

JESUS HAD TO DIE; YOU ARE CALLED TO FOLLOW
(SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 2010)

SCRIPTURE READING: ISAIAH 53; MATTHEW 16:21-27

INTRODUCTION

This is our 53rd Sunday in Matthew's gospel. It can be easy to get lost in such a long study, so let us take just a moment to get our bearings as it were.

Though there are many different outlines of the book of Matthew, I think perhaps the best outline is a simple three-part outline.¹

1. Matthew 1:1-4:16: The Preparation of Jesus
2. Matthew 4:17-16:20: The Proclamation of Jesus
3. Matthew 16:21-28:20: The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus

This outline is based on a short phrase that is found in Matthew 4:17 and 16:21.

Matthew 4:17 - From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 16:21 - From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

The twice-repeated phrase **from that time Jesus began** divides the gospel into three main parts. In these three main parts, we first learn about who Jesus is in terms of his genealogy, birth, early suffering, baptism, and

¹ Jack Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 40.

temptation in the wilderness. In the second section, we see the main part of His ministry to Israel. In the third part, the focus is his journey to Jerusalem where He suffers, is shamefully crucified, and is raised.²

Now from the very beginning of Matthew we know the purpose for which Jesus came. What did the angel tell Joseph about Mary and why he shouldn't be afraid to take her as his wife? The angel said to Joseph in **Matthew 1:21**, "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." Matthew 1:21 lines up very well with 16:21.

We will look at Matthew 16:21-27 in two parts. First, Jesus instructs His disciples about His suffering, death, and resurrection. Second, Jesus demands that all true disciples follow Him. **Jesus had to die; You are called to follow.**

1. JESUS INSTRUCTS HIS DISCIPLES ABOUT HIS SUFFERING, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION, v. 21-23

Matt. 16:21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. **22**

Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" **23** But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

² Ibid., 40.

Raymond Brown in his famous two-volume work *The Death of the Messiah* discusses briefly the apostate scholars who are part of the “Jesus Seminar.” The “Jesus Seminar” takes votes about the authenticity of Jesus’ sayings and gives each saying of Jesus a coded-color.

red = he undoubtedly said this or something very much like it;
pink = probably he said something like this;
gray = the ideas are his even though he did not say this;
black = he did not say this; it represents later or different tradition.

In 1987, the eleven synoptic sayings where Jesus spoke about his future passion were all recommended to be voted black. So according to the “Jesus Seminar,” Jesus did not give instruction to His disciples about His coming suffering, death, and resurrection. Verse 21 according to these losers is a later invention and tradition of the church. Later in 1991, the seminar concluded that not a single saying of Jesus in the book of John is authentic.³

Such is the folly of unbelief. And today apostate Christians like Brian McClaren attempt to argue that Jesus did not really come to save people from sin and certainly not to save anyone from eternal destruction in hell.⁴ But here in Matthew 16:21 we have the heart of the gospel message.

Jesus declared to His disciples not simply that He knew the future about his suffering, death, and resurrection. The word **must** in verse 21 is a significant word.⁵ Jesus had to go to Jerusalem in fulfillment of the counsel and decree of

³ Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, Vol. 2, 1468.

⁴ Kevin DeYoung, *Christianity and McClarenism*, available at <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/files/2010/02/Christianity-and-McClarenism2.pdf>

⁵ Thayer: “necessity established by the counsel and decree of God, especially by that purpose of his which relates to the salvation of men by the intervention of Christ and which is disclosed in the O.T. prophecies.” *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “δεῖ,” n.p.

God. Jesus had to go to Jerusalem in fulfillment of the many OT prophecies that showed that this is what the Messiah was called to do.⁶

This is not the first time we hear of the city of Jerusalem in Matthew, but it is the first time that we see Jesus going to Jerusalem in Matthew. We know from John that there were other times that Jesus was in Jerusalem. But this journey to Jerusalem would be different.

We didn't spend much time in our two previous sermons looking at verse 20. After Peter's great confession that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus gave a strong command to His disciples that they should not tell others that He was the Christ or Messiah. The reason for this strong command was that the disciples still did not understand as we see in verse 23 that as the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of Man, **had** to suffer and die.

Jesus mentioned three groups in verse 21 – the elders, chief priests, and scribes. These were the religious and political leaders of Israel, the three main groups who composed the Jewish Sanhedrin, which met at the temple complex in Jerusalem. Interestingly the only other place where these three groups are again mentioned together is in Matthew 27:41.⁷ They stood before Jesus and mocked him as He suffered on the cross.

I should point out also from verse 21 that Jesus in speaking here of his sufferings and death also spoke of his resurrection. The glory of the gospel message is not only that our Savior suffered for us but also that He was raised to new life, thus securing our salvation.

⁶ This is the heart of NT preaching. See Luke 24:26 and Acts 17:2-3 as examples of this.

⁷ Pointed out by France, 631. Hagner (479) also observed that these three are mentioned together again only in 27:41 (though in a different order, ie, 2, 3, 1), which records the partial fulfillment of the present prediction.

(John Calvin wrote, “In like manner, all ministers of the Word, who desire that their preaching may be profitable, ought to be exceedingly careful that the glory of his resurrection should be always exhibited by them in connection with the ignominy of his death.”⁸)

Peter in the synoptic gospels is mentioned the most often. He is listed as the first of the disciples in each of the different listings. It is not surprising then to see Peter as the one who spoke to Jesus in light of this difficult instruction. While we might simply attribute to Peter that he was quick to speak, we should keep in mind that he acted as the spokesman for the disciples, though here we are not explicitly told that all the other disciples had the same response to Jesus’ words.

Peter took Jesus aside as we see in verse 22 and began to rebuke Him. The word translated as rebuke is a very strong word. Most of the time this verb is used in describing the actions of Jesus in his miraculous healings and calming of storms. Peter’s rebuke can be translated as “Far be it from you, Lord,” or even more strongly as “God forbid!”⁹ And the last part of his rebuke, “this shall not happen to you,” shows that what Jesus declared was not just undesirable but unthinkable!¹⁰

While Peter had somewhat privately rebuked Jesus, Jesus on the other hand delivered a much needed and public counter-rebuke.

⁸ John Calvin, s.v. Matthew 16:21.

⁹ ἰλεώς ἰλεως **Adjective** nom masc sing **merciful, propitious;** *may God be gracious to you, Lord*, i.e. may God in mercy spare you this, *God forbid!* BDAG, s.v. “ἰλεως,” 474. This verb is used only 2x. See also Hebrews 8:12.

¹⁰ France, 634.

Get behind me, Satan! Where else in Matthew do we find similar words? The words here are similar to Jesus' words to the devil in Matthew 4:10, Away with you, Satan! The devil offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory if only Jesus would worship him. And in a similar way, Peter here acting as a spokesman for Satan was seeking to say to Jesus that He also could enjoy the glories of the kingdom without having to suffer.

You are an offense to Me! This phrase might be better translated as you are a stumbling block to me. There is great irony in this rebuke. Even if you don't believe that Peter is the rock of verse 18, Peter means rock or stone. But here Jesus calls him a rock of stumbling.

For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men. This was the great error of Peter and likely the other disciples.

Correctly they believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but incorrectly their view of the Messiah was shaped by the things of this world rather than by the words of God found in the OT and in the instruction of Jesus.

The error of Peter is not all that different from what so many believe today. How many people today want to focus on the many miracles of Jesus or His acts of kindness but speak very little of why He had to die in order to turn away the wrath of God. One commentator has written:

Lacking in the disciples' perspective was a sense of the gravity of sin and thus of the necessity of the cross as the instrumental means to the very possibility of the experience of the kingdom. Jesus' purpose was far greater than the blessing of Israel with the establishment of political independence and the experience of material blessing. His purpose was to counteract the effects of sin universally (cf Gal 3:13) and thus to deliver humanity

from a far greater enemy than the Roman oppressors. It is this purpose that makes the work of Jesus the turning point of the ages and that controls Jesus in the accomplishment of God's will. It is this that drives him to the cross (20:28).¹¹

2. JESUS DEMANDS THAT ALL TRUE DISCIPLES FOLLOW HIM, vv. 24-27

Matt. 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. **25** For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. **26** For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? **27** For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

These very challenging words of Jesus can be outlined rather simply. In verse 24, Jesus makes three demands applicable for all disciples. And then in verses 25-27, Jesus gives three great reasons for His demands.

If you desire to follow after Jesus, the first thing you must do is deny yourself. It is interesting that the same verb **deny** is the same verb used for Peter's denial of Jesus. What is self-denial? One way to define it is to realize we live in a world that promotes entirely the opposite, love for self. The American way of life almost entirely is based on living for self. You deserve it. You should have it. This will make you happy. If you don't have it, you won't be happy. If it feels good, do it. The worship of self is the greatest idol.

¹¹ Hagner, 481.

Jesus demands that you seek to deny yourself, meaning that what you pursue with greatest importance is not simply what you want but what Jesus Christ demands of you.

Self-denial doesn't mean that you move to a desert island and stop eating and drinking until you die. Adrian Rogers said that there is a great difference between denying yourself things and denying yourself. Self-denial isn't merely giving up some things for a time.

Let me give an extended quote here from Martin Luther, which I believe is relevant to this issue and others.

Idolatry is all manner of seeming holiness and worshipping, let these counterfeit spiritualities shine outwardly as glorious and fair as they may; in a word, all manner of devotion in those that we would serve God without Christ the Mediator, his Word and command. In popedom it was held a work of the greatest sanctity for the monks to sit in their cells and meditate of God, [solitude] and of his wonderful works; to be kindled with zeal, kneeling on their knees, praying, and having their imaginary contemplations of celestial objects, with such supposed devotion, that they wept for joy. In these their conceits, they banished all desires and thoughts of women, and what else is temporal and evanescent. They seemed to meditate only of God, and of his wonderful works.

Yet all these seeming holy actions of devotion, which the wit and wisdom of man holds to be angelical sanctity, are nothing else but works of the flesh. All manner of religion, where people serve God without his Word and command, is simply idolatry, and the more holy and spiritual such a religion seems, the more hurtful and venomous it is; for it leads people away from the faith of Christ, and makes them rely and depend upon their own strength, works, and righteousness. In like manner, all kinds of orders of monks, fasts, prayers, hairy shirts, the austerities of the Capuchins, who in popedome are held to be the most holy of all, are mere works of the flesh; for the monks hold they

are holy, and shall be saved, not through Christ, whom they view as a severe and angry judge, but through the rules of their order. (*Tabletalk*, 1626 AD).¹²

Self-denial isn't following a list of man-made rules. But it does mean you're your commitment to love and follow Christ is greater than your commitment to simply please yourself. And self-denial often then means giving up some of your own ideas and pleasures in pursuit of the much greater pleasures of Christ. Amy Carmichael, who served 55 years as a missionary in India said, "Rid me, good Lord, of every diverting thing."

Second, Jesus demands that you **take up your cross and follow Him**.

Taking up your cross is not just bearing up with some difficulty in life. Martin Hengel in his informative book, *Crucifixion*, points out that in the Greek world, the **cross** is never, as far as he could see, used in a metaphorical sense.

Presumably the word was too offensive for it to be used as a metaphor by the Greeks.¹³ Jewish people also would not have viewed the cross in simply symbolic way. No, for first century Jews, Greeks, and Romans, crucifixion was a horrible but common means of putting your enemies to death in just about the most cruel and shameful way possible.

Jesus was demanding absolute obedience and sacrifice to the point of death. For the first disciples self-denial and cross bearing meant that they give up with their wishes for what Jesus would do for the physical nation of Israel and be willing to follow after Jesus to the point of death. Jesus was speaking literally.

¹² Cited by <http://apprising.org/>

¹³ Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 68. See also his comments on pp. 84-85.

In Luke 9, we read that we are to daily take up our cross and follow Him. There must be on the part of all true followers of Jesus Christ a daily focus on seeking to do this.

And since generally speaking, we don't wake up each day thinking that today might be the day that I die as a martyr for Jesus, we rightfully must think of how we practically seek to take up our cross. And in this sense, I think we rightfully should think about bearing whatever burdens we must carry. But keep in mind what literally Jesus is calling for you to do.

Third, Jesus demands that you follow Him. The command to follow might simply be explained in light of the two previous commands – self denial and cross-bearing. But I think there is a reason for this third command. Self-denial and cross-bearing are not just efforts in self-control or self-improvement. Jesus is not just calling you to improve your character and internal strength. No, you are called to live a life of self-denial and cross-bearing while keeping a very clear focus on Jesus. And it is this self-conscious attempt to follow Jesus that allows for self-denial and cross-bearing. For there is no way that any of us can do these things in our own strength. No, there must be that very clear determination to follow Jesus Christ in terms of obedience, purpose, dedication, and faithfulness.

Three reasons are then given for Jesus' demand. And in these three reasons we find the supreme reasons why following Jesus is the only thing that makes sense. Of course, these three reasons go against our natural sense of logic and purpose, which has been twisted by sin. But in these reasons we see that although Jesus demands much, He also offers the greatest reward that we can

imagine. Instead of pursuing a selfish and self-centered life, Jesus calls you to true life.

One scholar here suggests that Jesus' words here resemble the pre-battle speech of generals.¹⁴ So we have here not just purely logical reasons, but inspiration for a life of service and battle.

First in verse 25. Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Those whose goal in life is merely seeking their own pleasure and happiness above following Christ end up with the exact opposite. If your goal is to seek self-satisfaction you won't find that goal. But those who give up everything including life itself in following after Christ will find true life.

The **second** reason is given in verse 26. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

Jesus here is speaking ultimately of salvation and eternal life. Those who deny Jesus and think they can find their own way of salvation may find some temporary happiness but in the end they lose everything. Others don't even think of such a question. They are so busy with their own pursuits that they think very little about spiritual matters and eternal life.

Some of you may well be very distracted and focused by other concerns. You spend far more time focused on very trivial matters than on preparing your soul for truly serving Christ. What gain is there in doing that? What good is there for your soul?

¹⁴ Keener, 435.

Third, verse 27 says that there is a coming day of judgment. Jesus here is not speaking of earning your own salvation through good works. But Scripture does quite often speak of a judgment according to works.

The Lord knows your heart – your desires, thoughts, and pursuits. He knows all your actions. He knows when you are half-hearted. He knows your excuses. And so it is good for you that you often reflect on the fact that you will stand before Jesus Christ, the perfect and just judge, the one who knows all things.

CONCLUSION:

Let me close with a few points of application and further consideration of this passage.

First, I think this passage is a very good reminder that there has never been a time in church history since the time of Christ where God's people have been able to coast without opposition. No, there is always for God's people at all times, the call for self-denial, the taking up of the cross, and the seeking to wholeheartedly follow our Lord Jesus Christ. Persecution may not always be experienced by God's people, thankfully, in the same way at all times, **but the lack of explicit persecution is in some ways even more dangerous than open persecution.** Yes, we are very troubled by what we are facing as a nation. But this trouble is in no way the failure of Christ or the true gospel message.

Second, I mentioned earlier that while we don't generally think, today might be the day where I die as a martyr for Jesus Christ, that are still many

situations where you will be tested as a follower of Christ and face the choice of either self-denial or denial of Christ.

1. Witnessing
2. Peer Pressure
3. The use of money, time, and emotional energy

You will never give or serve more than Jesus demands. And you also will never give of your time, money, effort, and your life without being given an even greater reward in return. Let's do our very best as a congregation to show this!

Closing Hymn: 507

Benediction – Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.