

## **Matthew 16:21-26**

<sup>21</sup>From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised again.

<sup>22</sup>Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “May you receive mercy, Lord! This will never happen to you.”

<sup>23</sup>But Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a snare to me because you are not thinking the things of God, but the things of men.”

<sup>24</sup>Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. <sup>25</sup>In fact whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup>After all, what will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul? Or what can a person give in exchange for his soul?”

## **Way of the Cross**

### **I.**

It wasn't that he had never told them before. He had. But now, things had changed. It was time to be blunt. It was time they would begin to understand more clearly. There were things they would soon have to face that would rock their world.

“From that time...” (Matthew 16:21, EHV). From what time? From the time of last week's gospel, that's what time. Last week Jesus had asked the disciples who people were saying he was. All kinds of great men were being listed by the common people when they heard Jesus and saw Jesus. Then Jesus asked: “But you, who do you say that I am?”<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Matthew 16:15-16, EHV).

What a great answer Peter gave! It might be worth a gold star stuck by your name in the classroom. Some modern English translations have been substituting the word “Messiah” for “Christ” in Peter's answer. Both words mean the same thing, but they want to draw attention to the fact that Peter recognized Jesus as the One who had been promised by God from the time of Moses...and even before. Peter believed very strongly that Jesus was the Savior God had promised to send into the world.

In fact, Jesus commended the kind of faith Peter demonstrated with his answer. That kind of faith was the rock on which Jesus promised to build his church. Peter had been the one to speak up among the Twelve, but they all believed it. They all saw Jesus as the promised Messiah.

“From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised again” (Matthew 16:21, EHV). Do you see what time it was? Jesus had made some veiled references about what was to come, but before that time he had never just come right out and said what being the Messiah involved. It was time to be blunt. It was time for them to know and begin to understand what it all meant.

“Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘May you receive mercy, Lord! This will never happen to you’” (Matthew 16:22, EHV).

Peter was pretty comfortable around Jesus. Peter loved Jesus very much. Can you see Peter grab his arm and lead him aside from the other disciples? “Whoa, whoa, Jesus! Hold

on a minute. Don't be so hasty. This is not what being Messiah is all about. Take a step back and think about things before you make such an assertion."

The beliefs of the day were that Messiah was going to come and restore the physical kingdom of Israel to its former position of prominence and glory in the world. *Everybody* thought that's what was going to happen. *Everybody* was looking for things to get better for the common people.

## II.

Things haven't really changed all that much, have they? At least, about our attitudes. Life has gotten so much easier with the advancements of the modern age. At the same time, *everybody* is still looking for things to get better.

The Jewish opinions of the day were that when the Messiah would come, they would live in a David-style kingdom, or a Solomon-style kingdom. Israel would be respected. Israel would be a prized trading partner.

Some Christians today are looking for a Messianic Kingdom on earth. They look forward to a time when Christians will be respected and Jesus will return to rule on this earth.

Many don't really expect such a Messianic Kingdom, but they still feel that God ought to bless them for their obedience to God, and for their faith. If a believer has enough faith, God will bless him or her with success and financial stability and all kinds of earthly blessings.

"But Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a snare to me because you are not thinking the things of God, but the things of men'" (Matthew 16:23, EHV).

Peter was trying to impose human ways of thinking—human logic—on Jesus. That would never do. Peter didn't really understand all the Old Testament prophecies and how they were designed to play out. He didn't understand the kind of kingdom that Jesus had really come to establish—a kingdom that was superior in every way to anything Peter could possibly imagine.

You and I have the benefit of hindsight. We have the completed history of God's saving activity. We have all the prophecies of the Old Testament that we can read. We have the completed New Testament to see how every one of those prophecies came to fruition.

But what happens all too often? New Testament believers still try to tell Jesus how he ought to do things; what kind of blessings would be appropriate for us. All too often our sight is focused on the things of men. Like very young children who can't think abstractly yet, we are fixated on the physical world. The tangible things we can taste and see and touch drive us to demand of God that he fulfill *our* desires, rather than realizing that the things of God are so much higher and so much better.

## III.

Back to the beginning. "From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised again" (Matthew 16:21, EHV). All thoughts we might have about how Jesus *ought* to bless us pale in comparison to how he *has* blessed us.

He *had* to go to Jerusalem. It was there that the most important events in all of human history would take place. Jesus knew that was the path his Heavenly Father had set for him, and he did not shrink from it.

He *had* to suffer many things. The insults. The gobs of spittle that landed in his face. The

indignity of the crown of thorns and the mocking purple robe. The physical blows of the whip striking him again and again. Being dragged from one courtroom to another like some common criminal.

He *had* to be killed. The cross was a shameful way to die. It had to be that way. The cross was a painful way to die. It had to be that way.

Still, the greatest shame and the greatest pain came from God the Father abandoning him to suffer hell for every sin every person ever committed or ever will commit. Only the Son of God—God himself—could possibly take all of this on himself. It *had* to happen this way.

He *had* to be raised again on the third day. The things of God, the ways of God, the thoughts of God, the plans of God, are so much higher and so much better than anything any human being could ever conceive. Jesus completed God's plan of salvation flawlessly. The resurrection is God's stamp of approval on the whole perfectly-executed plan. It is finished.

#### IV.

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me’” (Matthew 16:24, EHV).

All the things Jesus *had* to do to accomplish our salvation make it ludicrous for us to think there might be some little bit we can do to help him, don't they? Don't think you can choose Jesus on your own without the Holy Spirit working that faith in your heart first. Don't think you can get yourself to a point where you can make demands of God or assume that God should bless you.

Instead, deny yourself. True success for the believer lies only in Christ. Rely totally on Christ. Relinquish control to Jesus.

Take up your cross, Jesus says. He's not speaking of the difficulties that come to us all because we live in a world tainted by sin. Those will come, to be sure. As Paul said, those will not be worth comparing with the glory we will receive. But crosses will come to the believer specifically because we deny ourselves and give over control of our lives to Jesus. The world looks down on believers because we live like believers. Sometimes you will face shame specifically because you are following Jesus and doing the will of God.

“In fact whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25, EHV). While faith comes only from the Holy Spirit and is not something you do or produce, being and remaining a follower of Jesus requires lots of effort. It's life-changing. Believers don't live life for the joys of this world, but set those aside as being things of men—things of lesser importance—and live their lives for God.

“After all, what will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul? Or what can a person give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26, EHV).

Remember Jesus' parable of the rich man and his bigger and better barns? He was fixated on wealth and all he could do with it. In the end, his riches were completely useless. Dying without faith in Jesus is the most awful fate anyone can ever face.

You are someone who knows Jesus. You are someone who gives thanks that he was willing to do all those things he *had* to do to gain your salvation. Live your life as one who gives thanks every day. Live your life in the way of the cross. Jesus has died for you. Live for him. Amen.