



# MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church  
Dr. Rob White – Senior Minister  
<https://aulc.us>

**TITLE:** The Right Stuff Award

**SERMON IN A SENTENCE:** Jesus warns that those who want to save their life will lose it, but he promises that those who lose their life for his sake will find it.

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 16:21-28

Today's scripture lesson comes from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 16, verses 21 to 28.

Starting at verse 21:

From then on Jesus began to point out to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.

Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, "Oh no, Lord! This will never happen to You!"

But He turned and told Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me because you're not thinking about God's concerns, but man's."

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will find it.

What will it benefit a man if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life?

For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will reward each according to what he has done.

I assure you: There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

May the Lord add His Blessing to the reading of His Word!

Hello, I am Doctor Rob White with the A U L C Ministries with our message this week.

I am happy that you can take a few minutes out of your busy week to be with us today!

It seems amazing to me that Christianity is as popular as it is. Sometimes I wonder if people really understand it.

The Apostle Peter certainly didn't understand it. He had some grand and glorious ideas about what Jesus was going to do, and he was happy to be part of the grand and glorious enterprise. I don't know how Peter would have answered if we had asked what he expected of Jesus, but I am certain that he would have been off-target. Most likely, he would have said that he expected Jesus to be like David, Israel's greatest king and Israel's greatest warrior.

Israel was never a large country, but under David it became a great country. The Israelites won battles—expanded their borders—commanded respect. That's what people want—respect.

But in Jesus' day, it had been a long time since Israel had commanded respect. In the years after David, Israel had been defeated, subjugated, and humiliated. Foreign powers came and went, but there always seemed to be one. During Peter's lifetime, the Romans occupied Israel—collected taxes for the emperor—stamped Caesar's image on their coins—and the Jews did pretty much as they were told. That isn't much of a way to live.

The Jews didn't expect that to go on forever, though. God had promised them a Messiah of the house and lineage of David, and they could just imagine what that meant. This Messiah—this man like David—would lead them—would show the Romans a thing or two—would win their independence—would make them great again—would get them Respect with a capital R. They had waited a long time for the Messiah—centuries—but now he was here. Peter could hardly wait.

And Peter was sure that the time had come. Just a little bit ago, Jesus asked the disciples who they thought he was, and Peter said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Jesus did not correct him, but said, "**Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven**" (Matthew 16:17). That confirmed it for Peter. The Messiah was here, and he—Peter—had turned out to be the Messiah's right-hand man. He could hardly believe his good fortune!

But then Jesus started to tell the disciples what they could expect. He didn't say anything about David. He didn't say anything about organizing an army. He didn't say anything about driving out the Romans. He didn't say anything about making Israel great. What he said was this: He said that he would undergo great suffering. He said that he would be killed. He also said that he would be raised on the third day, but I don't think that Peter heard that. Peter heard the word, "killed," and quit listening. "Killed!" Finis! The end! What kind of a Messiah is that!

Peter figured that Jesus was just having a bad day. Something must be bothering him. He was feeling "down," and needed a little encouragement until he got back on his feet. So Peter took Jesus aside to speak to him in private, and said, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." Note that he calls Jesus Lord. Note further that he doesn't treat Jesus as Lord. Peter tells Jesus what must and must not happen. "Far be it from you, Lord! This will never be done to you" (Matthew 16:22). That isn't the way you talk to the Lord!

But, frankly, faced with the same situation, I would have done pretty much the same thing. I would have taken Jesus aside. I would have asked him what was wrong. I would have tried to encourage him, much as Peter did. "You're just having a bad day, Jesus! Everything is going to work out! God chose you to be the Messiah because you're the best! God will not let you fail! Things will look better after a good night's sleep."

But Jesus was having none of it. He turned on Peter and said, "**Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men**" (Matthew 16:23).

But Peter WAS setting his mind on divine things! He knew what the Messiah should do, and he was trying to help him do it.

The problem, of course, is that Peter didn't really understand. He had a vision, and he was trying to get Jesus to live up to it. Jesus, however, had his own vision. Jesus came to save the world, but he wasn't going to do it by raising an army. He was going to do it by dying on a cross.

Is there anyone here who can't understand how difficult that must have been for Peter to understand? The Savior had come, but he had come to die! That doesn't make much sense, does it!

And then Jesus turned to the other disciples and said:

**"If anyone desires to come after me,  
let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.  
For whoever desires to save his life will lose it,  
and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it"** (Matthew 16:24-25).

I believe that the other disciples were as befuddled as Peter. Jesus was introducing them to the kingdom of God, where all the rules are upside down and backwards. It was too much for them to understand. They wouldn't really understand until they saw the risen Lord. It would only be after the resurrection that the disciples would begin to get a handle on what Jesus was saying—because what Jesus was saying was truly revolutionary.

Frankly, we have trouble understanding too. We have our own beliefs, just like Peter did, and we want Jesus to bless them. "God helps them that helps themselves," we say. That makes a great slogan, doesn't it! It has a nice ring to it. "God helps them that helps themselves." But I have news for you. That isn't in the Bible. Nor is it what the Bible teaches. Not by a long stretch!

And we have other beliefs that we want Jesus to bless. "Work hard," I tell my kids. "Stay in school. Keep your nose clean. Save your money. Invest wisely. Then someday you can retire and play golf." But that isn't in the Bible either. Nor is it the kind of game plan that Jesus envisions for us. He says:

"If anyone desires to come after me,  
let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.  
For whoever desires to save his life will lose it,  
and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it."

Is that what you teach your kids? Probably not! But we need to hear it. And our kids need to hear it too. Jesus says:

"If anyone desires to come after me,  
let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.  
For whoever desires to save his life will lose it,  
and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it."

It isn't that Jesus wants us to be miserable. He just wants to show us the way to true joy. As one commentator put it, "Jesus is not anti-our-life; he is anti-**PREOCCUPATION-with-our-life**" (Bruner, 593).

Jesus warns that, if we decide to live selfishly, life will backfire on us. We will find that we can't get enough of anything to fill the empty place at the core of our being. There won't be enough money! Or enough toys! Or enough sex! Or enough power! Or enough awards! There won't be enough of anything to fill the empty place at the core of our being. If we choose to spend our lives feeding that empty place, we will grow weary feeding it and will grow frustrated at never being full.

Jesus warns us that, if we spend our lives running after things to make ourselves happy, we will find ourselves in a rat race that goes on and on and on. At first, it will seem exciting—but after awhile it will become boring—and then it will get downright tedious. At some point we will want to quit, but will find that it's the only game we know. And then, when the game finally stops—and the game will stop for every one of us—we will find ourselves forever in a place as Godless as the Godless place where we have forever lived.

BUT Jesus promises that, if we are willing to lose our lives for his sake—if we are willing to go where he would have us go and do what he would have us do—if we are willing to live our lives in devotion to God and in service to others—we will find the kind of satisfaction that everyone covets but only a few people find. Jesus says, "**and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it.**" It's true.

A book entitled *A Smile as Big as the Moon* tells the story of Special Education students—kids with learning disabilities—physical problems—emotional problems. It's the story of their dream to go to the NASA Space Camp In Huntsville. That might not seem like a big deal, but Space Camp is designed for gifted and talented kids—not kids who find school difficult. It wasn't easy to get the camp to accept these kids. Nobody expected that they would do well. Their teachers spent a year preparing them, though, and they were hopeful.

As it turned out, the Special Ed kids did very well, and came away with a fistful of awards. The reason was that, working for a year toward a common goal, they stopped fighting each other and started helping each other. They learned to stop focusing on self and to start focusing on the task—and each other.

And they did well at the camp. They did great! Competing against the brightest and the best, the Special Ed students walked away with more awards than anyone.

The biggest surprise was the Right Stuff Award. Most awards are presented to teams, but the Right Stuff Award is presented to an individual—to the student who best displays the characteristics of a true astronaut—to the kid who demonstrates the best leadership. They awarded the Right Stuff Award to Scott Goudy who, in the words of his teacher, "just one year earlier had found his greatest pleasure in picking at the wounds of his classmates." But, during the year of preparation, Scott had learned to care about the other kids. He had become a leader.

When Scott received the Right Stuff Award, the first thing that he did was to get a pair of scissors. Then quietly—off to the side—with no fanfare—Scott cut the Right Stuff ribbon into twenty pieces. Later, at a victory party, he gave a piece of the ribbon to every kid on the team.

Scott's teachers were stunned! But then they realized how much Scott had grown during their year of preparation—and during the week of camp. They also realized that the people at the camp, observing from the background, saw what was happening and rewarded Scott for his good work—for his selfless service—for his caring leadership.

They see smart kids every day. Genius IQs are nothing new to them. What they were looking for was a kid who was willing to make sacrifices in behalf of the team. Scott did that, and the people at the camp noticed.

The promise of our Gospel lesson is that God notices too. God doesn't care about genius. God doesn't care about wealth. God cares about SELFLESSNESS. God cares about LOVE. God cares about SERVICE to others.

The warning of our Gospel lesson is that God gives up selfish people to their selfishness. Its' promise is that God has great rewards waiting for those who live unselfishly in Christ's service. Jesus says:

"If anyone desires to come after me,  
let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.  
For whoever desires to save his life will lose it,  
and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it."

And so it will be!

That's our Lord's message for this Lord's Day and I hope you got a blessing out of it!

Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed! For the more you are a blessing, the more you will be blessed!

Thank you all for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!

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