put up with the inconvenient treatment to get well. So though most of us naturally drift to convenience, we will bear inconvenience for something of greater value. Al Gore claims global warming is “an inconvenient truth.”

Today, I’m here to tell you about “The Most Inconvenient Truth” that concerns everyone. Once we understand this truth, we will be prepared to consider the most inconvenient call from Christ to deal with it. What is the most important inconvenient truth? You can save the planet, but lose your soul.

Jesus uttered a phrase very much like this to His disciples or 12 followers who shared in ministry. He completed the public phase of His ministry. Now it was time to privately prepare them for the most

difficult part of His life. This happened immediately following one of the greatest moments He had with His disciples.

He asks them “who do you say I am?” Peter declares “you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus responds with some of the most inspiring words in Scripture. “Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades or Hell will not overcome it.” Talk about a triumphant statement, Jesus will build the church. Jesus and these disciples were going to be part of a kingdom that Hell could not withstand.

But they had a long way to go to get there. In fact, Jesus was about to share the most disturbing truth and the drastic inconveniences required of the disciples to deal with it. Christians this truth and the drastic inconveniences still apply to each of us. Non-Christians, the most inconvenient truth describes you. So there might be some discomfort in this message for all of us. Yet facing this most inconvenient truth and embracing Jesus’ call to us can lead us to the ultimate purpose of our lives. It can lead to life beyond the grave in

paradise. So I invite you today to come with me on this journey by imagining you were there when Jesus spoke these words to His disciples. We will first look at 3 different ways Jesus declared the most inconvenient truth. Then we’ll consider the inconveniences Christ commands us to bear. We’ll conclude with a time of response.

#### Matthew 16:21-28 NIV

<sup>21</sup>From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

<sup>22</sup>Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

<sup>23</sup>Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

<sup>24</sup>Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For whoever wants to save his life<sup>[a]</sup> will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. <sup>26</sup>What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>27</sup>For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. <sup>28</sup>I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

C.S Lewis puts it this way in Mere Christianity: “To become new means losing ourselves. Out of ourselves and into Christ we must go... Our real selves are all waiting for us in Him; it is no good trying to be

myself without Him. To enter Heaven, Lewis says, is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being on earth.” Whoever loses his life in Jesus will find life.

The most important inconvenient truth is that you can save the planet but lose your soul. Jesus states this in 3 different ways. 1x

Apart from me you will lose your lives.

**2x *Apart from Christ we will lose your lives. (16:25)***

**Verse 25** “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.” What does Jesus mean by saving and losing life? To save our lives means to hang onto control and lordship over our lives. We let our own natural inclinations and interests rule our lives. We put our claim to our lives above the Lord’s claim. One way we can do this is to elevate comfort and convenience above everything else. So we might be willing to give God an hour on Sunday mornings but the rest of the week is our time to pursue comfort and convenience. If the Christian life involves enduring shame and suffering because of our faith, we’re not going to do that. That’s inconvenient and uncomfortable.

But Jesus says if we keep our lives away from Him and refuse to endure any inconvenience because of Him, “we will lose our lives.”

We will lose life as God calls us to live it. We will lose the joy of discovering real life is all about loving God and loving people. In fact, if we cherish comfort and convenience more than Christ, it may indicate we’re not even Christians. That’s Jesus’ warning here. “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it.” We can even go to church all our lives, but that doesn’t make us Christians.

On the other hand, if we are willing to lose our lives for Christ, we will find life. We will discover this life Christ calls us to. I love how Christ included that little phrase “for me.” Lots of people lose their lives in various pursuits. But only those who lose their life for Christ will find it. Only those who submit to Christ as Lord over life will find life that God created us to live.

Another way Jesus declares the inconvenient truth is found in verse 26. “*Apart from me, you will lose your soul.*”

***Apart from Christ we will forfeit our souls. (16:26)*** “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” Christ describes the inconvenient truth in economic terms; gain; forfeit; exchange. Some of your versions say “what shall it **profit** a man, if he gains the world

and forfeits his soul?” So if we look at our lives economically, are we making a wise investment with them apart from Christ? Vs 27. People can have millions of dollars in the bank, they can own billions in property, they can rule over nations or empires, yet they can still forfeit our souls. To forfeit means to lose, to be deprived of, and to give up. We can never give enough in exchange for our souls. We can offer no amount of resources that will obligate God to say, “I guess you have earned enough to pay your way out of the grave, you won’t suffer death, I’ll let you into Heaven now.”

Jesus quotes from Psalm 49:5-8 which clearly points out the economics of His claim; “Why should I fear when evil days come, when wicked deceivers surround me – those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches? No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him – the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough – that he should live on forever and not see decay.” But people pursue wealth as if acquiring more of it is ultimately the purpose of life. Guard against that pursuit says Jesus or you can lose your soul.

The third way Jesus declares the inconvenient truth is found in verse 27. Apart from me, you will not be ready to face me when I come back.

***Apart from Christ you will be unprepared to face Him when He returns. (16:27)***

“For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels. And then he will reward each person according to what he (or she) has done.” The NIV uses the word reward but repay is better. It communicates that there will be an appropriate response from the Lord to our lives on Earth.

For Christians, this will be a wonderful moment. We will see our Savior face to face. Then He will reward us for all the investment we made in people’s lives; for the love we poured out imperfectly to Him; for all that inconvenience we did bear in following Him. But for those who don’t know Christ, He will “reward” them for refusing His lordship. The Bible lays out clearly what that involves – eternal life in Hell apart from God’s blessed presence; a never-ending life of weeping, frustration and regret. We, with our modern sensitivities like to delete those sections from the Bible. Or we argue that a loving

God could not do that. When we start saying things like that, we reveal we have no comprehension of the magnitude of sin. We have no understanding of the purity of God's holiness. We have no knowledge of the Gospel and what He did to pay for our sins. God poured out His wrath for our sins on Jesus on the cross. But for non-believers, Jesus will pour out God's just wrath on them when He returns.

So Jesus states this most important inconvenient truth in a variety of ways in verses 25-27. But He doesn't abandon us to this truth. His questions and statements drive us to Himself. In Christ, we overcome the most important inconvenient truth. This comes by responding to the **Inconvenient Call of Christ**, it starts when we **Put your personal trust in me as Savior and Lord**. If you don't know Christ, verses 25 and 26 describe you; saving your life but losing it; pursuing the whole world but losing your soul; forfeiting your soul. But it doesn't have to remain that way. Listen to Jesus' words in Matthew 11.

Matthew 11:28-30 NIV

<sup>28</sup>"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my

yoke is easy and my burden is light." Sometimes, the only way we will pay attention to our need for Christ is when life overwhelms us. Yesterday's Daily Bread told the story of Australian & New Zealand soldiers fighting on the Gallipoli peninsula against Turkey in World War I. An 8 month stalemate left thousands killed and wounded. Finally the British withdrew and the Aussies and Kiwis were evacuated to Egypt. There a chaplain named Oswald Chambers offered hospitality and hope to those disillusioned by the war. He told them "no man is the same after an agony; he is either better or worse, and the agony of a man's experience is nearly always the first thing that opens his mind to understand the need of redemption worked out by Jesus Christ. If you have gone through an agony, will you heed Jesus' invitation to you in Matthew 11? When we put our personal trust in Christ by coming to Him through our faith, God pours His Gospel and Grace into our lives. God adopts us as His kids, He saves us. Together we begin the journey of dealing with the most important inconvenient truth. Second, as Christ's followers, we must constantly adjust our perspective to God's way of thinking. We must go through the inconvenient process of letting God and His Word sift and correct

our thinking. Stated positively, think like Christ, don't think like the world.

***Don't speak for Satan. (21-23)***

- We see this in Peter's response to Jesus' mission description.

Verse 21 states: Then Jesus began to show His disciples four necessities: He **must** go to Jerusalem. He **must** suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and scribes. He **must** be killed. On the third day He **would be** raised.

Peter seems to hear only the first three. He heard that Jesus, the Messiah must go to Jerusalem – that political and religious center where lots of trouble awaited him. That's not very comfortable. Then Jesus must suffer many things at the hands of the religious leadership. That's very inconvenient. Then he must be killed. Talk about inconvenient and unacceptable. Talk about the end of a movement. Jesus has just shattered Peter's dreams of only a few verses ago

So Peter rebukes Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God. May God prevent this. "This shall never happen to you. This is very inconvenient Lord. Let's get back to talking about the kingdom and

our coming reign." What does Jesus say? Does He say "now now Peter, you've misunderstood." Then Jesus rebukes Peter who has suddenly become a messenger of Satan. "Get behind me Satan. You are a stumbling block. A few moments ago, I declared that upon you, the rock, I would build my church. But when you talk like this Peter you become a stumbling rock. You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men - things like comfort and convenience at any cost. Kingdoms & Power obtained by cheating and short cuts. So it's no small thing to think only like the world does. We can end up speaking for Satan. Following Christ means we must constantly deal with the inconvenience of looking at things from God's point of view. We constantly check our words to ensure we're not becoming messengers of Satan.

Then Jesus lays out the inconvenient call of discipleship. Verse 24 – "If anyone would come after me, he (or she) must deny themselves. **Deny yourself.** To **deny** means to yield to Christ's control so completely that self has no rights whatever. It means to deliberately die to our sinful self that would pursue things apart from the Lord.

Then He says **“Take up your (personalized) cross.** Notice he doesn’t say “take up *the* cross.” Take up his cross. Endure the shame and suffering that you are called to bear in your world because you’re a Christian. Notice also he doesn’t say “identify” with your cross. It’s “take up.” Lift up – lift it high so that all may see it. Some of the disciples hearing these words, including Peter, would endure a public execution and humiliation because they were Christ followers. Today, the Persecuted Church and Voice of Martyrs reminds us of Christians around the world who endure this very visible suffering for their faith. That same call is held out to you and me in this culture.

The final part of the call is simply to follow Him. To live as He lived; to take his yoke upon us and learn life His way. It’s not that we can ever perfectly imitate Christ. But it is a commitment to take up the fight, to struggle against sin in our lives. We can’t fulfill this inconvenient call in our own strength. But by Christ’s power and the Spirit’s indwelling we receive the resources to live the inconvenient call that overcomes the most important inconvenient truth. So we first need to acknowledge the most inconvenient truth apart from Christ

we’re lost. Then we come to Christ so in Him we overcome the inconvenient truth.

Some of us here today have been living as Christ followers, but maybe wonder at times if it’s really worth it. In following Christ, you find life. He will save our souls, we will be prepared. It will provide the greatest reward. It’s where you find real life. Others need to receive Christ or come back or confess that we’ve let comfort and convenience become our god. Or maybe we have given in or given up depending on Christ in our struggle against sin. It’s time to come back – lean back or rely on Him to live the inconvenient life. So after I pray and during the playing of our final song, I want to invite you to come forward and stand or kneel before the Lord – to acknowledge the most inconvenient truth and that its only in Christ that we can overcome it.