

## Taking the Cross 5-8-05

Matthew 16:21-28 (NIV)

<sup>21</sup> From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

<sup>22</sup> Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" <sup>23</sup> Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. <sup>26</sup> What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. <sup>28</sup> I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

In our last study in Matthew, Jesus asked the disciples to declare who they believed Him to be. Peter boldly declared his belief that Jesus was not only the Son of Man but the Son of God, the Messiah. Jesus told Peter that he was blessed because he had come to understand this by a revelation from God. (Matthew 16:16-17) The same is true for each of you. You that realize Jesus is the Son of God have received a revelation from God. You are blessed. It makes a spiritual world of difference to know that God has come as a man to declare His love for the world, to make a way for us to be right with Him, and to show us how to live. It is the difference between thinking God is distant or non-existent to knowing He is near, understanding, sympathetic, and involved in the details of life. (Hebrews 4:15-16) One way is a hopeless end. The other is an endless hope. That is just a part of the blessedness of knowing that Jesus is the Son of God.

The next passage, our passage for today, begins in verse 21. *From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.* Once the disciples understood who He is, they were then ready to hear the warning of what He had to suffer. He will give them five more warnings in the Gospel of Matthew. The Scriptures say that they did not remember He had given these warnings until they saw Him raised from the dead. (John 2:22) (John 12:16) If it was only after the resurrection that they remembered, the warnings served to strengthen their conviction that Jesus knew what He was doing and why.

When *The Passion* was released, there was a lot of debate about who killed Christ. Certainly, He died for our sins. In this passage, Jesus declared that it would be at the hands of the religious leaders. They are the ones that out of envy at His success, and anger over the exposure of their sins, insisted that He must be

**Commented [notes1]:** <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."  
<sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.  
Matt 16:16-17 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.  
<sup>16</sup> Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.  
Heb 4:15-16 (NIV)

**Commented [notes3]:** <sup>22</sup> After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.  
John 2:22 (NIV)

**Commented [notes4]:** <sup>16</sup> At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.  
John 12:16 (NIV)

executed. (Matthew 27:18) Religious institutions are often the instruments of evil. That is because they become organizations of man for the glory of man. They usually begin with an on fire messenger of God who turns the people to God. After the messenger has died, the people begin to exalt the messenger. Then they build a movement around his teachings, and that evolves into a monument to the man. In the end, it is about who is in the seats of authority and whose opinions will be law. It is a sad thing to observe, but it is the natural process of things in a fallen world. Then God raises someone else up to call people out of the dead rituals to a living relationship with Jesus, and the cycle begins again.

**Commented [notes5]:** <sup>18</sup> For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. Matthew 27:18 (NIV)

<sup>22</sup> Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Peter loved Jesus. It is only natural that he did not want Him to suffer, natural from the perspective of fallen man. We do not want our friends to suffer because we suffer with them. But what if the suffering was for their good? What if it resulted in something of meaning and purpose far greater than if they had not endured it? (Psalm 119:71) Love wants the highest good for the one loved. Fallen man cannot see past the present pain. The spiritual person that is focused on the sovereignty and wisdom of God will trust that a greater good lies through the path of suffering. The Apostle Paul declared that suffering for the cause of Christ was a gift, like the gift to believe. Listen to Philippians 1:29 (NIV). <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him... The gift of belief unto salvation is likened to the gift of suffering for Him. In our natural self, we would say the same thing Peter said to anyone we loved that predicted suffering or a horrible death. But listen to Jesus' response.

**Commented [notes6]:** <sup>71</sup> It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. Psalms 119:71 (KJV)

<sup>23</sup> Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Do not forget that Jesus predicted not only rejection and execution but also resurrection. When Jesus began His ministry, He was tempted by Satan to give it all up and take a short cut. Satan offered, "Just worship me and you can have the world." In other words, "Why suffer and die in agony. Just worship me and I will let you reign over the world. In exchange for Your worship, I will let you have what is in my hands. Skip the suffering and go right to the Millennial reign. How about it? What do you say?" At the end of those temptations in the wilderness there is an interesting passage. <sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. Luke 4:13 (NIV) Was this that time? You see, Peter was saying the same thing Satan said. Now that people were recognizing Jesus as the Son of God, why go through the suffering? Take a short cut. Do it man's way.

Jesus knew that was not possible. He had the mind of the Father, not the mind of man. When we refuse the suffering that comes from a godly life, we refuse the blessing and fullness that God has for us and for those who will benefit from our suffering. What was at stake was nothing less than the salvation of the world. The same Peter, that was just lauded by Jesus for receiving a revelation of God, was rebuked by Jesus for being an instrument of Satan.

Dear brother and sister in Christ, such is the state of our life in this fallen world. I would love to say that in the power of the Holy Spirit we do not go this route, this

yo-yo of extremes. However, I see so few people of God who are mature enough to let the Holy Spirit consistently guide their words and actions, and I include myself. God help us yield ourselves more fully to the Holy Spirit that our witness might be more consistent. One minute we are encouraged by a revelation from God, the next we are in the pit of despair because we have to suffer some little thing for the sake of the kingdom and our own maturity. (Romans 8:18) Let us grow up into maturity, into consistency, so that we have in mind the things of God and not of man! (Ephesians 4:13)

**Commented [notes7]:** <sup>18</sup> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. Romans 8:18 (NIV)

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. We often read this verse apart from the preceding passage. It is so much richer in context. Peter just said in effect, "Let's not go that suffering route." Jesus responded that his mindset was that of man and not of God. That was the introduction for this powerful statement to those who would be His disciples. "Do you want to follow Me? Then you must deny self. You must quit thinking like men, selfishly, with only what would be best for you. You have to turn away from selfishness to follow. AND not only that, but you must consider yourself on the way to your execution. Your life is done."

**Commented [notes8]:** <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:13 (NIV)

The word "deny" (*aparneomai*) in our translations is a strengthened form of the verb. We could translate it to utterly deny. Jesus used it predicting how Peter would deny Him. (Luke 22:34) Peter denied Jesus with curses. (Matthew 26:74) That is the kind of denial of self we must have if we want to follow Jesus, utter denial.

**Commented [notes9]:** <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me." Luke 22:34 (NIV)

Taking up your cross is not carrying some burden. I do not know how we got that image. You hear it quite frequently, "I have my cross to bear." What an ungodly statement! Excuse me if I offended you. Let me explain. When the a Roman leader who had the right of the sword, the authority to sentence to death a human being, gave the order for crucifixion, he would declare, "Put the cross on the man!" It was the most bone chilling expression one could hear. It meant untold suffering lay ahead. It meant your life was over and it was only a matter of time, agonizing time, until you were dead. In the process, you will have wished you were dead a thousand times over. Now hear again Jesus say, "If you want to follow me, utterly deny yourself, voluntarily take the cross of death, and follow me through the suffering."

**Commented [notes10]:** <sup>74</sup> Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. Matthew 26:74 (NIV)

There is only one cross to bear, the cross of Jesus. Anything else you call a cross is only a tool in the hand of God to help you focus on what is eternal. It is a gift from God. That was the Apostle Paul's declaration. "I have this thorn in the flesh", he said. "It makes me lean upon the grace of God. It demonstrates the power of God in a weak life." (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) That is a godly attitude.

**Commented [notes11]:** <sup>7</sup> To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NIV)

Are you suffering? Good! His strength is made perfect in weakness. Do not use it as an excuse to compromise, but as a reason to let the power of God be manifested in your life. (2 Corinthians 4:11) Live in resurrection power. If you have taken up the cross, your life is over. Now it is Christ that lives in you. (Galatians 2:20) Follow Him! Too often, we use the suffering as an excuse not to follow. It just means we have not taken up the cross. We refuse to deny our self. The power of God will not be manifested in a life like that.

**Commented [notes12]:** <sup>11</sup> For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. 2 Corinthians 4:11 (KJV)

**Commented [notes13]:** <sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

"Follow me!" Jesus said. "Don't go your own way. Put your feet in My footprints. Humble yourself as I have humbled Myself. (Philippians 2:8) Forgive as I forgive. Have mercy like I have mercy. And lest you think I am talking of a boring downcast existence, have the joy that I overflow with! (Hebrews 1:9) Have the conviction I have! Have the confidence and comfort of the Father that I have! Speak the truth like I do! FOLLOW ME! Follow me to death. Follow me to victory. Follow me to resurrection life! Follow me to glory!" (Romans 8:17)

**Commented [notes14]:** <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! Philippians 2:8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes15]:** <sup>9</sup> You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." Hebrews 1:9 (NIV)

You only have two choices, follow your own fallen selfish desires, or follow Jesus. Lest you think the suffering is not worth it, listen to Jesus' conclusion. <sup>25</sup> *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.* <sup>26</sup> *What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?* Living for self means that you lose it all. Losing your life, that is taking the cross, the denial of self to follow Jesus, means you find what life is really about. Life is Jesus. Losing this temporal life, your worldly desires and cares, means you will find real life in Him. You will find the purpose for which you were created. Jesus said your eternal soul is on the line. What are you willing to give in exchange for your eternal soul?

**Commented [notes16]:** <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. Romans 8:17 (NIV)

I knew one of the wealthiest men in Japan, a multi-millionaire. Do you know what he really enjoyed? Not his home in the country, or his fine collection of wines, or his trips around the globe. When you have everything, nothing satisfies. I do not think he even enjoyed his family that much. He liked to putter in his garden, grow potatoes and azaleas. I think it was just getting away from all the stress of his self-centered life.

What would you give in exchange for your soul? Wealth? You can never have enough to satisfy. A relationship? You will find every relationship with the ungodly will leave you empty because they are as selfish as you are. If it is with a godly person, they will be unhappy because you are trying to find fulfillment in them instead of God. The devil cannot really deliver what he promises! Temporal pleasure is about all he can offer and it will always leave you wanting more. (Ephesians 4:19) So what lie will you fall for in exchange for your eternal soul? It will leave you emptier than before. In the process, you will lose life, the joy of being. (James 4:14)

**Commented [notes17]:** <sup>19</sup> Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. Ephesians 4:19 (NIV)

<sup>27</sup> *For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.* This passage is a flowing thought. The Day of Judgment approaches. You have two paths to choose from. One is selfish pleasure that is fleeting at best. It usually costs you more than you ever intended on paying and leaves you hungrier than before. Then you have to settle with God for the pain it produced in others' lives. Not only that, but God will balance the books. After giving you life, opportunity, truth, the work of His Spirit in your heart, blessing and goodness and warnings day after day, you squandered it all to live a life of ingratitude. God is just. The books will balance. You will be rewarded. The word means that you will get what you deserve, what is due. What does ingratitude, rebellion and selfishness deserve. Paul said the reward of sin is death.

**Commented [notes18]:** <sup>14</sup> Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. James 4:14 (KJV)

(Romans 6:23) That is the opposite of what you would have earned had you followed Jesus.

Those who followed Jesus and found life will get what they deserve as well. As they yielded to the Holy Spirit their actions and words had far-reaching effects that they never dreamed of. God multiplies the effect so that He can richly reward you. The little things you did for the weak He counts as if done to Him. (Matthew 25:40) The unselfishness you showed to a fellow worker of the Lord earns you that person's reward on top of your own. The little things you were faithful to care for in God honoring way earns you the right to rule cities. (Luke 19:17)

Jesus declared these truths. This is going to happen. Just as the earlier statement warning of His rejection and murder and resurrection happened, this will happen as well. If you are tempted to think it is a "pipe-dream", consider what you would have thought when He said He would walk out of the grave three days after they killed Him. You had better believe it because the One who said it cannot lie. (Numbers 23:19) He is coming back! You will get what is due. What will be due you if He came back this moment?

The last verse in our passage could have several possible interpretations. <sup>28</sup> *I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.* At first reading, we might connect it with the Second Coming because that was what He was referring to in the previous verse. However, we know that is not the case because He has not yet returned. Some believe He meant the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. My understanding is that it is either the following passage regarding the Transfiguration, or Pentecost. If it is the Transfiguration, the three disciples that were there saw Jesus glorified. Jesus is the King. It was a preview of Him coming in glory. If the correct interpretation is Pentecost, they saw the tongues of fire and the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit. The church was born and the church is His kingdom, those who are under His rule. We could even consider both of these events as a fulfillment of His words. They saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. That surely encouraged them to endure.

He is coming again to physically reign in the earth. He will reward everyone for what he or she has done. He will reward according to whether they chose to live for self or chose to deny self and follow Him. What is your choice this morning? Will you give up your eternal soul in exchange for some passing thing that will never satisfy you? Or will you lose your life and take up the cross and follow Him? I hope you understand now what it means to take up the cross. Who will come and die with Jesus that you might truly live? "Follow me!" Jesus said. Who will take Him up on that request? Who by the grace of God will die to themselves, take up the cross, and follow the Son of God through suffering into life eternal and full of glory?

**Commented [notes19]:** <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Romans 6:23 (NIV)

**Commented [notes20]:** <sup>40</sup> "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'  
Matthew 25:40 (NIV)

**Commented [notes21]:** <sup>17</sup> "Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'  
Luke 19:17 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** <sup>19</sup> God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?  
Numbers 23:19 (NIV)