

“Standing at the Crossroads” (Cross Roads Week 1)
(Matt. 16:24-26)

- **Roads**

- What are the things you use every day that you take for granted? Living in this highly-developed nation, there are *so many* incredible aspects of our daily life, with technology and infrastructure, that we rely on—and we pretty much take for granted. What are the top examples that come to mind for you? (*Electricity, Cars, Refrigeration, Microwaves, Internet, Medicine, Plumbing, Air Conditioning...*) Let me give you one that I bet most of you didn't think about: *roads*. Seriously, roads! Do you ever drive and think, “*Man I am just SO THANKFUL for roads!*” Stop and think about *a world with no roads*. There was a time on this planet when there were no roads, and then very few, and very primitive roads. Roads are a *huge deal*—they're incredibly costly and incredibly impactful! Without them, we'd all be stuck trying to *make our own way* through life.
- How about some “road facts” just to *drive* it home (pun intended): this picture highlights all the roads on earth. **(Picture)** There are *40 to 75 million miles* of roads throughout the world, enough to circle the earth over *1,600 times*. The USA has the most paved roads of any country, followed by India, and China. How many of you have heard of the “Pan American Highway”? **(Pic)** The longest road in the world, you can drive from Alaska to Argentina, *19,000 miles*. Road trip anyone? What about the *widest highway*? The Katy Freeway in Houston, TX has up to *26 lanes!* **(Pic)** The oldest road? **(Pic)** The Lake Moeris Quarry Road of Egypt, over 4,000 years old, the oldest known paved road. In Jesus' day, the Roman Empire built a *massive* road system, hence the proverb, “All roads lead to Rome.” All of these roads are so impressive and important, but the greatest road ever made is one that human hands could never do. It's the road, *the Way*, that goes from Heaven to Earth—that brings us to *the Cross Roads*, on this first Sunday of Lent.

- **Cross Roads**

- Lent is a 40-day journey of reflection and repentance leading to resurrection (Easter!). Taking a journey with no road makes you a *pioneer*—it might be adventurous, but it's really

dangerous, and not many make it. But taking a journey *with* a road makes you a *pilgrim*. God isn't asking for pioneers—we only needed one: *Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith*. We just have to be *pilgrims*, following the Way He made. Do you remember what they called the first believers? “Followers of the Way.” That’s another word for *Road*. So, this Lent we’re taking the journey of **Cross Roads: The Way of Jesus**.

- The prophet Jeremiah said to the wayward people of Israel: **“Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’” (Jer. 6:16)** Then Jesus came along and said: **“I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)** There are *many roads* that lead to nowhere. There’s only one Road that leads to Life—true life, eternal life. Imagine the world *without that Road*. Welcome to the Cross Roads. The way of Jesus is a Cross-shaped life: it’s a way of *surrender, death to life, cross to resurrection*. Here are some of the Cross Roads we’re taking this Lent: the way of forgiveness, peace, true priorities, faith in action, love, perseverance under persecution, sacrifice, and resurrection. These are some of the landmarks that we’ll see on the Cross Roads.

- **Standing at the Crossroads**

- Today, we begin with the *ultimate* crossroads, the moment of decision, the great exchange of surrendering our life to receive His. The crossroads of surrender is where the Way of Jesus begins. Jesus said: **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (Matt. 16:24-26)** At first, that sounds like a pretty rough deal—*What do you mean Jesus? I have to die to myself, I have to carry a cross to follow you? Who would want to do that?* But that’s when we only think about where you’re standing. You have to think about the destination. Where does this road lead? Jesus, the Son of God, the Word who made all things, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge: He’s offering *His life* in exchange for yours. I mean this is the most lopsided trade ever! The eternal Son of

God for a sinful creature made of dust. Our little sand-castle kingdom for His Heavenly Kingdom. Our sin for His righteousness. Our death for His life. And all we can think about is, *What am I gonna lose?* Seriously?! How about *what am I gonna gain?* He says infinite, abundant Life is ours, but you've got to leave yourself behind and become a new creation, as you follow Him on the Cross Roads. Every step you take on this road is going to be a kind of death to self, a surrender. Forgiveness, service, faith, Christlike love—it's a death to self, but it leads to the only real life. The cost is cheap compared to the gains. But how do you convince someone to leave everything behind so they can receive infinite gain, when this is all they know, and this life is all they want?

- C.S. Lewis wrote in "The Weight of Glory," ***"If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."***
- It makes me think of "the allegory of the cave" by the Greek philosopher, Plato. There were prisoners who had been chained in a dark cavern since birth; all they'd ever known were the flickering shadows cast on the walls of the cave by their little fire, and they thought *that* was the real world, the was their reality. When one prisoner was finally freed and dragged into the blinding light, he suffered a painful disorientation before he could really see the world as it is. Then he felt the duty to go back and tell his fellow prisoners that they were not seeing the real world—but some of the prisoners wouldn't believe him, and some didn't want to give up the comfort of all they'd ever known.
- If you want to follow Jesus into real life, the road that leads to Heaven, you've got to face this crossroads with the pain of leaving your old life behind. But in exchange, you get what's true, and good, and more beautiful than you could imagine. ***"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake,***

you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?" (Matt. 16:24-26 NLT) This is the real deal, folks. This isn't another self-help scheme. This isn't an optional add-on. This is all-or-nothing. This is laying down your control, your pride, your sin, your self-will in order to gain the only thing that really matters: Jesus and His life. That's what it means to follow the Way of Jesus, the Cross Roads. Paul articulated the cross-shaped life like this: ***"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*** (Gal. 2:20)

- The American missionary Jim Elliot who was martyred in Ecuador in 1956, wrote this in his journal: ***"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."*** Several years after Jim and his friends were killed by spears when they tried to make contact with an unreached tribe of people, his widow, Elizabeth, returned to live among those people. Through her witness of radical forgiveness and sacrifice, she eventually helped to bring some of the very men who killed her and her friends' husbands *to faith in Christ*. She and her friends helped bring the peace of the Gospel and transformed the culture of a tribe known for extreme violence. They walked on the cross roads. The Way of Jesus is still changing lives, still changing the world.
- So how about you? Will you walk the Cross Roads? It begins at this moment of decision, when Jesus says, *deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. Let go of your life, let go of your control, and you'll find real life, eternal life*. This is what Lent is for. This is what Baptism is about. This is what following Jesus is about. Every day is a chance to give Him our full surrender and walk His Way. It's not always easy, but it is good—greater than we can imagine. I want to walk on the Cross Roads. Who's coming with me?