

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“NO EASY BUTTON”
Matthew 16:21-27; 4:1-11

- ☑ Say “Hello” to the “Easy Button.”

Staples began using it in their TV commercials 7 or 8 years ago. They feature stressed-out office workers with a ridiculously hard assignment or an impossible deadline. Amidst the panic, someone presses the “Easy Button” and, voila, the task is accomplished! The deadline is met! The day is saved!

The message is basic, mundane even: Staples has goods and services to make work easier. As accurate as that is, it is not very exciting.

Still, like all highly effective commercials, the “Easy Button” spots strike a deeper chord. They don’t merely address our need for office products; they speak to our desire for comfortable, undemanding, pain-free living – not just on the job, but everywhere. They get at our longing for safety and confidence.

- ☑ Not surprisingly, some religious marketer has copied Staples. Pastor Travis Jarrett {SermonCentral.com} reports seeing a t-shirt with a picture of the big red button – but instead of the word “Easy” it had the name “Jesus” on it. The caption next to it read, “Life’s Problems – One Solution – It’s Just That Easy.”

- ☝ If this means that Jesus is {Jn 14:6} **“the way, and the truth and the life”** who freely forgives our sins, reconciles us to God and saves us from futility and death, without effort on our part, then I wholeheartedly agree.

Christ Jesus *is* the solution to everything, including our security needs.

- ☝ But if the shirt means that Jesus is a kind of divine “Easy Button,” a genie and vending machine and bodyguard all rolled into one who guarantees bodily, emotional, financial and social safety and confidence in this life, at the push of a button, then I heartily disagree.

- Please turn to Matthew 16. In verse 21 Jesus begins **“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.”**

- ☐ Peter does not like this one bit. He loves his Master. More to the point, he has just declared (in verse 16) that his Master is **“the Christ, the Son of the living God,”** a declaration which Jesus affirms. To his way of thinking, the words **“Christ,” “suffer”** and **“must be killed”** do not belong in the same sentence. It has never occurred to him that that God’s Anointed One could be subjected to a violent death.

- So in verse 22 he takes Jesus aside and rebukes him: **“Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!”**

- Verse 23 {NRSV}: **“Jesus [turns] and says to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’”**

- This takes us back to his first great test in Mt 4. In verse 3 Satan said (and I paraphrase), “Give them

bread,” continually fill their bellies and pockets “and they will follow you.” In verses 5-6 he said, “Give them wonders,” wow them with spectacular miracles “and they will follow you.” In verses 8-9 he said, “Give them the world,” seize control of the armies and governments “and they will follow you.”

The Enemy promised earthly safety and confidence. There is no reason to think he would not have delivered. Wouldn't the people have followed Jesus had he turned the stones to bread, or jumped off the temple without injury, or allowed Satan to crown him King of the World? It would have been like pressing the “Easy Button”.

Consider the possibilities, if the Messiah established his reign by those means:

- Israel would crown him with a bejeweled gold crown instead of thorns, would lift him up on a throne instead of a cross. As for the Romans, if they had any sense of self-preservation they would surrender without a fight; if not, they would be ground to dust.
- Idolatry, irreverence, dishonor, murder, adultery, theft, lying and covetousness would be stamped out. Immorality, greed and hypocrisy would be outlawed.
- Christ could compel poverty of spirit, grief for sin, meekness, hunger for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, and peace. He could reward the righteous and punish sinners by giving (or withholding) bread, by performing awesome signs and miraculous healings (or not), and by unleashing (or restraining) his legions of police and soldiers.
- The economy would prosper, the (deserving) hungry would be fed, the (worthy) sick would be cured, public

safety would be assured, and it would be standing room only in our synagogues.

We would live in a better version of the Kingdom of the World, at least for a while. Sounds good, doesn't it? But it would not be the Kingdom of God!

→ Had Jesus avoided the cross we could neither be {Ro 5:10} “**reconciled to [God] through the death of his Son**” nor “**saved through his [resurrection] life.**”

→ Had Jesus avoided the cross we could neither be {1 Jn 1:7, 2:1} “[purified] **from all sin**” nor “**have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ... the atoning sacrifice for our sins.**”

→ We could neither be {Heb 10:29} “[made holy] **by the blood of the covenant**” nor {Heb 4:16} “**approach [God's] throne [to] receive mercy and find grace... in our time of need**” and temptation and failure.

→ We could neither expect his return as {Rev 19:16} “**King of kings and Lord of lords**” nor await the day when {Rev 11:15} “**The kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.**”

→ Eliminate the cross and resurrection, and we still have Christ's teachings, rules and example – but no power to follow them. At best, we would be {Mt 23:27, NLT / NRSV} “**like whitewashed tombs – beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with the bones of the dead and... all kinds of filth.**”

Our eternal safety and confidence depended upon the Messiah's submission to suffering and death. It was imperative for him not to press the “Easy Button.”

No wonder Satan tempted Jesus in Matthew 4 to fill our bellies and our pockets, to impress us with spectacular miracles, and to seize control of the armies and governments, instead of taking the way of the cross!

No wonder Jesus tells Peter in Matthew 16, **“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things”!**

■ The dialogue does not end there. In Matthew 16:24-25 {NLT/NIV} the Lord tells all of his disciples (including us!): **“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must deny [yourself], put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me. If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life.”**

✎ 1st, this is not a form of works righteousness. The Master is *not* saying that we earn safety and confidence (much less salvation) by crucifying the self.

He *is* saying that we will never be united to him so long as we grasp at earthly security. Our hands and hearts can hold only so much. If we cling to money, possessions, coercive power, false religion, faded glory, or bogus dreams, then we simply cannot hold onto Christ Jesus and his kingdom.

✎ 2nd, though his bodily crucifixion was a one-time event, the cross defines the Lord Christ’s entire ministry prior to his resurrection. His conception in Mary’s womb was an act of self-denial and cross-carrying. So were his birth as a helpless infant, his experiences of hunger, thirst, fatigue and physical pain, his consent to misunderstanding, rejection, denial, hatred and betrayal, and his submission

to his Father’s will even when it clashed with his human desire for safety and confidence.

Consequently, self-denial and cross-bearing are not optional or of secondary importance for his followers. They are the heart of earthly discipleship. Here and now, to love and serve and be with the Messiah is to **“deny [oneself], shoulder your cross, and follow.”**

Until you *do* this, until you actually deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him, this sounds crazy. {1 Co 1:18, 24} **“The message of the cross is [idiocy] to those who are perishing” – “but to us who are being saved it is... the power... and wisdom of God”** for salvation.

■ Matthew 16:26: **“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?”** {NLT} **“How do you benefit if you gain the world but lose your soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?”**

✎ That brings us to the 3rd point: cross bearing is what enables us to embrace the real safety and confidence only the Son can give, now and forever.

→ The Word became flesh, not to give us death, but **“that [we] might have life, and have it to the full”** (John 10:10). This in no way contradicts Matthew 16, for all {Ro 6:5, 8, 4} **“who have been united with him... in his death... will also be united with him in his resurrection..... if we [have] died with Christ... we will also live with him.”** **“We were... buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as**

Christ was raised from the dead... we too may live a new life.”

Self-denial and cross bearing often involves hardship, but it is not about self-punishment. It changes us for the better, but it is not about self-improvement. It is about putting aside our instruments of control so we can hold onto Jesus. It unites us with him in his death so we can live in his kingdom today and be raised up on the Day of the Lord.

Jesus is not an “Easy Button.” He is God the Son, who was slain but lives forever!

Following him is not quick and simple. It requires self-denial and cross bearing.

But it opens us up to embrace him and to receive safety and confidence that is real and eternal. And that is infinitely better than any “Easy Button”!