

Matt. 16:21-28 - Take Up Your Cross

Written by Tim Black
Sunday, 14 March 2010 10:45

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Body

1.

Set Your Mind on the Things of God vv. 21-23. First, set your mind on the things of God. I say this because this is how Jesus analyzed the issue in v. 23. The only way to follow Jesus is to set your mind on the things of God, not on the things of man.

1.

What Are The Things of God? v. 21. So what are the things of God? They are what Jesus began to tell His disciples in v. 21. They are the things that accomplish our redemption from sin. Jesus tells us what those things are by foretelling the place, the people, the persecutions, and the profit of His work that accomplished our redemption.

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21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

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The Place: Jerusalem. The place where our redemption was to be accomplished was Jerusalem

, the head and holy city, where sacrifices were offered. Christ came to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Each of the gospels tells us that at one point in Jesus' ministry He stopped teaching and ministering in Galilee, and "

set His face to go to Jerusalem

" (

Luke 9:51

) to die for our sins. Jesus began to prepare His disciples for His death in this passage.

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The People: Sanhedrin. The people in Jerusalem who would put Jesus to death were "the elders and chief priests and scribes

." These constituted the

Sanhedrin

, the rulers of Israel. They were God's covenant people, but they rejected Christ. "

He came to His own, but His own received Him not.

" (

John 1:11

)

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The Persecutions: Many things, killed. The persecutions Christ would undergo were that He would " suffer many things...and be killed."

Christ's sufferings were varied and many in number, and led to the extreme end of dying " to bear the sins of many.

" (Is. 53:12;

Heb. 9:28

) He would humble "

himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

" (

Phil. 2:8

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The Profit: Resurrection. This would be an ignominious death, but it would lead to the profit of this redemptive work: Christ's resurrection. Now that His disciples believed He was the King and the Savior, He spoke plainly to them of how He would secure His reign and our salvation. It would be by His death and resurrection. Like the prophets of the OT, Jesus " predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.

" (**1 Pet. 1:11**

) The Messiah's work was to be one of suffering and glory. Suffering first, then glory to follow. If you are in Christ, that is your life. You suffer now, and await glory to follow. This is the perspective of, and these are the things that matter most to, a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Christ suffered first, then went to glory, so that is the path I will walk too

.

What Are The Things of Man? Sin and Selfishness v. 22. But is that how you think? Is that how you walk? Peter had his mind set on the things of man.

What are the things of man

? V. 22 reads,

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22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

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Peter's Walk. Peter was not following Christ. Instead, Peter "took [Christ] aside", meaning he made Christ follow him! Do you see that? What path was Peter walking on? How did Peter walk? He walked after himself

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Peter's Talk. That's Peter's walk; what was Peter's talk?

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He "began to rebuke" Jesus. He wasn't following Jesus' teaching. He was following his own teaching, and he was so proud as to attempt to teach Jesus. "T
his shall never happen to you.
" "Look, Jesus, don't you understand? You have thousands of followers! We'll fight for you!"

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You and I would easily have thought the same thing Peter did. Jesus' kingdom is supposed to be glorious, so it should have no suffering and shame. But in v. 21 Jesus had said "he must
...suffer
." Peter should not have contradicted Jesus.

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Here you see two things contrasted. You either follow yourself or you follow God. You either follow your word, or God's word. Even when you think you're doing Jesus a kindness, when you think you can have confidence because you are a Christian—on the winning side!—all your kindness and confidence is an abomination if it is not grounded on the word of God. We must never trust our own mind, but only the word of God. The reason is that the things of man are sin and selfishness, but these are not the things of God.

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Set Your Mind on the Things of God v. 23. Christ's rebuke to Peter teaches you you must set your mind on the things of God
. By man's standard of sinfully, selfishly protecting yourself, Peter was right. "

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But
" in
v. 23
, Jesus "
turned and said to Peter,
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23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."
"

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Get behind me, Satan! Jesus said "Get behind me, Satan!" Satan's name means "Adversary." Peter was not Satan, but he was Christ's adversary at this moment. Peter was a tool in Satan's hands to tempt Christ to depart from His saving mission, from His talk and His walk. You can be led astray just as easily as Peter was. One moment you confess Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and the next, Satan has you.

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You are a hindrance to me. Jesus said, "You are a hindrance to me." Peter was a stumbling block in Christ's way, because Christ had to go to the cross. He had to die in order for us to be saved from our sin.

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The Problem. What was Peter's problem which elicited such a harsh rebuke from Jesus? The problem was that Peter served sin and self, but Christ's purpose was to save us from our sin. The things of man are sin and self, but the things of God are to graciously save you from your sin and your self.

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Sunday, 14 March 2010 10:45

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It's Your Problem. Do you have this problem? Yes, you do. You want the city of man to accept you like Peter wanted Jerusalem to accept Jesus, even to give you honor, fame, wealth, or power. You want the sinful world to grant you comfort and pleasure rather than to make you suffer many things for following Jesus. You only want to follow Christ until it hurts. You don't want to die.

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Set Your Mind on the Things of God. But Peter learned something this day. He learned no longer to set his mind on himself, but on the things of God. No longer to live for sin, but for salvation. No longer for sin and self, but the redemptive work of God. Peter learned this, so he tells you to learn it too in **1 Pet. 4:1-2**, "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

" (**1 Pet. 4:1**

)
Set your mind on the things of God
. In this world you will suffer (John 16:33), and it is not pleasant, but measure suffering by the standard of God's redeeming work. Don't say, "I don't deserve to suffer." Say "My Redeemer will save me even through this suffering." Don't ask "How can God be good if I'm suffering?" or "How can this suffering be good for me when it hurts?" Instead, ask God "Please show me how this suffering will further your work of redemption in me or in my neighbor." "

The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

"
(Rom. 8:18)

There is a heavenly standard by which our sufferings must be measured, and that standard is God's work of redemption.

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Take Up Your Cross vv. 24-28. Even when you are not suffering, Jesus calls you to take up your cross

. This is the practical side of setting your mind on the things of God. Take up the implement which caused Christ's greatest suffering on

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Sunday, 14 March 2010 10:45

your
behalf, and be willing to suffer to that extent on His.

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The Challenge v. 24. Christ lays down the challenge to take up your cross in v. 24.

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24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

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"Come after me." Did you know that this word "come after me" is the same word as "get behind me" in v. 23? Jesus made another play on words; a pun upon a pun! If you really want to follow Christ and not be His adversary, if you really want to be a living stone in Christ's church, in line with Christ the chief cornerstone, be willing to die for Him, because He died for you.

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Deny Yourself. You say, "Ok, I'm willing to die if I have to, but I don't have to right now, right?" Look closer at what Jesus said. He said "let him deny himself." You're right, you don't have to die today. You have to deny yourself today. If you really do that, you'll be willing to die for Him if the time comes. But if you say, "I'm not willing to die for Him today," you have not taken up your cross, and you are not following Him.

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Take Up Your Cross. The cross was a means of execution, of putting a man to death. Jesus is telling you, "Take up your electric chair, and follow me." Do you know in some

Matt. 16:21-28 - Take Up Your Cross

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Sunday, 14 March 2010 10:45

Muslim countries you can be put to death if you tell a Muslim to follow Jesus? Jesus knew that would happen when He said "Take up your cross." Some of my friends from college and seminary are in those countries, because "Our Lord Jesus preferred our salvation before his own ease and safety."

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Serve God and Others. Rather than serving yourself, what it means to deny yourself is to serve God and your neighbor first. "In humility count others better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Phil.

2:3-4

)

Rom. 15:1-3

says, "

1 We...have an obligation...not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.'

" I challenge you, when you go home today, not to serve yourself first. When you walk into your house, don't say "Here's what I need to do for me

." Say "I'm going to do what she

needs first, then if there's anything left over, I'll do what needs to be done for me." Children, set the table without being asked. Mom and Dad will wonder what has gotten into you. True Christianity says "

I

don't come first. My neighbor comes first."

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The Tradeoff vv. 25-26. You say, "But if I deny myself enough, I'll lose everything!" Yes. That is the tradeoff of taking up your cross. Jesus said,

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Text

Matt. 16:21-28 - Take Up Your Cross

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Sunday, 14 March 2010 10:45

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25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

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26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?

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Eternal Life. If you try to save your life in this world by not denying yourself, not following Christ, so as to preserve your earthly comfort, wealth, fame or power, you will lose those things of this transient life, and eternal life as well. If you willingly deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Christ, you will lose your earthly life in principle from the outset if not in practice in the end, just as Paul counted all things a loss for the sake of knowing Christ, but though this results in sharing in Christ's sufferings, it also results in sharing in Christ's resurrection from the dead. That is the profit for you of Christ's redemptive work. It is better to count all things a loss than to gain the whole world, yet lose eternal life.

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Holy Life. But though you will suffer when you lose your life today by denying yourself, you will also find your life today when you deny yourself. The life you find is a life of holiness. Being holy to the Lord is the substance of eternal life. A husband will never be joyful as a husband until he finds joy in denying himself to serve his wife. A wife will never be joyful as a wife until she finds joy in denying herself to submit to her husband. Self-sacrifice and submission are the biblical pattern of holiness and of joy in authority relationships. "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

" When you consider others better than yourself and serve your neighbor first, you will find that is what you were made to do. Serving others makes relationships fulfilling in a way serving yourself will never do. "

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

" (

Matt. 20:28

) Make it your aim to be content to fill a little space, if God be glorified. A life of self-renouncing love is one of liberty.

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The Warning v. 27. Christ ends with a warning and an encouragement. The warning is in v. 27:

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27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

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This verse should remind you of the prophecy about the Son of Man in Dan. 7. Jesus will come again to judge the world, punishing those who served themselves, and rewarding those who by His grace denied themselves, took up their cross, and followed Him. "Spend and be spent

" (2 Cor. 12:15) for God and your neighbor, and all your spending Jesus will repay.

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The Encouragement v. 28. There is a great encouragement to take up your cross. It is that although you may suffer many years in this life before entering into glory, yet you are already in the kingdom of God now. Jesus said in v. 28,

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Matt. 16:21-28 - Take Up Your Cross

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Sunday, 14 March 2010 10:45

28 Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

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Jesus was not speaking of His second coming at the end of the age. He was speaking of the coming of His kingdom, which He already had said was at hand, and even was here, because He is its King. It came in many stages, but the stages He was directing them to anticipate were the ones these men would see. After Christ's ascension, Christ Himself came in great power to rule in His kingdom in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the establishment of the New Testament church, the destruction of Jerusalem "to make an end of sacrifice and offering

" (

Dan. 9:27

) and the place and nation of the Jews. If you don't realize this was Christ coming in His kingdom, you will wonder why the disciples died before Christ's second coming, and the reality is that you don't see the kingdom. But it's right underneath your nose! Christ our King reigns in His church and in this world by His word and Spirit; He subdues us to Himself, He rules and defends us, He restrains and conquers all His and our enemies. Because Christ's kingdom is here and now, take courage, brothers and sisters in Christ, to take up your cross and follow Him. Do not be afraid to deny yourself for your neighbor, for He has already given you more than you can ever lose. "

Seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

" (

Luke 12:31-32

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Conclusion

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It is fitting to give Peter the final word on this passage. Humbled himself, he says to you, "6

Matt. 16:21-28 - Take Up Your Cross

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Sunday, 14 March 2010 10:45

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

" (

1 Pet. 5:6-11

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[1](#) Matthew Henry, 236.