**HEAVENLY PEOPLE**

**(Matthew 16:21-28)**

His name is John Gray. He is both a family therapist and an author. In 1992 he published a book that took the world by storm. Since its publication is has sold more than 15 million copies, has been translated into 40 languages, and was declared by CNN to be the highest acclaimed non-fiction book of the 1990’s. It spent 121 weeks on the best-seller list. The name of the book was *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus.*

On the first page of the first chapter of Gray’s book, he tells his readers to imagine that there once was a race of men living on the planet Mars. One day, they were looking through their telescope at the planet Venus. Lo and behold they saw the most beautiful creatures they had ever seen. Upon first sight, they fell in love with the Venusians who were all women. They quickly invented space travel, built a space ship and traveled to Venus.

Upon landing, they were welcomed with open arms and open hearts by these beautiful Venusians. According to Gray, the love between the two was magical. They loved doing things together and sharing experiences. Although they were from different planets, they took pleasure in their differences. They spent much time learning about each other, and they appreciated their different needs, preferences and behavior patterns. Despite these differences, they lived in harmony and love.

Eventually, the men from Mars and the women from Venus decided to move to Earth. After arriving here, something unexpected happened. Due to Earth’s atmosphere, they came down with a type of amnesia. They forgot they were from different planets and that they were supposed to be different These differences instantly became a source of conflict.

Gray wrote:

Without the awareness that we are supposed to be different, men and women are at odds with each other. We usually become angry or frustrated with the opposite sex because we have forgotten this important truth . . .

Men mistakenly expect women to think, communicate, and react the way men do; women mistakenly expect men to feel, communicate, and respond the way women do. We have forgotten that men and women are supposed to be different. As a result, our relationships are filled with unnecessary friction (abrasion; discord) and conflict.

Of course, we know that men and women aren’t really from different planets; it just seems that way. When it comes to people and God, however, it seems as though we are from different galaxies. The Bible teaches that God has no origin. He is not from a particular place. He has always been. There was never a time when God was not. He existed before time began.

All of us, however, had a distinct beginning. We routinely celebrate our birthday. We can name the month, the day, and then we fudge on the year that we made our entrance into this world. We didn’t come into this world from another place. This is always been our home.

We humorously say that men are from Mars and women are from Venus, but we can truthfully say that God is from heaven, and we are from Earth. It is both our Earth-boundedness and our fallen-ness that accounts for why we think so differently than God thinks, why our values do not mirror His, why we love what He doesn’t, and why we don’t love what He does.

We who are believers, however, are being readied for a different reality. We are the subjects of an extreme makeover. It is God’s will that we be remade into the image of His Son. He wants us to become heavenly people.

Today, we are going to examine what this transformation entails. Our text is Matthew 16:21-28. From this point on, Jesus’ ministry enters a decidedly new and final phase. His long, Galilean ministry has ended, and He is making His final trip to Jerusalem. He will enter Galilee one final time as He is traveling from the northern-most part of the country to Jerusalem. His ministry among the large crowds has come to a close, and He is focusing His attention on His small band of disciples. His only hope that His movement will continue after He is gone lies with His followers. He has no plan B; so, He begins to focus on the Twelve He had chosen.

Likewise, God is working on you and making you into someone upon whom He can depend and through whom He can minister and love and act.

1. **HEAVENLY PEOPLE SET THEIR MINDS ON WHAT GOD VALUES.**

In the gospel accounts, Peter often acts as a spokesman for the disciples. Just a few verses before, Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am?” It was Peter who answered that question. He often gave voice to what the disciples were thinking and feeling. I think that Peter also serves a good stand-in for you and me. We can routinely see ourselves in Peter’s words and actions.

In this passage, Jesus begins to lay out what’s going to happen. He tells them what they can expect. Basically, Jesus tells them four things. **First, I must go to Jerusalem.** He used the word *must.* This wasn’t a personal choice. This was a divine imperative or necessity.

We often live our lives with a strong sense of personal freedom. “I can do this or I can do that. It’s all up to what I want to do and when I want to do it.” Do you ever get an intense sense of “must-ness”? “This is what God has laid on my heart, and this is what I must do. This is what God is telling me and charging me to accomplish.”

**Second, I will suffer many things.** He doesn’t specify just what those things are, but the idea of the Messiah suffering anything at the hands of the religious elite struck a discordant note in the ears of the disciples. It is like the screech of a record player when the needle runs sideways across the vinyl. Suffer? What? What are you talking about?

Then, it only gets worse. **Third, Jesus I will be killed.** Elsewhere, Jesus says He will lay down His life of His own accord, but here, He wants to get the attention of His disciples, and He maintains that the powers that be are going to take Him out. He’s either going to be assassinated or legally executed. Once again, this made no sense to the disciples. Everyone knew what the Messiah was going to do when He came, and get Himself killed was not one of those things.

As they obsessed over what Jesus had just said, they seem to completely miss the last thing He says. **Four, Jesus promises on the third day I will be raised.** In is interesting that Matthew always uses the passive verb “be raised” while in other Gospel accounts it has Jesus using the active verb. He promises, “I will rise.” Did Jesus rise from the dead of His own accord or did His Father raise Him up from the dead? The answer to that question is, “yes.” They are both true. I can’t fully explain that nor do I feel a necessity try to do so. The Trinity and how the Trinity works is a mystery. I do think Matthew, however, uses the passive form as a way of saying, “The Father will raise the Son to vindicate Him and exalt Him over all His enemies.”

Peter doesn’t like what he is hearing. This is crazy talk. He takes Jesus aside to correct Him. “Jesus, you are scaring people with this stuff. Cut it out.”

Peter wasn’t ready for what happened next. Jesus eyes narrowed. He leaned forward toward Peter, bore through Him a stern stare, and said firmly, “Get behind Me, Satan.” Was Jesus really calling Peter Satan? The Greek word *Satana* means Adversary. Jesus is telling Peter, “You have forgotten who is running this show. I am. Get back in line and follow Me.”

I am reminded of the Chief Executive Officer who sat down to chair a meeting. He took the seat nearest him, a seat on the side of the long boardroom table. A younger officer, “Sir, wouldn’t you like to sit at the head of the table?”

The CEO replied, “Young man, wherever I sit is the head of the table.”

Whenever we contradict Jesus, whenever we run counter to His plan, we become His Adversary, and His Spirit whispers to us, “Get back in line Stay in your lane, bro, sis.” And your lane is right behind Jesus.

The ancient Jews had a saying, “In the dust of the Rabbi.” A student of a Rabbi should walk so close behind his teacher that the dust his Rabbi stirs up with his feet should fall on the feet of the student. “Peter, you are getting ahead of Me; you need to get behind Me.”

You and I are often Peter. We want what we want; we don’t want what Jesus wants. We have set our mind on the wrong thing, and when we do that, we are hindrance to the forward motion of Jesus. We are standing in His way; we are blocking His path. We need to get out of the way and get back in line, and we do that by setting our mind on what He values.

To set your mind on what Jesus values, you have to know what He values, and you can find it right here in this book. As you sit down to read this book, ask the Holy Spirit to show you what Jesus values. Then, read the book slowly and think about what you are reading.

I watched a TED Talk online in which John Gray, the author of *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* talked about the relationship between husbands and wives. At the end of the talk he told the wives how to affirm their husbands. If you really want to boost him and help him stand taller, add three phrases to your conversations. He said that every now and then wives need to say to their husbands, “That makes sense.” Then say, “Good idea.” And then, if you really want to build him up, say what so few men hear and what they need to hear. Say, “You’re right.”

We don’t need to boost Jesus’ own ego, but we do need to elevate Him in our own eyes. As you read His words, let yourself say, “That makes sense. Good idea. He’s right. You are right, Lord Jesus.”

Earthy people set their minds on what they value, but God is making you into a heavenly person; so, set your mind on what God values.

1. **HEAVENLY PEOPLE SET THEIR EYES ON GOING AFTER JESUS.**

Look at v. 24. What are you going after? Far too many of us are going after what the world offers, and what does the world offer? The world offers comfort. Just watch commercials, and you will see what the world offers.

* If you will just buy this car, you will ride in comfort and in style.
* If you just drink this beer, it will be like being at a beach party where everybody is young and looks great in a swimsuit.
* If you have been wronged or injured by someone else or by some product, call this number and we will get you what you deserve, which is a boatload of money.

Every commercial you see will appeal to your vanity or your comfort.

This verse, v. 24, can be summarized with four words. The first is **decide.** You and I must decide whether we are going to after Jesus and after something or someone else. We must make a choice. Don’t delay. Decide.

If we decide to go after Jesus, the second word comes into play—**deny.** We are to deny what we want so that we can choose what God wants. The truth is that we aren’t very good at denying what we want. While it is true that some people need to learn to say “no” to other people, almost everybody needs to learn to say “no” to themselves so that we can say “yes” to Jesus. If what Jesus wants and what you want differs, who are you going to say “no” to?

The third word is a simple, three-letter word, **die.** Jesus instructs us to take up our cross. Taking up your cross is not putting a silver, gold, or wooden cross necklace around your neck. One man said that in Jesus day, if you ever saw a man carrying his cross outside the city gate, you knew one thing—he wasn’t coming back.

A cross was an instrument on suffering and death. It always worked. No man ever crawled down from a cross alive. There were occasions when it took two and three days, but the person who was nailed to a cross, always, invariably, died.

Jesus is not speaking literally. He is not calling upon us to commit suicide. He is speaking metaphorically. He wants us to die to our selfish, self-centered, self-absorbed manner of living. It is only when we die to self that we can live for Him.

**Decide, deny, die,** and the fourth word is just two letters **do.** He calls us to follow Him. Do what He says. Go where He directs. Carry out His instructions. The Nike ad campaign got it right. Jesus tells us what to do, and we *Just Do It.* In a nut shell, that is discipleship.

Pastor John Ortberg once told about the two scariest days of his life. The first was when he drove his new-born daughter home from the hospital. She was so tiny. The car seat seemed to swallow her. He said he drove down the interstate at 35 mph with the hazard light flashing the whole way.

The next scary day was when his daughter turned 16 and he handed the keys over to her. It was now her turn to drive. Up until then, he had been in control, but now it was different when he was no longer in the driver’s seat. He lost control. He applied that to our relationship with Jesus.

Ortberg said:

A lot of people find Jesus handy to have in the car as long as He’s in the ride-along seat, because something may come up where they require His services. Jesus, I have a health problem, and I need some help . . . I want you in the car, but I’m not so sure I want you driving. If Jesus is driving, I’m not in charge of my life anymore. If He’s driving, I’m not in charge of my wallet anymore. If I put Him in control then it’s no longer a matter of giving some money now and then when I’m feeling generous or when more of it is coming into my life. Now, it’s His wallet. It’s scary. If Jesus is driving, I’m not in charge of my ego anymore. I no longer have the right to satisfy every self-centered ambition. No, it’s His agenda. It’s His life. Now, I’m not in charge of my mouth anymore. I don’t get to gossip, flatter, cajole, deceive, rage, intimidate, manipulate, exaggerate. I get out of the driver’s seat and hand the keys over to Him. I’m fully engaged. In fact, I’m more alive than I’ve ever been before, but it’s not my life anymore. It’s *His* life.

That brings us to the last point about what is involved in becoming a heavenly person. Not only do we set our minds on what God values and set out eyes on going after Jesus . . .

1. **HEAVENLY PEOPLE SET THEIR HOPE ON THE KING’S REIGN.**

Look at vv. 25-28. The last sentence of our text and the last line of chapter 16 mentions “the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” Let me tell you what that verse is not referring to. It does not deal with the Second Coming of Jesus. One reason we know that is Jesus said that some of those who were in the sound of His voice that day we still be alive at this coming. It has been 2000 years since then, and none of those there that day are still alive. I think Jesus is referring to any of several events. On the day they saw the resurrected Jesus, the saw His kingship. On the Day of Pentecost, when they witnessed His Spirit coming upon the Church and 3000 souls getting saved, they saw His powerful reign as King. When the gospel began to go out to the Gentiles, and the Church experienced great growth, they saw Jesus standing supreme over His Kingdom. John saw a vision of Jesus in heaven seated upon His throne.

Have you set your hope on the reign of Jesus as King?

If Jesus is truly reigning as King, we discover things we did not before know. We learn the truth of v. 25. It is only by losing our life that we find it. We discover the value of a soul in v. 26. The wealth of this world cannot begin to compare with being spending an eternity with Jesus in a place where sickness and death have been banished, where pain is no longer present, where fear is but a distant memory, and where joy and peace are our constant companions.

We know those things are a reality in the next life because we are beginning to experience them right here and right now. We are living the truth of what Paul wrote in Romans 14:17 were he wrote, “The Kingdom of God is . . . righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

The return of Jesus at the end of the age is in view in v. 27. When He comes back the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked will be judged.

The point of our passage is that we can’t stay the way we are nor should we even want to. Jesus is fashioning us into His work of art. We will bring glory to God.

In was in 1992 that John Gray released his book *Men Are from Mars and Women Are from Venus.* Eight years later in 2000, he came out with another book, *Children Are from Heaven.* While children are a gift from God, and while ~~t~~hey may have cherub faces, they do not always act heavenly. Just like us, they are earth-bound and fallen, too.

Through Christ, however, we have been adopted by the Father to be His children. Just like a natural born child favors the mom or the dad, God’s Holy Spirit is going to see to it that we look like the Elder Brother, Jesus.

A number of years ago, I read a moving autobiography of a Chinese pastor and evangelist who is known as Brother Yun. Brother Yun worked tirelessly starting and building house churches in China. He was often arrested and beaten by the authorities. He was eventually placed in a maximum, security prison in China, a place from no one had ever escaped. One day, he heard the Spirit of God say to him, “Walk through that door.” He tried the door. It was unlocked. He walked through it. Again, he heard the Spirit whisper to him, “Walk past this guard.” He was right past the guard as if he was invisible. These quiet instructions continued again and again until finally he found himself on the outside of the prison beyond the wall. From there, he eventually was able to escape China and find freedom in Germany.

His autobiography reads like the Book of Acts—God did amazing, miraculous things for and through Brother Yun. He gave his autobiography an interesting title. He borrowed it from something he told the guards on one of the occasions when they were interrogating him. They asked his identity. He refused to tell them his name out of fear that it would endanger other believers. He said only, “I am a heavenly man.” He entitled his story, *The Heavenly Man.*

God wants you to be a heavenly man. He wants you to be a heavenly woman. He wants us to be a heavenly church. Will you trust Him? Will you submit to Him?