

Death and Resurrection

Matthew 16:21-28

We have already seen this call from Jesus for his disciples to take up their cross, to follow him in his death.

Mat. 10:38 “And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

But here, there is more to be said. More explanation to be given. More revelation about Jesus’ own death and resurrection. And it is not a coincidence that this passage comes right after Peter’s glorious proclamation of the identity of Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” With that rock upon which the church would be built, Jesus now gives his disciples further, specific instruction. Now, knowing the truth of Jesus’ identity as the Son of the Living God, now the disciples were ready to hear something that would seem to them absolutely impossible. Absolutely contradictory to that previous declaration.

v.21

Jesus would suffer and die. That is what Jesus now puts before his disciples. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. Jesus is the Son of the Living God. Yes he is! The Father in heaven has revealed that himself. But now there is more. He would suffer. He would die. And he would be raised from the dead. That is what the gospel is all about!

I. THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

The point to be made is,

A. The necessity of Jesus’ death.

Look at verse 21 again. He “must” go to Jerusalem. “It was necessary.” Not just that it would happen. Not just the certainty

of his death. But the necessity of it. Jesus must go to Jerusalem, Jesus must suffer many things, and be killed. Why?

That’s the key question in the whole of the Bible. Why did Jesus have to die? That’s the key question for those who are called upon to explain the meaning of the gospel, and to give evidence of sufficient knowledge to truly possess saving faith. Why did Jesus have to die? Why was it necessary?

The simple answer, because death was the penalty for sin, the wages of sin is death. Death was the covenant curse that the covenant breaker earned. Death was the requirement of God’s own justice and wrath. And Jesus had to die, because God had determined to provide for redemption. God had determined to save the lost, to rescue those subjected to the punishment of death. God had decreed to save and redeem. And the only way for God to provide that justification, that forgiveness of sins, and at the same time to remain perfect just himself, there had to be the death of a substitute.

Heb. 9:18 “Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. 19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you.” 21 Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. 22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.”

There is the principal of God’s justice. Forgiveness requires the punishment of death, the shedding of blood. Hebrews 9 continues,

Heb. 9:23 “Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the

things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another— 26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”

That’s why Jesus had to die, “to put away sin.” And he accomplished just that “by the sacrifice of himself.” That was God’s plan, his eternal plan, I might add. God came up with this plan, we read, “before the foundation of the world.”

But Peter, so eloquent in his recent declaration of Jesus’ identity, doesn’t get it! In fact, he rejects it. He corrects Jesus. Amazingly, he rebukes Jesus.

v.22

Remember, this took place in the immediate context of Peter hearing those words from Jesus, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Peter receives a different response from Jesus here, doesn’t he?

v.23

Satan is the father of lies. Satan is the one who would dare to rebuke Jesus and correct what he has to say. So now Peter speaks under Satan’s influence. And Jesus must say to Peter, “You are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

Interesting, isn’t it, that the things of men are identified here

with Satan. And the contrast is with the “things of God.” The things of God have reference to the plan of God. And Jesus is seeking here to explain,

B. God’s plan for Jesus’ suffering.

The things of man would certainly not include suffering and death. That’s not how you build a kingdom, by suffering and death. That’s not how the church would be built, if you are following the things of men. The Messiah, the Christ, would be a conquering king, not a suffering servant, according to the wisdom of men, according to “the things of men.”

So Peter has human ideas. Earthly ideas. Very limited physical ideas. And he doesn’t look to the plan and purpose of God. We can fall into that temptation, too, can’t we? We can get distracted by “the things of men.” We can set our minds on the things related to this world, and we can get very, very distracted. Paul would later write to the Colossians,

Col. 3:1 “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

So set your minds on things that are above. Don’t get trapped by the attractions and affections of this world. For your life is hidden with Christ in God. We’ll get back to that idea shortly, but for now, let me emphasize God’s plan. Jesus calls this plan for his suffering and death, “God’s plan.” He would suffer as the atoning sacrifice for your sin. He would die, paying the required payment to justice for your sin. And he would be raised from the dead so that you can be forgiven your sin. That is the gospel, isn’t it? God’s plan for Jesus’ suffering.

What, then of Jesus' disciples? His followers. What would happen to them? That's the point that Jesus as he instructs his disciples. They would follow him in his suffering. By definition! That's what a disciple is. That's what a disciple does. He unites with Jesus, has fellowship with Jesus, in his suffering.

v.24

So we come to,

II. THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

We begin with,

A. The necessity of death.

v.24

Here is a profound thought, something of a paradox for some people, something of a stumbling block for others. We are called to suffer with Jesus, to take up our cross. One of the most astounding passages in that context is,

Col. 1:24. "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, 25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God."

Paul is conscious that he not only is united to Jesus in suffering, but somehow completing Jesus' suffering, filling up in his flesh "what is lacking." Paul believes that he himself is bringing to completion the suffering that began with Jesus! He is not providing any work of atonement, of course. There is no mediation nor any merit in Paul's suffering that is applied to any of us. But he suffers, not as a demonstration of the failure of God's love, but as a token of his union with Jesus.

Beloved, there is a healthy, holy place in the life of a Christian

for the experiences of suffering. In this sense, it is part and parcel of what it means to be united to Jesus! So don't be alarmed. Don't be discouraged. And don't despair! Suffering is not a cause for despair, but actually provides for a sense of fellowship with Jesus.

1 Peter 4:12 "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified."

"Rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings." That's a profound experience of faith, isn't it? And the willingness to die, the willingness to think nothing of your life, even to rejoice in suffering, is the definition of the disciple of Jesus. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Follow me into the experience of death, for so obviously, that is what the cross represents!

Suffering also allows for the work of God to have its intended effect, its intended good effect. Again,

1 Peter 1:6 "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

James 1:2 "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

James 5:10 “My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”

Blessed are those who suffer, and remained steadfast. Blessed are those who die with Jesus. So take up your cross and follow him. That’s the necessity of our death. But we can’t stop there! For death means resurrection. And, again, I am speaking still in the figurative sense, the symbolic sense of spiritual meaning. And the experience of the first resurrection is nothing less than the experience of being born again. Being regenerated. Being made alive!

v.25

So this is the secret to life, if I can call it a secret. Die! This is the key to experience life as a Christian. Die! Die with Jesus. Give up your own life. Give up the control of your own life. Give up the affections of your own life, even the dreams of your own life. Give up you life, as Paul would say of himself, “I am crucified with Christ!” And that is not despairing, because he continues in,

Gal. 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

That’s,

B. The experience of the first resurrection.

I am borrowing from the language of Revelation 20, language which I believe applies to believers today,

Rev. 20:6 “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a

thousand years.”

I would make a direct connection with,

Eph. 2:4 “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

God made us alive together with Christ. That’s the gospel. That’s our salvation. That’s the first resurrection. That’s what it means for Jesus to say, “whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” And as Jesus emphasizes here as well, the experience of that first resurrection brings with it,

C. The expectation of the second resurrection.

In other words, there is an eternal resurrection. There is life beyond this physical existence, beyond this body. It is what Jesus refers to as “the soul.”

v.26

In other words, what good is life, in this world in this age, if you do not have eternal life for your soul? What good are all the pleasures of this world if that is all that you have. What profit is there, if you only measure profit and wealth by this world’s standards? You can’t use this world’s riches to purchase your soul. “Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul.”

So for the one who dies with Jesus, for the one who is willing, in this life, to suffering with Jesus and to rejoice in that experience, there is the expectation of eternal glory. There will be a judgment, and though that is a terror to the ungodly, that judgment of good works will be our ultimate and eternal vindication and glory. And that’s what life is all about. Not about

success and fortune in this world. It is not about peace and security here in this world. Life is about good works, done in faithfulness to God, as disciples of Jesus. Life is about dying with Jesus, suffering with Jesus. And living by faith in Jesus in the midst of it, united to him in fellowship as you suffer and die with him, and as you anticipate the final resurrection with him who is already raised from the dead. So here is our perspective,
v.27

Now, one final word. One final word from Jesus. One final word for you. In a sermon with such a focus on death, Jesus' death and the death of his disciples who would follow him, there is an encouragement.

D. Encouragement in the face of death.

It was a specific encouragement to the disciples who were with Jesus, and by extension the encouragement can be ours as well. The encouragement is simple, and I believe straightforward, although some people would interpret this verse in other, less straightforward ways.
v.28

I take that to mean this, that some of his disciples would live to see the day when Jesus would be described as "coming in his kingdom." I don't think that Jesus thinking about the end of the age, and was therefore somehow mistaken or wrong. I don't think he is referring to the second coming in the fullness of its glory and the finality of its judgment.

"The Son of Man coming in his kingdom" can also include some preliminary events. Beginning with the resurrection! Such a triumph over the kingdom of this world! And then the ascension, the obvious destination for Jesus, who would not remain on indefinitely. After 40 days of appearances, he

would,

Eph. 1:20 "...raised him from the dead and seated ... at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come."

In the prophetic language of,

Ps. 110:1 The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."

And,

Heb 1:3 "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs."

Surely the kingdom is then established. King Jesus is on the throne, reigning and ruling even over his enemies. And the encouragement that Jesus gives is that some of his disciples will live to see it!

I believe there is one further, final climactic event that would also be part of this description of "the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." That would be the final and complete destruction of the Old Covenant temple, accomplished in God's will by the armies of the Roman empire in AD 70. That final, physical destruction of the Old Covenant shadow forever made evident that the Kingdom of Jesus had come! So some of Jesus' disciples would live and survive to see the fullness of all of those events related to the coming of Jesus' kingdom. And that's the encouragement.

Please recognize that encouragement, so that this call to suffering and death would not lead you to despair. Please feel

the power of that encouragement, that as we suffer and die with Jesus, God is accomplishing his purpose. As I just read from Ephesians 2, God has “made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” So we are actually raised with Jesus now, seated with him now at the right hand of God.

So we who have died with Jesus, we who are called to suffer and die with Jesus, are also alive with him and reigning with him! That’s the encouragement we need.

Therefore, people of God, take up your cross and follow Jesus, joining him in his suffering and death! Lose your life, for his sake. Don’t cling to those things that seem so important to you, but cling to Jesus, who is your life. Lose your life for his sake, and you find life, life as God has designed and intends for you to live. So that you might be able to make this triumphant declaration as well,

Gal. 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”