

“Say no to your self.” Jesus had just berated us for getting hung up on physical bread and not understanding that spiritual bread—the teachings we listened to—was the most important bread. And so we were feeling quite down about ourselves. We headed north, away from the Sea of Galilee to the city of Caesarea Philippi, which was at the base of Mount Hermon. There Jesus pulled us aside and asked us, **“Who do you say that I am?”** Peter spoke up boldly for all of us, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living Creator!”** Jesus then said, **“Blessed are you, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but my heavenly Father.”** We were so proud. After failing miserably to understand Jesus and his Kingdom in so many ways, we had gotten this! We were thinking spiritually for once instead of blindly following our stomachs and flesh. Jesus said to us, **“I will build my church on you and the gates of death will not overcome it.”** Then he said, **“I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you bind on earth, will be bound in heaven. Whatever you release on earth, will be released in heaven.”** We had been such slaves to our stomachs and flesh in our lives and now Jesus was giving us power over them. No longer would we be helpless when faced with the urges of our bodies. He now was giving us power over everything earthly, so we might make everything on earth, including our flesh and blood bodies, serve the Kingdom of Heaven.

But then Jesus started saying that he must go to Jerusalem and there he would suffer and be killed, but then resurrected on the third day. We were really upset by this. Jesus couldn't die! This made no sense. This would ruin everything! So Peter, on behalf of all of us, pulled Jesus aside and said, **“Lord, this will never happen to you!”** Jesus turned and said, **“Get behind me Satan!”** Oh how quickly our fall came after our pride. Jesus said, **“You are pulling me away from the path, because you are not focused on the things of the Creator. You are focused on the things of men!”** Everything in our fleshly and physical bodies told us that survival was the single most important thing. Jesus couldn't die if he was truly the Christ—he needed to live. If he died all would be ruined—death was the end. There we were again, slaves to the earthly. Only thinking with our stomachs, bodies, and flesh.

Then Jesus looked around at all those who were gathered with us there. He said, **“If you want to be with me, then you must say no to your self, take up your cross, and follow me. If you want to save your life, then you will lose it. But if you lose your life for me, then you will find it.”** Jesus was clear, if we wanted to follow him then we were going to have to say “no” to our survival instincts. We needed to tell our stomachs “no,” we needed to tell our flesh “no,” we needed to tell our bodies “no,” we needed to tell our egos “no,” we needed to tell the earthly “no” so we could say “yes” to the heavenly. And the hard truth was that the single most destructive thing we could actually do to our body and flesh, the earth, was to always tell it “yes” and always do what it wanted.

Jesus said to us, **“The Son of Man will come and he will reward each person according to his practices.”** How we lived mattered and had consequences. We would be judged and rewarded for our lives one way or the other. If we lived our lives focused on the **earthly**, then we would be making short sided decisions to satisfy the **flesh** that would hurt our bodies and souls in the long run. But if we lived our lives focused on the **heavenly**, then we would be making decisions focused on the big picture, on the **eternal** work of the Spirit. We needed to make decisions with that long term judgment in mind. We needed to say “no” to our selves, to our flesh, to our bodies so that we could live for something much bigger than just this breath, this meal, and this moment that was passing away.

Six days after this, Jesus took three of us up to the top of 9,000 foot high Mount Hermon. There Jesus's appearance was changed before us. His face was shining and his clothes were dazzling white. Then suddenly we saw Moses and Elijah there with Jesus and he was talking to them. Peter was scared and excited and said to Jesus, **“If you want, I will make three tabernacles—one for each of you, Moses, and Elijah!”** But suddenly a great cloud covered us and a booming voice spoke, **“This is my beloved Son, listen to him!”** The voice knocked us to our knees in fear. Jesus touched us and said, **“Do not be afraid.”** When we looked up we saw **only** Jesus. We realized that this is what we needed—singular focus on Jesus. Everything else was a distraction. Our bodies, our flesh, our egos, our jobs, our families, our plans and dreams—we needed to say “no” to all of these so we could look at Jesus **only** and say “yes” to him and his heavenly Kingdom.

“Say no to your self.” We were in the midst of radical change and growth and our focus was all over the place. One minute we were focused on Jesus and able to **walk on water**—the next moment we were back in our old ways, looking around at everything else and **sinking** into the abyss. Jesus said the first step of following him everyday was saying “no” to ourselves. This was our great, **daily** struggle. We were still wanting to say “yes” to our desires and our flesh. We were still wanting to say “yes” to our families. We were still wanting to say “yes” to our culture and nation. Our attention and focus was all over the place—we were **divided** and splintered. But Jesus was calling us to a radically simple focus—to be solely focused on the Kingdom of Heaven. To be solely focused on him and following him and obeying his every word. Our **fears** and **worries** were distracting us. They were thorn bushes growing up around us, choking out the Creator's Word and the growth of the Kingdom of Heaven within us. But Jesus had given us the keys and power of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever we bound or released on earth would be bound or released in heaven. We now had **power** over the flesh, our bodies, and the earth around us, we were not slaves to our flesh anymore. We could say “no” to it and it must listen because the power of the Kingdom of Heaven had been given to us.

Who or what are you saying **“no”** to? Who or what are you saying **“yes”** to? Are you listening to the desires of your flesh? Are you listening to your survival instincts? Are you listening to family expectations? Are you listening to the culture around you? You need to **“say no to your self.”** Do not let it be your master and lord. Turn your focus away from the things of men, away from the flesh, away from the earthly, and turn your focus toward the Word of Jesus. If you seek your self and the indulgence of your flesh, you will **destroy** yourself—body and soul. But if you say no to your self and the desires of man and the desires of the flesh, then you will **save** yourself—body and soul.

We all stand before the judgment of the Lord. We all have to answer for every **word** and **action**, for every **practice** and **habit**. To survive this judgment our focus must be singular. We must seek **one** thing. We must pursue one thing. We must ask for one thing. We must knock on the door for one thing. You want true life? Then **listen to Jesus**. Focus on him. Follow him. Seek the Kingdom he is showing you. He has given you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. You have power over the flesh, over your body, over your ego. **“Say no to your self”** and follow Jesus only and the Kingdom of Heaven will be yours. Love will be yours. Joy will be yours. Peace will be yours. **“Do not be afraid.”** Your heavenly Father is holding you in his loving hands and is taking care of your every need. **“Say no to your self”** and say “yes” to Jesus and you will find eternal life. **Amen.**